

Salvation Army helps one woman find hope and healing through housing

Quiet moments fill Terri Nacke's new apartment. With air-conditioning humming and her two dogs curled at her feet, she describes the small, simple space with mountain views as "the richest home in the world."

Just months ago, she and her dogs took refuge in her car and under the sparse shade of a park during [Phoenix's scorching summer](#), where temperatures often exceeded 115 degrees during the day.



"You don't realize how precious safety is until it's gone," she said.

Nacke, facing multiple health challenges including a traumatic brain injury and respiratory complications, said her health declined quickly in the heat—until one day she called a crisis hotline for help.

"That's when they connected me to The Salvation Army," she said. "And it felt like my saving grace, someone actually cared to understand and help be a voice with me."

Within a day, Michele Kirkpatrick, Emergency Assistance, Outreach, and Contact Compliance Manager for The Salvation Army Phoenix Family Services Herberger Center, called Nacke to begin helping her secure stability and rebuild her life.

[The Tempe Street Level mobile outreach team](#) met Nacke where she was, bringing essential supplies and helping her into a motel with her dogs the same day.

"Having a roof over one's head allows them to focus on what else they need to do," Kirkpatrick said. "We meet a lot of people living in this survival mode because they have no other choice."

"My fight for me is a fight for others. I'm working on myself so I can help others and leave the world better than I found it."

Terri Nacke

She added that a combination of Salvation Army programs worked together to provide immediate relief and financial assistance for Nacke, including [Project H.O.P.E.](#), which typically focuses on families.

For Nacke, the genuine care and support felt like a turning point.

“Connecting with Michele and her team changed everything for me,” she said. “They gave me the chance to breathe, to think, and [to realize that I still had hope.](#)”

Before facing homelessness, Nacke had a long-term home and a career in gardening and farming, crafting pure aromatic oils and sharing organic cooking techniques and recipes with her community. She said that when she fell ill, one hardship led to another, eventually resulting in the loss of her home.

“It’s easy to forget that homelessness can happen to anyone,” Nacke said. “It doesn’t matter what success you’ve had; one unexpected health issue or setback can turn your world upside down.”

During her motel stay, Nacke spent her time making phone calls and searching online for affordable housing in her area, emphasizing that keeping her dogs with her was a priority.



The Salvation Army's Tempe Street Level van in Phoenix. Courtesy The Salvation Army Tempe Corps.

"Everyone was putting so much investment into me and my well-being," Nacke said. "In a way, it made up for all of the times I felt overlooked or invisible, and it pushed me to keep going."

Kirkpatrick said Nacke took the lead in finding her own housing, ultimately securing an apartment for her and her dogs.

"She was very determined and never once mentioned giving up," Kirkpatrick. "She called me and said she thought she found a place that would work, and I could hear the relief and excitement in her voice."

The same day, Kirkpatrick contacted the apartment complex to explain the utility assistance Nacke would receive from The Salvation Army, and the complex handed over the keys without hesitation.

Now settling in her own apartment, Nacke said she's focusing on her physical and mental health so she can return to helping others.

"My fight for me is a fight for others," she said. "I'm working on myself so I can help others and leave the world better than I found it."

Looking ahead, Nacke plans to focus on her health so she can continue her gardening work. She and Kirkpatrick have discussed expanding the community garden at the Phoenix Family Services Herberger Center, where Nacke hopes to help feed clients and the broader community while teaching people how to grow their own food.

"I want others to see that even if you're in a rough spot, it's only temporary—healing and growth are possible," she said. "Even the smallest seeds buried deep in the soil can flourish into something strong and bold."

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