

## Process and Guidelines for Helping a Homeless Person

Helping the homeless is a special opportunity for the advocate's spiritual growth. The homeless have frequently encountered if not a life of "bad" decisions, a point of time that "bad" decisions were made, or a streak of very bad luck and never feeling able to recover. They are homeless but not alone as the homeless community communicates with each other the resources they have discovered and may refer to each other as brother and sister.

Serving the homeless is often more difficult as the homeless person may not have a car, or even a phone. Meeting with them is often done in a restaurant (good time to feed them if they haven't eaten that day, or the advocate's car or the lobby of the hotel that they have been staying).

Some are homeless because they choose that life style; others don't know the next steps to break the cycle of poverty. We are not trained to solve all of their problems, and do not have the financial resources to do so, but our goal is to give them our time, our talents, and our love. **If you are lead advocate and have not previously served the homeless, we recommend you include an experienced advocate in your home visit.**

The typical request is for hotel but that may not be the most pressing "need" but a "want". In order to establish their true immediate need, we have to determine

- Have they eaten lately?
- Do they have shoes and appropriate clothing for the weather?
- Do they have family that can help them at this time? (If family is not in this area maybe a bus ticket is more appropriate for them.)

The advocates can only address the immediate needs in the first visit, and possibly with a willing attitude of the neighbor work to break the cycle in ongoing discussions.

A few examples of the type of homeless person, we meet are:

1. Sometimes a homeless person can show up at our parish. If this happens, the office staff is to call Dan, Gary or Russ.
2. A person calls the helpline and indicates they are homeless and living in their car or a storage unit.
3. A person is in a motel and is essentially considered homeless. **If the neighbor has been there for several months, we should consider this room as their home. The typical home visit format can be followed.** If they are currently in hotel, the hotel must be in 75023 zip code however an advocate can provide a room outside of 75023 as room rates in 75023 is much higher.

### The Visit with Homeless

Assume as little as possible before the home visit. The more you assume the more you start formulating what **you "assumed to be true" before you lay eyes on our friend** - never a

good idea. Try to give your friend “the benefit of the doubt”. Assume they had good reasons that we may not be aware of for decisions made. There will be time enough later for any other information to be revealed.

Post COVID, two advocates need to then complete the home visit. First, make clear when you first meet with a homeless neighbor that SVdP has no shelters, nor any capacity for long-term assistance. Not because we don't want to, but because it just is not what we do.

The Homeless neighbor has many different situations such as

1. No job, or a day labor when they can, or a full or part time job
2. Transportation and using that as shelter.
3. Living in hotel room day to day, or long term stay hotels
4. Sleeping in the parks, in storage units, public places open 24 hours a day

**Given the multiple ways that our homeless neighbor lives, there is a spectrum of needs that should be considered when determining the best way to assist, keeping in mind that an advocate decision can use as much as \$450 on the first meeting. After the first meeting, the conference would vote on your recommendation for additional assistance.**

Since most of the request for assistance from the homeless are for hotel, the advocate decision can be for a couple of nights for shower and good sleep, or to give as much as a week as long as the total assistance provided does not exceed \$450.

In the visit/call, we need to establish the most pressing need of the person or family. The information we need to obtain is:

How long have they been homeless?

What do they use for transportation? DART? BIKE? CAR? WALK?

Do they have any family? Could the family help them? (A bus ticket may be the answer)

Do they have a full time job? If part time, how many hours? (Day labor is available in Plano if they need more work) (Do they need something to interview? Clothes, transportation etc)

If not working when the last time was they had a job? What skills do they have?

Where do you sleep at night? Do you have bedding? (Possibly provide a sleeping bag)

Where do you get food to eat? How often?

Are you able to shower? (Showers available, see flyer)

Do they have adequate clothes and shoes for the weather conditions?

Where do they do laundry? Do they need coins and supplies?

Is their phone pay as you go or a monthly plan? How do they pay for it?

Have they applied for Transitional Shelter or used Emergency shelters? If not, why not?

**Any substance abuse problems may make them ineligible for either type of shelter. Criminal Background does not make them ineligible.**

Many whom we meet are still very much coming to terms with their own homelessness, and want to put off using shelters as long as they can. The shelter is there to help them and is safer than the streets. We have never had a client say that they were robbed in a shelter but have many that were on the streets.

Be clear that there are two types of shelters: transitional and emergency shelters. Emergency shelters admit same day as you show up. The Emergency shelter separates men from women and families are kept together unless a male child is over 15.

Transitional shelters often have a waiting list and job requirement. Get on the waitlist as soon as possible. Samaritan Inn in McKinney is the only local transitional shelter. Plano has no emergency shelters. There are transitional shelters for women and families so indicate to the neighbor using the resource guide.

Both types of shelters often provide more than a cot to sleep on, most have food, clothes and counseling if needed.

If person is not willing to use emergency shelter, the advocate may want to consider a night or two to clean up and get a good night's sleep. We can't force them to use the emergency shelter. The typical shelter will offer registration at 4pm each day. For families, Family Promise provides longer term shelter.

**If providing motel is decided by the two advocates, Review the "Local Motel Information"** document on our website. This lists all of the local motels (along 75) that we generally use. The hotels in 75023 are typically more expensive than along 75. The contact information allows the advocate to call to make sure a room is available. **Take the Tax Exempt (located on the web page under Forms)** if the motel is not Motel 6 which has a CP code for discounted rate for SVdP. (code is on the web page under resources)

The advocates can decide to help the neighbor with any "need" be it gas card for transportation, or a bike, clothes, food or medicine. All purchases require a receipt for reimbursement to our treasurer. The lead advocate is authorized to spend up to \$450 without approval. Additional help can be requested through the emergency or normal process depending on the timing. **The advocate should under no circumstances give cash to the neighbor.** Visa cards should be a last resort as these can be used like cash on the streets for drugs. Most gift cards can be used as not intended for smokes or alcohol so consider shopping for them.

If considering gift cards, use Tom Thumb and Kroger. If homeless has car and needs gas, they can use for gas or types of food not available at food pantry..

The home visit for a homeless person requires some flexibility, but there should still be two advocates except for a most extreme case – like the person is at the parish office which is about to close and has no transportation.

It is also a good idea to determine if the person wants to be homeless. If not, a person who finds themselves in this state may actually be in crisis (suicidal or homicidal). If so, the

proper response is to call 911. We have yet to encounter such a person, but it is a possibility.

If clothes are an immediate need, use SVDP store on I 75. Obtaining a voucher requires at least a few business days and requires the homeless person to present ID at the store when asking to use the voucher.

Proof of identity for a homeless person who claims they have been robbed is a problem, and they may need even more immediate help (clothes, bathroom items, etc). Ask if they submitted a police report and ask to see a copy and if they did not report it ask why not.

The advocate needs not to feel pressured to respond immediately to the neighbor that waits to the last minute to contact us for assistance. There is a certain urgency that is hard to ignore, but we are not 911 service. If they are living on the streets, then one more day may not matter, so refer them to an emergency shelter, but if they have long term stay and will lose the tax credit, and was just given our number, the manager at the hotel frequently works with us by phone.

If it is determined that a more traditional lifestyle is the direction the homeless person desires encourage the person to start the process immediately by following up with the resources you have shared with them. The next steps may need to be finding full time employment, and getting on waiting list for transitional shelters, or applying to the Colin County Homeless program..

When all is said and done the homeless situations will vary across the spectrum. We are dealing with individuals, agencies and timing. Most important is that we make our best efforts and if in doubt contact with other advocates for advice is recommended. There is no consensus among experienced advocates about how best to help a homeless person. Some think you concentrate on giving them a week in a hotel, others believe you address the job, transportation and other basic needs first. So, there is no wrong answer... This document purpose is to assist you in the thought process.