

Needy seek refuge

Community suffers lack of resources necessary to help disadvantaged local citizens

Shannan Anderson
Index Staff

Senior Randi Reed said she witnesses interesting things happening all the time in Kirksville.

So when she encountered homeless people, she said she wasn't really shocked.

"I figured there were [homeless people in Kirksville]," Reed said. "I couldn't imagine a place that didn't have homeless people. ... But it's kind of sad that somewhere as small as Kirksville would have [this problem]."

But Kirksville does seem to have such problems. Homelessness in Missouri grew more than 42 percent from 1998 to 2001, according to a 2001 Missouri Association for Social Welfare study. Yet many places, such as Kirksville, remain without a homeless shelter, which worries some residents but does not seem to be an issue for others.

Reed lives off the corner of First Street and Normal Avenue. She said she has seen three different males in her area whom she suspects are without a home.

"I don't know if they're completely homeless," Reed said. "I just know they exhibit some of the stereotypical qualities of homeless people. One of them pulls a wagon, and it always has bags with like tin cans and stuff in it. The other one always has one of those hats on, and he looks chapped in the face."

Reed said she is not sure where the men stay, but she has seen them around Kirksville for the last year or so.

"A lot of people just want to turn their head away from it."

Margaret Gregory, a volunteer at the Out Reach Mission, said she sees homeless people every day but does not have the resources to assist them as much as she would like. Gregory works with other volunteers at the mission in an attempt to help the homeless in Kirksville.

Many people in Kirksville are unaware of the problem, Gregory said. She said the number of people who do not recognize the need within their own community amazes her.

"It's like [people] can't believe it," she said. "It's straight under their nose. All they have to do is look around. There is a lot of need here. ... A lot of people just want to turn their head away from it and not believe it or think that somebody, if they're homeless, is a lower class of a person. That's very irritating to me."

The mission provides clothing, the occasional meal and, most importantly, compassion to the homeless and needy in Kirksville,

HOMELESSNESS

Do you think homelessness exists in Kirksville?



Junior Shannon Grantham

"Yeah, I'm sure it does. I ran into a sort of bag guy once. I've seen people carrying everything they own with them, but you don't really see them on the corners."



Senior David Kreidler

"I would assume so. I mean I know what the stereotypical New York City homeless person looks like, but I don't know what a Kirksville homeless person would look like."

Design by Stephen Emlund/Index

Gregory said. She said she thinks they serve a very important function.

"I feel we are a vehicle that helps get people connected with other people who can help them," she said. "We can contact churches or the Salvation Army to get them short-term housing or financial assistance. ... [We do] anything we can to help them get their personal needs met, but many of them don't have a place to go."

Gregory said she would not advise a homeless person to come to Kirksville because homeless shelters do not exist. Despite her strong desire to aid the needy, the mission only can do so much, she said.

Deann Stewart, another volunteer at the Out Reach Mission, said she wishes Kirksville would help.

Last summer a homeless man passed through town, living on park benches or under bridges, she said. People and businesses gave him food and money, but it wasn't enough for a place to live.

"We have a lot of factory buildings just sitting empty," she said. "I would like to see the city step in and do something about the problem. But basically what they want to do is help them for a couple of nights and then send them on."

Stewart said she thinks the few nights

they're able to stay in Kirksville are helpful, but temporary assistance does not do anything to address the underlying problem.

Helping the homeless is a financial burden.

Major Don Kincaid, co-operator of the local Salvation Army, recognizes its assistance does not solve all the homeless' needs, but it tries to meet them as best it can.

"[Lack of a shelter] is kind of a problem," Kincaid said. "Sheltering people at a hotel means we're just providing Band-Aid service, and we understand that. But they do have the availability of our office staff ... for counseling and guidance. ... It's a financial cost, but it is a mission and a burden that the Salvation Army has been willing to carry."

Kincaid said the majority of people they help are women and children, and he suspects the problem extends to larger cities. He said the Salvation Army attempts to replace the support structure most of the homeless lack.

"[Homelessness is] a problem because statistically speaking, almost every night in the course of the year, ... there's at least one family or individual that finds themselves no place to go," Kincaid said. "They're either going to be sleeping out in the elements, worrying about security, safety and disease, or someone in the community is going to have to pay for [their lodging]. ... It's not economically feasible at this point and time to have an on-site shelter."

Kirksville does not have a problem. Yet some members of the community



Roger Meissen/Index

Margaret Gregory and Deann Stewart serve at Out Reach Mission on April 6.

do not believe homelessness to be a big issue in Kirksville.

Mayor Martha Rowe said she thinks private agencies such as the Salvation Army serve the homeless community very well. Thus, she said she does not perceive the community to be in need of a homeless shelter, and it is not something on the agenda.

"I am not aware that anyone has asked for that service," Rowe said.

She said she is aware of one or two incidences of homelessness in Kirksville that private agencies were able to take care of by providing people with motel rooms for a couple of nights, but she does not think it is a large problem.

Sgt. Steve Farnsworth of the Kirksville Police Department said that although the city has seen the occasional homeless person come through, stay for a while and leave, he does not think homelessness is an issue.

"It happens on occasion, but I can't remember more than one or two incidences," Farnsworth said. "Staying in one part of town and then moving around, we don't have that kind of problem."

However, the police department has dealt with reports of homeless people in the past. Although Kirksville does not have any ordinances against being homeless, the city has ordinances against trespassing, among other smaller crimes. Farnsworth said that when he comes across someone in need, he usually

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refers them to the Salvation Army, which can provide housing for a couple of nights.

"Lord, we need help."

JoAnne Clark, volunteer at the Out Reach Mission, said she is grateful for the services provided by the Salvation Army. Despite Farnsworth's belief that Kirksville does not possess homelessness problems, Clark said she sees it every day.

"I see so much waste in Kirksville," she said. "I know we need factories, I know that. But I know we need a lot more compassion here."

Clark said the mission never turns away anyone who is hungry and recognizes homelessness is not easy for anyone.

"The man who stands out on the corner, that is probably the most degrading thing that man has ever done," Clark said. " ... I don't want to give [the homeless] a bad impression of Kirksville, but, Lord, we need help."

The mission takes donations from anyone and opens its doors to the public from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.

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