

For many, the onset of the holiday season means sprucing up a home for visitors and preparing scrumptious meals for friends and family. But what about those who don't have the simple comfort of a home or meals on a regular basis; where do they go?

Fortunately, there are organizations dedicated to providing shelter to these individuals, and to ending homelessness in the area.

The Men's Shelter of Charlotte is one such organization. With the mission of being "dedicated to providing safe emergency shelter while working to end homelessness for each man," the Men's Shelter serves as a strong resource for Charlotte area homeless men.

"People may think of the shelter as just a place to stay overnight," says Executive Director Carson Dean. "But it's not just that. Yes, we provide emergency shelter. But our end goal is to put an end to homelessness."

The organization is making notable progress in lowering the population of homeless men in Charlotte. Since July of this year, 134 men have been placed in more appropriate housing, with only 3 returning for temporary housing. In the past three years, the Men's Shelter of Charlotte has housed more than 1,000 men.

In order to put an end to homelessness, the Men's Shelter uses a three-part equation to make sure the organization meets the needs necessary to get men off of the street: income + housing + support = end of homelessness.

The first component of the equation, income, may mean getting work for some, while it could involve getting relevant benefits for others. For some, it is a combination of both.

Dean explains, "Some of the men at the shelter are gainfully employed, but they simply don't make enough money to pay for all of the necessities of life. In this case, we can help them find better jobs, and also help them determine what types of benefits are available to them."

Gaining sufficient income doesn't take as long as one may think. According to Dean, Social Security and disability benefits applicants had to wait close to 18 months before receiving income in the past. It now takes around 90 days for applicants to receive checks.

Housing, the second component of the equation, takes on many forms. The type of housing that each man is placed in varies, but the goal is to get each one into "more appropriate" housing.

“In our work, ‘more appropriate’ housing means shelter that is more appropriate than living on the street in some fashion,” Dean explains. “While some men do end up in their own apartments, others may find shelter in various group living situations or assisted living arrangements, depending on specific need.”

The Men’s Shelter of Charlotte works to provide the third component of the equation, support, in several different ways. Participants have access to agencies that offer an array of services and are located on the same grounds as the shelter. Services include medical and dental care, mental health support, veterans’ support, substance abuse treatment and much more. Once men are placed in more appropriate housing, they have access to aftercare resources, as well.

“Our services don’t end once someone is placed in housing. We make sure that they know about community resources. Sometimes they just need to know about the nearest food pantry or a church for spiritual support,” Dean says.

Men who are homeless and at least 18 years of age are welcome at both locations of the Men’s Shelter. The intake process is relatively simple, and each man is assigned to a case manager who will help with all of his needs until he finds shelter.

Participants find the shelter and services invaluable. One participant, who wished to use only his surname, discussed his experience.

“I fell and hurt my back and couldn’t keep my job. The staff here is real nice and I have a place to stay. It’s good because I’m getting help getting my disability checks,” said Mr. Gordon.

Those wishing to get involved with the shelter, either through volunteering or giving donations, are encouraged to do so. The Men’s Shelter of Charlotte makes it easy to help. Visit their website at www.mensshelterofcharlotte.org for more information and to spread some holiday spirit to those in need, now or any time during the year.