

Loveland Service Extension Center helps homeless with medical needs

Respite program helps people receive important medical care—and recover from it.

By Vivian Lopez –

The Salvation Army Service Extension Center in Loveland, Colorado, recently instituted a respite care program specifically to help city residents experiencing both homelessness and medical needs.



With no full-time shelters in the community, Linda Franklin, a volunteer and advisory committee member at the Loveland Service Extension Center, knew something needed to be done.

“One of the goals of The Salvation Army is to recognize and meet the needs of the clients coming to the office. We were seeing more and more of a need for homeless [individuals who] were medically fragile,” Franklin said. “They would be in the hospital and discharged back on the street.”

Sometimes, the hospital would not conduct the necessary medical procedure unless the patient had a place to stay to recover afterward.

So, Franklin, who previously served as executive director at a nonprofit clinic in Virginia, worked with Loveland Service Extension Center Coordinator Olga Duvall to develop and launch a respite care program in spring 2019.

“It’s everybody’s responsibility that when you see a need, that you step in and address [it]. There really has been nothing in the...Northern Colorado area that has anything like this,” Franklin said. “We were seeing people that were being discharged from the hospital in critical situations. Part of the mission of any of us is to help those who are in a crisis.”

The program was a godsend for Christopher, who suffered a shoulder injury that prevented him from maintaining employment in his career field. He was unable to pay rent because of this, and ended up homeless.

“It’s hard to do construction work with only one arm,” he said. “Every time I found employment, I could only withstand the pain for a couple of days before I had to quit. I finally sought medical care and was told I needed to have orthopedic surgery.”

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But because he was homeless, his doctor would not agree to do the surgery unless he had somewhere to recover. He was referred to The Salvation Army of Loveland by his doctor's office.

That's how the program works: The local hospital's social work department notifies The Salvation Army when they have a patient in need of a safe place to recuperate. Franklin and Duvall then meet with the client and find them a place to stay for their recovery period.

"[This] gives them an opportunity to heal and hopefully to prevent them from being readmitted to the hospital," Franklin said. "It will not only give them shelter, but also eliminate some of the hospital emergency room visits, as well."

The Salvation Army also provides clients with a respite emergency bag with toiletries and emergency food, and with transportation to the hotel and follow-up appointments. In addition, the program partners with the local Meals on Wheels to provide hot meals for eligible clients, and with Northern Colorado Health Alliance for case management.

Funding for the program comes from a \$1,000 community grant that Franklin secured, federal Emergency Food and Shelter Program funds and community donations.

Since its inception, the program has helped lodge 11 households, as it allows for family members to stay with the recovering client. It has provided 46 nights of hotel accommodations.

Franklin said people are responding well to the program, and recalled a woman who sat at their desk and cried.

"It gave back her dignity, and it gave her a resource to recover so she could rebuild her life," she said.

Since Franklin and Duvall recognize that hotel lodging is only a temporary solution, they hope to spread awareness throughout the community so that something more permanent is developed — like a full-time shelter or respite care facility.

"I would like the community to come to understand that there is a need for more long-term sustainable solutions," Duvall said.

In the meantime, the Loveland Service Extension Center continues to provide respite care to those who need it. In some instances, the program has managed to help clients, like Christopher, escape the cycle of homelessness.

"This was the first glimmer of hope that I might be able to get my life back on track," Christopher said.

And he did. He recovered from his surgery, returned to work full-time, and was able to rent a room to live in.

"People forget how important it is to feel safe, and just have access to a bathroom," Christopher said. "Being able to have my surgery and stay in a safe place to recover meant the world to me."