

TOPEKA RESCUE MISSION MONTHLY REPORT APRIL 2020

Topeka Rescue Mission • 600 N. Kansas Avenue • Topeka, KS 66608-1240

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

FACILITIES: 785-354-1744

Hope Center for Women & Families #8
Men's Shelter #0
Distribution Center x366
Children's Palace 785-730-8810



PROGRAMS: 785-354-1744

Dining Services x322
Food Distribution x366
Education & Mentoring x338
Volunteer Services x393

COMMUNITY:

Operation Street Reach 785-230-8237

DONATIONS:

Monetary: 785-354-1744 x316
Material: 785-357-4285
Food: 785-357-4285

website: TRMonline.org

email: trm@trmonline.org

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A photograph of a person from behind, wearing a grey hoodie and a black backpack, standing on a dirt path next to a rusted, brown train car. The person's hands are on their hips. The background shows a cloudy sky and some dry grass.

**“TENT
CITY”**



“TENT CITY”

She puts a few sticks together and ties them in the middle with a rubber band. She stands them upright in the dirt, pulling a thin grey tarp over the top. She makes herself as small as possible to fit underneath, shrinking into a ball and pulling her coat closer, her muscles straining against the cold, her watchful eyes looking into the darkness. As she tries to drift to sleep the gnawing that's been in her stomach all day turns into pain, and she wonders if she'll find food tomorrow.

Her mind flashes back to when she first started living outdoors. She was exhausted from the stress and strain of continually losing jobs and housing, no time to rest before fighting to keep a roof over her head again, her situation getting worse with every passing year. Eventually living in her car, baking in the summer and freezing in the winter, being told to “move along” every time she tried to park somewhere and sleep. Holding on by her teeth while fighting the same demons day in and day out. One day it was like her body and mind just stopped. She couldn't fight anymore.

She remembers trying to convince herself that becoming one of the “unsheltered homeless” was going to be fun, that it would feel like freedom.

But hope was quickly replaced by the realities: lack of food, no water or hygiene, being so hot she couldn't think or so cold she couldn't move, storms battering and flooding her tent. The bugs, filth, fear, and sickness.

But tonight, as she falls asleep, the worst part is knowing she'll wake up again tomorrow with no security, no safety, no home - and no end in sight.

Stories like hers and many others are happening throughout our nation and recently right here in our backyard. Known as “Tent City”, a growing population of unsheltered homeless began to develop east of the Kansas Avenue Bridge, camping on property owned by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe and Union Pacific

Railroads, City of Topeka and TRM property. Starting with 15-30 people a little over a year ago and growing to over 130 people this past year, this population is in addition to the 250-300 guests who stay at the TRM each night.

As the population of Tent City began to grow so did the number of questions within our community. “Why aren't the people of Tent City staying at the TRM? Why would someone prefer to live outside vs. coming into warmth and safety to receive food, shelter and help?”

The answers to these questions vary from individual to individual. For those struggling with mental health or long-term addiction, coming into the Mission can be a huge challenge. Trusting strangers for help or

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being around large groups of people can trigger responses of fear, panic and stress - responses programmed through a lifetime of abuse, neglect and trauma. For this population, when TRM is already stretched to full capacity and our staff are worn thin, seeking help here can feel like an insurmountable obstacle.

National statistics say it takes approximately 70 positive contacts before a chronically homeless person will begin to trust those trying to help them and accept help other than the basics of food, water, clothing, etc. So, we continue to reach out to them. The TRM Street Reach program, coordinating with Valeo Behavioral Health, local law enforcement and other agencies, has frequently gone into Tent City to assist and assess the needs of the people staying there. Through time we developed positive relationships with its residents and many began coming into the Mission for food, water and hygiene.

A few months ago we were notified by Topeka law enforcement that the owners of the private properties being used by Tent City were going to take steps to enforce a “no camping” policy - meaning the people who reside there must relocate. As of this writing it appears a time for residents to relocate will occur early Spring. TRM along with local agencies and our community are attempting to answer the big question: “Where do all these people go?”

While camping

or “residing” outdoors on most public property is legal, the concerns raised are numerous - health, hygiene, and safety for both the homeless and the community, to name a few. For owners of private property, it’s their legal responsibility to protect anyone residing on their property. Most private property owners will not be able to adequately take care of unsheltered homeless, ensure their safety and meet their health and hygiene needs - as well as protect themselves against the liability issues that arise.

While we reach out to the unsheltered homeless at TRM, our first responsibility is the people within our shelters - the 2,000 plus different individuals we shelter each year, plus the tens of thousands of meals and other services we provide for the homeless and those in need in our community. The residents of Tent City are welcome in our shelters at any time, but the liabilities of allowing unsheltered homeless to camp on TRM property are significant and could

compromise our entire operation.

These are things we’ve considered as we work with the city, the railroad, local law enforcement, and the unsheltered homeless themselves. Now is the time for our community to ask a question: “Who are we? What are we doing for people this removed from a healthy, safe way of living? Are we willing to face this difficult situation together, or do we choose to cast them aside as many communities have done?”

The good news is, agencies and individuals are working together to locate as many resources as possible for the residents of Tent City needing to relocate. Now an opportunity exists for us to show the people of Tent City and all the unsheltered homeless across our community that they are not “others”, but are respected neighbors and members of our community. It’s up to us to show them we care about them, that they really do matter and there is hope for a healthy, safe future for all of us. †

WAYS YOU CAN HELP:

1. Pray for those experiencing homelessness.
2. Pray for those collaborating to help the unsheltered homeless.
3. Give of your treasures - both items and money. (See “Donate” on Page 3)
4. Consider volunteering at TRM and others organizations. visit: TRMonline.org for more details

THREEDOM

Topeka

**PRAY
GIVE
REACH**

Follow TRM on  to see live videos on the 3rd of every month.

PRAY: For our staff, volunteers, guests staying at TRM, and the unsheltered homeless
GIVE: In increments of 3 (\$3, \$30, \$300...) Text **TRMgive** to **77977** to give through PushPay.
REACH: Do 3 acts of kindness for people you don't know.

CURRENT NEEDS LIST

FOOD ITEMS:

Ravioli / Canned Tuna or Chicken / Spaghetti Sauce / Gallon Cans of Vegetables & Fruits Coffee / Sack lunch items (i.e. granola bars, fruit cups, pudding cups, snack crackers)

FURNITURE *(in good condition):*

Mattresses and box springs with the safety tag of July 2007 or newer, no tears or stains.

Furniture – i.e. Couches, Recliners, Loveseats, Dressers, Dining Tables & Chairs

Large Appliances – i.e. Washers, Dryers, Ranges, Refrigerators & Microwaves

SUPPLY ITEMS:

Hand Sanitizer / Bath Towels / Paper Towels / Kleenex / Pots & Pans / Toilet Paper / Arm & Hammer Super Washing Soda / 20 Mule Team Borax / Fels Naptha Laundry Soap / Kleenex (Large Boxes) / Dish soap / Twin Size Bedding

HYGIENE/HEALTH ITEMS:

Men's and Women's Deodorant (No Aerosol) / Foot Powder / Shampoo & Conditioner / Shower Gel / Razors (Men's and Women's) / Cough Drops / Hair Brushes / Hand Soap / Tylenol / Ibuprofen / Cold and Flu Medicine / Tampons / Women's Underwear (5,6,7) / Men's Underwear (30-38)

FOR OUR FULL NEEDS LIST VISIT: TRMONLINE.ORG

DONATE

Mail Donations to:

Topeka Rescue Mission Ministries
PO Box 8350
Topeka, KS 66608

Give online:

Text **TRMgive** to **77977**
to receive a link to give online,
visit **TRMonline.org**

 **Pushpay**

