

# STREETZine



Offering financial opportunity to homeless and economically disadvantaged individuals.

**STREETZine** is a program of The Stewpot and a member of **International Network of Street Papers**

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## The Face of Family

### Homelessness

By Bill McKenzie

The family is the bedrock of American society, and the family home is the center of life for many Americans. But the family home is a faded memory or a far-off dream for some Americans.

The National Coalition to End Homelessness reports that 30 percent of the 580,466 families experiencing homelessness as of January 2020 were living in families with children. That translates into 171,575 individuals, or a population larger than the size of Richardson, Texas.

Locally, the Metropolitan Dallas Homeless Authority (MDHA) reports that 18 percent of its 2021 count of 4,570 people experiencing homelessness in Dallas and Collin counties were individuals in households with children. About 2,600 of those counted were in family households without children. Together, that means more than 3,100 individuals in families were experiencing homelessness. Fortunately, those 3,138 individuals were living in a shelter, transitional housing, or safe haven. The MDHA reports, no children were found living in a family without some form of shelter. While

the count tragically discovered 23 families consisting of only children, each of those children-only families were in an emergency shelter or transitional housing.

Nationally, the number of families experiencing homelessness has declined since the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began requiring communities count their homeless populations in 2007 in return for federal assistance. According to the National Coalition to End Homelessness, the number decreased from 255,857 in 2007 to 171,575 in 2020. That represents a 27 percent reduction, with a particularly steady downward climb since 2012.

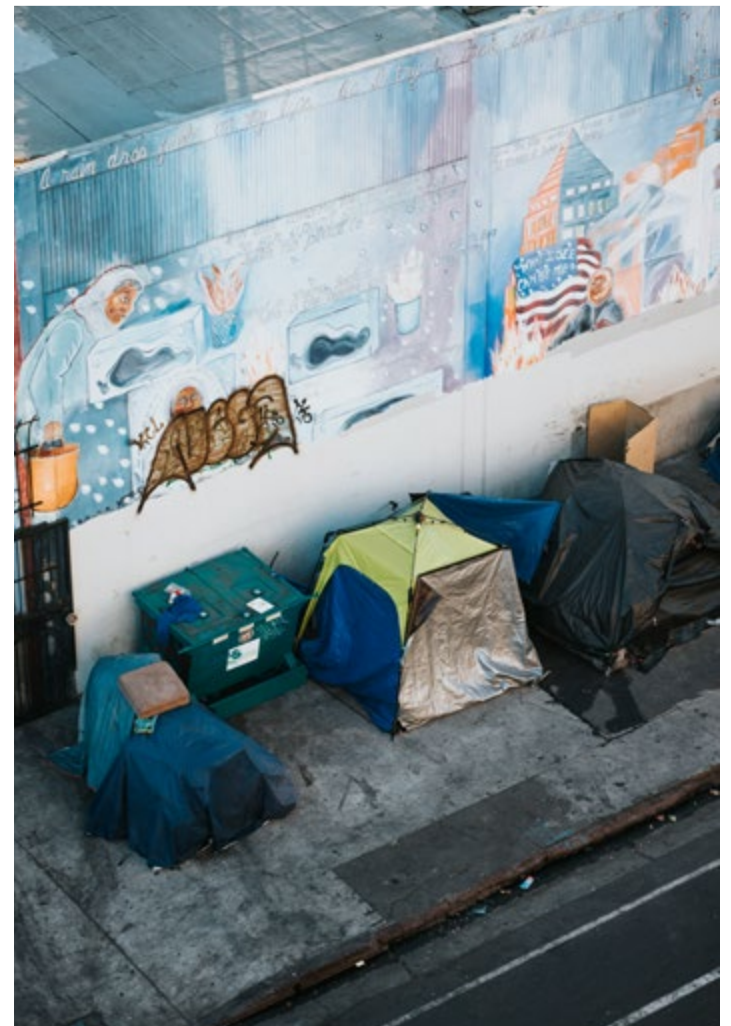
In Texas, 6,114 of the 27,229 people experiencing homelessness in the 2020 count were living in a family. The National Coalition to End Homelessness data shows that figure represents a 55 percent decline since 2012.

Those national and state trends are encouraging, and likely show the effect of families getting back on their feet as the United States came out of the Great Recession of the late 2000s. Still, the Urban Institute reported back in 2015, the lack of affordable

housing is the main driver of homelessness among families. The lack of such housing stock is compounded by the fact that families living in poverty or near-poverty may spend 50 percent or more of their incomes on what housing does exist.

The reality is that whole families among us still experience homelessness. In 2019, the National Coalition to End Homelessness reported, “6.3 million Americans households experienced severe housing cost burden, which means they spent more than 50 percent of their income on housing.”

Michelle Secours, director of housing services at The Stewpot, reports seeing a high volume of families in the program’s second stage of rapid rehousing work since the initiative launched in 2021. About half of the clients in the rapid rehousing program are in a family unit, she says.



*A tent used as shelter.  
Courtesy of Nathan Dumlaio  
through Unsplash.*

By contrast, there were only three families out of the 25 people who were quickly put into housing in the first stage of The Stewpot’s rapid rehousing initiative. Secours explains she and The Stewpot housing team are seeing

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**WHAT SHOULD WE COVER NEXT? TAKE OUR SURVEY:**

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# STREETZine

**STREETZine** is a program of  
The Stewpot.



The **STREETZine** is a monthly newspaper published by The Stewpot, a ministry of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas. The Stewpot provides services and resources for people experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of being homeless. The organization also offers opportunities for a new life.

As part of this ministry, the **STREETZine** seeks to raise awareness about the issues surrounding homelessness and poverty. The monthly publication also offers financial opportunity for Stewpot clients who sell the paper to Dallas residents. Vendors are able to move towards economic self-sufficiency by using the money they receive from selling copies to purchase bus passes, food, and necessary living expenses. Clients also receive stipends for contributing articles to **STREETZine**.

The content in **STREETZine** does not necessarily reflect the views or endorsement of its publisher, editors, contributors, sponsors or advertisers. To learn more about this publication, contact Betty Heckman, Director of Enrichment, 1835 Young Street, Dallas, Texas 75201 or [BettyH@thestewpot.org](mailto:BettyH@thestewpot.org). To read more about **STREETZine**, a member of the International Network of Street Papers, go to [www.thestewpot.org/streetzine](http://www.thestewpot.org/streetzine).

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## The Pastor's Letter

By The Rev. Amos Disasa

Too many of my conversations begin with an apology. Whether the dialogue is on the phone, via text, or in-person, before saying anything else, my conversation partner will often apologize for taking up my time. Their assumption is that I'm a busy person

The constant references about my busyness have led to some recent self-reflection. What signals am I sending that suggest I'm too busy to be with others – the most fundamental part of my job description. Why do people assume that I'd rather be doing something else? And am I the only one that's desperate for a different, more authentic, more integral, way of being? A way of being that doesn't have one eye on the clock and the other on my to-do list.

What's even stranger is that the people apologizing to me for taking up too much of my time are just as busy as I appear to be, just as hopeful that someone will save them from the tyranny of the urgent, just as tired from trying to appear that they have it all together, and just as curious about what, if anything, the gospel of Jesus Christ has to say about our unceasing desire to be as productive as possible.

To cure our current affliction of busyness - it might be wise for us to consider the example of a man that seemed to be quite busy and very available at the same time: Jesus.

One could argue that we shouldn't compare ourselves to Jesus because he didn't have a job, kids, or a home to maintain. He never had to do yard work, go to the grocery store, or pay bills. He didn't have to keep up with his friends because they traveled with him or get maintenance on his car because he walked everywhere.

It's true, the absence of commitments that occupy so much of our time make it difficult to compare our schedule to Jesus'. But to say that Jesus had all the time in the world wouldn't be accurate either. He was constantly interrupted. Strangers requested unscheduled visits to their homes for healing or dinner. Adversaries confronted him on leisurely strolls through grain fields. He never made it from one town to another without an unplanned stop or three.

Jesus was as busy as we are. The difference, though, was that he wasn't a busybody. Busybodies try to do everything. Around them lies a trash heap of unfulfilled expectations, shallow relationships, distantly admiring acquaintances, and missed opportunities. Busybodies confuse being frantic for being faithful.

They are dilettantes with no divine purpose. In their effort to be everywhere, they miss what is right in front of them - the old friend that's reaching out for help, the son that needs his father, the lonely widow next door, the sunset, the stars, the laughter.

God wants more for us. After our valiant attempts to organize ourselves out of busyness and establish useless boundaries that mark borders between loosely held commitments we never should have made, it's time to ask for help. To begin, reflect on the same question creation asked of Jesus when he entered the world: Who will you be?

You may answer today differently than tomorrow. This is okay. Just don't let the infinite possibilities stop you from beginning somewhere. At first you will not be so busy as you slowly learn something new. This is also okay. Just don't relieve the discomfort of your relative idleness with busy work.

*The Rev. Amos Disasa is the senior pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas.*



*This is Crucial* is a podcast with live and interactive recording sessions focused on healing justice and racial equity. It is an opportunity to learn from a rotating guest list of experts as they sit down to discuss these important, timely, and sometimes uncomfortable topics. *This is Crucial* is hosted by Rev. Amos J. Disasa (Senior Pastor of FPC Dallas) and Rev. Dr. Charlene Han Powell (Senior Pastor of FPC Berkeley).

# A Letter from the Executive Director

By Brenda Snitzer

Families experiencing homelessness are more common than you think. The articles in this edition detail the numbers and severity of the problem. They also present some of the organizations, including The Stewpot, that are helping families to prevent homelessness or get back on their feet in Dallas.

During the pandemic, more families who were on the edge of making it, lost jobs or had reduced income and became homeless before federal, state and city programs could get them help. Others have been unaware of what help is available.

In March 2020, as businesses began closing, The Stewpot quickly diverted private funding to provide rent and utilities assistance to families in our Children and Youth Program that were losing their employment or were unable to work enough hours to handle all their bills. Thankfully, after several months of converting funds to rent and utilities assistance from programs we had temporarily paused until all of us learned more about the virus, we were able

to apply for and receive federal funds through the City of Dallas to operate an even larger assistance program.

In the past two years, our Housing Department's Homelessness Prevention Program has helped more than 900 households stay housed with over \$2 million in rent and utilities. A great number of these households are families.

Additionally, we ramped up our food, clothing, and hygiene distributions during the pandemic to help families and individuals with these costly items so they could stay housed. The distributions also enabled folks to pay for other items like gas for their cars or car payments, so they had transportation for work.

Similarly, we were able to provide support for students with school supplies, tutoring assistance, and technology for families to stay connected when school was online. Whenever generous supporters provide donations for The Stewpot, it enables us to pivot to meet the needs in the ways that help the most vulnerable as quickly and as completely as possible.

Family Gateway is an important organization in Dallas and provides emergen-

cy shelter to any family that becomes homeless. You can read more about them in this issue, too. They have a diversion program to help families avoid homelessness. The initiative provides a 24-hour hotline for individuals to speak with someone.

The Stewpot partners with Family Gateway to provide birth certificates and identification documents when needed for housing.

We also have worked together to house several of their families through our Rapid Rehousing Program, which you can read about as well in this issue. Our Director of Housing Michelle Secours and her great team run that program.

Families are more vulnerable than ever as landlords attempt to evict those who are most in need. Organizations like Family Gateway, The Stewpot, and the Homeless Collaborative of Dallas and Collin County are working to end family homelessness. You can help by supporting our work!

*Brenda Snitzer is executive director of The Stewpot.*



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*Soup's On! 2020. Photo courtesy of Timothy Smith.*

# How Dallas ISD Addresses Student Homelessness

By Bill McKenzie

*Ashley Marshall directs the Dallas Independent School District's Homeless Education Program (HEP). The initiative works with students in families who may be living in a hotel or motel, doubling up with another family member or friend, residing in a shelter or transitional housing, or seeking shelter in a park, a car, or public space. She spoke with STREETZine about how the district attempts to meet their needs, including during a pandemic. (If any of your loved ones attending Dallas ISD fit one of these categories, please contact HEP at 972-749-5750.)*

## How does this program identify students as being without a home or experiencing homelessness?

It's a self-identification process. When students enroll, they fill out an application, including a student residency questionnaire which helps us identify those students. Of course, a student's situation can change at a moment's notice, and we can update that information anytime during the year. For example, I recently got a call about a family whose house burned down and are now in a homeless situation when they weren't earlier this year.

## About how many Dallas ISD students are experiencing homelessness?

Last year, we had over 4,000 students. As the school year progresses, things change. Some years it's less, but events like Hurricane Harvey can pump up those numbers. We are waiting to see how the end of the eviction moratorium will impact our numbers. It may escalate them.

## How do you provide the appropriate services? And what services are most often needed?

A lot depends upon a family's needs, but the majority of our students who are homeless are doubled up with one or more families. Those families may have a couple of working adults. But if they can't provide enough for them,

especially when it is cold, our families reach out for coats, sleeping bags, and blankets. Emergency foods, snack foods, and hygiene items also are common.

When the pandemic started, we were going up to hotels in school buses to deliver food. A mom came up to me and said, "I don't need food. I need hygiene items. They are more expensive than buying a pound of beans." Our department also provides enrichment items for kids. We bought books last year in different genres so they would have something to do over breaks and holidays.

## How do you train principals, counselors, teachers and others in schools to recognize when a child is experiencing homelessness?

We do trainings all the time for registrars and counselors so they can recognize a situation. For example, we ask them to look out for students who may be hoarding food at the cafeteria or may be asking for extra food and hiding it at their desk. That's a child who is food insecure, which is a sign of homelessness.

We also ask them to see if students are especially protective of their school items. Kids at shelters or who may have been evicted have lost all their things. They may be protective of those items. We also suggest they look for students who can't go on a field trip or do after-school activities. When I was a teacher, I never did a school trip unless all the students could afford it. That may have meant me paying for some or asking other adults to kick in for our kids. We wouldn't go unless we all could go. Another condition is kids who fall asleep in class. Sleeping at a shelter or hotel is hard.

## What general trends do you see about students experiencing homelessness? Are most of them recently experiencing homelessness? Living with other family members? Living in a shelter?

Shelters in Dallas are at capacity. But new federal funding through the pandemic, like the CARES Act, has allowed shelters to put families into hotels. So, we see a lot more students from hotels.

I always tell people these are not the

hotels you may think of. They may be an inn off the highway or some place you may not have noticed. Not long ago, I learned of one such hotel off I-30 with five families in it.

A hotel is a fun place to stay for those of us not experiencing homelessness. But for a family with mom and dad and four kids in one room, no student can do their homework, they may not have a desk to work at, and they may be figuring out where their food is coming from that day.

I dropped off McDonald's gift cards for a family at one hotel and the mom texted me later that her kids were crying because they could go get some food.

## What are the most common causes of the homelessness you see among students? Is that parents lacking a job? Lack of affordable housing? Domestic violence? Something else?

A lot of times it is parents who just can't get on their feet. Many of our hotel families go to work every day, but they can't find enough affordable housing because Dallas has become popular, they may have bad credit, they can't afford a deposit for an apartment, or they can't pay for electricity that would allow them to turn on the lights and access the internet.

That's a lot of money to get together in one fell swoop, so the families go month-to-month or week-to-week in a hotel and don't seem to make it out of that hotel.

*Bill McKenzie is a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas and the STREETZine Editorial Advisory Board.*

WHAT'S  
AHEAD

FORMER DALLAS MAYOR  
LAURA MILLER ON  
HOMELESSNESS

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more families who have been evicted from their homes during the pandemic. Around the country, and here in Dallas, rapid rehousing has proven to be an effective way of quickly moving people out of shelters. MDHA is leading the regional Dallas R.E.A.L. Time Rapid Housing Initiative. The federally funded program mirrors housing placement work being done in places like Houston. Assistance for rapid rehousing initiatives nationwide has increased 104 percent over the last five years, according to the National Coalition to End Homelessness.

Individuals or families referred to The Stewpot from MDHA are placed in housing units where they are assigned case managers. Together, they work on finding employment, managing budgets, and building a resume, among other needs. The tenants also are provided food assistance and mental health services.

In Dallas, Family Gateway has a special focus on serving families without a home. In 2021, the organization's impact statement reports, 1,765 of the 4,768 calls Family Gateway prescreened were from families that were homeless or on the verge of experiencing homelessness. Family Gateway estimates that 4,400 children were included in those calls from families who either were without a home or very close to experiencing homelessness.

The nonprofit serves such families in numerous ways, including putting them in supportive housing. In 2021, it placed 279 families in supportive housing. According to the impact statement, 99% of those families remained in stable living conditions, which surpassed the 77% HUD benchmark. What's more, 57% of families increased their monthly income during their stay in supportive housing. Their progress exceeded the HUD 20% benchmark.

So, progress is being made in different ways to help families in Dallas move forward. Still, the need remains. The face of family homeless may be unseen, but it is real, very real.

**Bill McKenzie is on the STREETZine Editorial Advisory Board.**

## Food Distribution and ESL/Parent Ed Classes

By **Becky Zamora**

2022 is off to a great start with our food and clothing distributions! In January, we were able to serve 175 families which included 107 seniors, 420 adults and 316 children. That was a total of 843 individuals! We gave out over 16,500 lbs. of food and gave away almost 900 articles of clothing. We are still planning on holding two food and clothing distributions each month plus 2 diaper and baby item distributions as well. Please reach out to Cynthia at 469-573-0148 or Katy at 214-810-2641 to sign up for food, clothing or diaper needs.

Adult ESL classes began virtually in January 2022, but have since moved to in person here at the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas. We are accepting new students. So, if you or anyone you know would like to participate in FREE English as a Second Language classes, please reach out to Becky at 972-946-7436. Classes run concurrent to the Dallas ISD school schedule and are on Saturday mornings from 9 am to 12 pm.

**Becky Zamora is the Manager of Individual and Family Stabilization Programs at The Stewpot**



**The Essilor Vision organization providing free exams and free glasses. Courtesy of Wendy Rojo.**

# Home at Last

## Thomas Jackson's goal: A house for his family

By Poppy Sundeen

When you grow up an orphan, home and family take on special significance. “I wanted better for my children,” says Thomas who suffered beatings with a fiberglass pole from the orphanage staff. “I left there when I was 13 and started living on the streets.” In the years that followed, he was homeless on and off, but he never stopped longing for a home and family.

### A birth certificate and a mystery

It wasn't until high school that Thomas learned anything about his parents. “I needed a birth certificate to go out for the football team.” When the document arrived, Thomas was surprised to see that he wasn't born in Florida, where the orphanage was located, but in Delaware. “It listed my father's occupation as truck driver. I figure he and my mother took me with them on the road, and when they got to Florida, they decided it wasn't a good life for a child, so they put me in an orphanage.”

### Following in the footsteps of a father he never knew

As it turns out, Thomas spent 30 years in the same occupation as his biological father. His days as truck driver came to a sudden halt when he learned he was being held responsible for the overweight charges his employer neglected to pay. “It cost me my license, and I ended up homeless,” he explains.

### The bridge to a home

Thomas was in his 60s when his life changed forever. “I went to The Bridge [homeless shelter] and learned about their program. The caseworker had a long list of the things they expected of me. I said I'd do all those things if they would do the one thing on my list: help me get into a home.” Both Thomas and the caseworker held up their ends of the bargain. “They got me an apartment through Dallas Housing.”

### A growing family

By the time Thomas moved into his apartment, he was no longer single. “I met my wife, Chandra, at The Bridge.” Pastor Buchanan from The Stewpot conducted their marriage ceremony. Chandra's mother moved from the shelter into their apartment as well. “It was a package deal,” explains Thomas.

The Jackson family soon expanded to include two children, a son born in 2015 and a daughter born in 2018. They moved from a one-bedroom into a two-bedroom apartment, but it still was too snug.

### A house all their own

After four years in the apartments, Thomas was ready to make another big move — into a house. He learned about a new development that would meet their needs but with no credit history, he couldn't qualify. “So I went and got me a little \$300-limit credit card and never spent over \$50 and paid over the minimum on it and after while my credit score went way up.”

There was just one more obstacle: the \$1000 down payment.

### Saving and selling the STREETZine

Thomas managed to save up the down payment by cutting expenses to the bone and using his work as a STREETZine vendor to supplement his income. He'd been selling the STREETZine for a number of years and had built up a loyal clientele. “The friends who bought my paper helped me out quite a bit.” In October 2019, the Jacksons moved into their house and have lived there ever since.

### Three adults + two kids + one dog = Home

Thomas has come a long way from having no home or family to having an abundance of both. It hasn't always been an easy journey. “I think my experience has made me a kinder father to my children. It made me determined to have a good home for my family.”

Chandra and her mother have both experienced homelessness as well. Even their family dog was once on the street; the Jacksons adopted him from the pound.

### Challenges to overcome. Joys to share.

Just as all families, the Jacksons have their challenges. Thomas suffers from lymphedema, a circulation problem that causes pain and swelling in his feet and hands. “My wife has to help me get dressed sometimes, and I have to take a chair with me when I go out to sell the STREETZine.”

Daughter Sahara has her share of health problems too. Born with an undeveloped esophagus, she requires a feeding tube. “That doesn't stop her, though. She's got more energy than all of us put together.” The difficulties they face are balanced by the satisfactions of family life, including occasional outings together. “We can't afford to do much, but sometimes we go fishing. My wife takes a blanket and food, and my mother-in-law and I fish.”

Then they pack up and head back to their home, sweet home.

*Poppy Sundeen, a Dallas writer, is a member of the STREETZine editorial board.*

*Photo of Thomas with his family. Image provided by Thomas Jackson.*



# A View from the Street: Transition from Homelessness to a Real Life

By Vicki Gies

I retired from my two careers when I turned 62 years old. I had worked for 27 years in the government offices for Dallas County, overlapping mostly at night for 25 years in the food and beverage industry. I was very ready not to have to work another day! I am 69 years old now.

My husband, Bill, and I have been married for almost seven and a half years (on the “paper” version). We’ve been spiritually married for 11 years.

I applied for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) in 2010 while Bill was still working. I was approved in April 2012, but my monthly pay was not enough to live on or get a place to live. Sometimes we were able to stay with friends, but with our pets, most of the time we stayed in the woods at White Rock Lake in a large tent.

During Bill’s work, he was having trouble catching his breath and having pain in his left shoulder. He was working at a landscaping business when he started getting sick. He had injured his shoulder in his youth and had smoked most of his life. His job required physical labor, and his medical condition finally got so painful that he had to leave his job. He went through a series of doctor visits, tests, procedures, physical therapy, and surgery consultations.

We have recently moved into a used mobile home in Seagoville, Texas. We have only one neighbor! It’s quiet and peaceful here. With our new home, we have a place to live comfortably, and we have heat.

We have almost everything we wanted — a solid roof over our heads, real bathrooms with showers and a large oval tub, large kitchen with appliances (including a dishwasher, washer, and dryer!). We also have a large fenced-in back yard for our dogs and a covered front porch.

We also have our friend Austin next door who gives us rides to and from the store and church because there is no public transportation here. That is the only negative thing.

When I think back to our previous living situation in the tent at White Rock Lake, I felt comfortable and safe there, even though it wasn’t a house. I had been homeless there once before, and I already knew most all of the managers of the stores nearby. Neither my husband nor I were panhandled in front of their stores, nor did we cause any trouble. I actually miss those people. We felt safe there too because we knew most of the police in that area. They knew we were homeless back in the woods.

The most surprising thing that has happened since we moved into our new home is that we actually have a life now! We kept praying and didn’t give up our faith. We still have our faith, and I pray every night.

*The most surprising thing that has happened since we moved into our new home is that we actually have a life now!*

*Vicki Gies is a Stewpot client and a STREETZine vendor.*



*Image of Vicki and Bill’s house. Courtesy of Vicki Gies*

# Combating Homelessness One Family at a Time

*Laura Miller served as mayor of Dallas from 2002-2007. She previously was elected in 1998 to the Dallas City Council. Before that, Miller was an award-winning journalist for the Dallas Observer, D Magazine, New York Daily News, Dallas Morning News, Miami Herald, and Dallas Times Herald.*

*Today, Miller chairs The Ladder Project, an effort that Congregation Shearith Israel in Dallas launched in 2018 to address homelessness in the city she once led. In this exchange with The STREETZine, Miller describes the work of her project. She also shares her experiences dealing with homelessness as a political leader and private citizen. And she emphasizes the importance of individuals taking action to combat homelessness in their communities.*

## **How did you get involved personally in dealing with people experiencing homelessness?**

When I was mayor in 2003, President [George W.] Bush appointed a homeless czar, Philip Mangano. He went to the major cities and said “the president has a goal to end chronic homelessness in 10 years, and he wants your city to prepare a plan for how you are going to do that.”

Our City Council took that request seriously, and we held a day-long town hall meeting for just our homeless citizens. People came into City Hall, stood in line to speak, and talked to us about the services they needed and what we could be doing better.

I appointed a homeless czar, Tom Dunning, to come up with a plan for a facility that the city could build to address these issues. With Mangano nipping at our heels, we put \$25 million on a special, one-item bond election that passed overwhelmingly. We built The Bridge, which Mike Rawlings oversaw the construction of as our second homeless czar.

I have been acutely aware of, and interested in, homelessness since that

period. I serve on the Baron and Blue Foundation, created by attorneys Lisa Blue and the late Fred Baron. We give grants twice a year to homeless organizations so I am very familiar with the many nonprofits that do amazing work in that sphere. But four years ago, seeing that our city was still far from ending chronic homelessness, I wondered if there might be a different way to engage people more directly, and personally, in the problem.

## **In your experience as mayor and on the City Council, what did you learn about the challenges that cities face in dealing with homelessness?**

As many have pointed out nationwide, the government completely dropped the ball letting mentally ill people out of hospitals, where they were safe and getting care, and putting them on the streets. That is a problem only government can go back and solve. The result is that people who have suffered great trauma and illness are now living on and off the streets for years, and there are only a certain number of them you can successfully transition into apartments and jobs, with a chance of becoming financially independent. But those people are out there, and I believe strongly that our faith community can help them, along with the newly homeless.

With that in mind, I posed a question to my rabbis at Congregation Shearith Israel in the summer of 2018: If the 1,000 members of our synagogue can’t take care of one homeless individual or family -- transition them from the streets to independent living by creating a safety net for them – how can we ever hope to end homelessness in our country? Why don’t we try.

The rabbis were enthusiastic, and we started The Ladder Project the following month. It was based on the principles of Jewish philosopher Moses ben Maimon, or Rambam, who created a ladder of charity. The top of the charity ladder is giving a human being a gift or a loan that helps them become self-sufficient and able to survive on their own.

## **I see your organization’s ladder has five steps. What are they?**

We have five steps to success: communication, housing, financial accountability, employment and medical.

In the beginning, we held a meeting of in-

terested congregants, and I subsequently asked eight to be on an executive committee with me; we have run the program ever since. The biggest surprise of all – for us, and anyone who asks about our program – is that money is not an issue.

In the very beginning, we said if every congregant gives \$36, we can start this program, and we instantly raised \$36,000. We haven’t asked for money since. We are fortunate in that congregants donate money when the spirit moves them, and we have several families that are consistently generous, so we have always had the funds when we need them. Another given is that when we take on a new family, we put out a call to our congregants for furniture, clothing, kitchen supplies, TVs, used cars, job leads, pro bono legal and medical help, and the response is always instantaneous. (The real glue, of course, is the eight of us who run the program – we are now a well-oiled machine, able to overcome any obstacle through sheer will, time and effort.)

Our biggest challenge to success is not resources. It’s that life is hard, especially for people in poverty and homelessness. We see it with every family – how virtually impossible it is for people without money to deal with bureaucracy; disrespect; abusive relationships; and lack of child care, education, access to technology, medical care, and transportation. The obstacles are extraordinary.

We have more referrals than we can handle right now. Stimulus money and eviction moratoriums are over, and it’s much harder for people to access the government agencies that provide social services and financial assistance since many of those employees are still working remotely. No one answers the phone. Offices are closed.

One family we are currently helping is an Afghan family of six that fled their country during last summer’s U.S. evacuation. The family was sent to Dallas in November, where they languished for three months in an extended-stay motel provided by Refugee Services of Texas (RST), which was overwhelmed with families. We were introduced to the family by Temple Emanu-El, which is doing incredible work with Afghan refugees.

In less than three weeks, we found the family an apartment; negotiated a lease; fully furnished the apartment; paid for renter’s insurance, electricity and internet; gave them DART passes and bicycles; bought



clothes and personal care items; took them to doctors and job interviews; even took them to White Rock Lake to breathe.

One family member had been suffering a kidney stone for seven weeks when we met him – one for-profit hospital’s ER turned him away twice, untreated except for pain pills. With Parkland booked out for weeks, one of our committee members appealed to his personal urologist, and within 24 hours we had emergency surgery scheduled; luckily, the young man (painfully) passed the stone the night before surgery.

That’s just one family. We create a safety net. That is what we do. It is very intense.

**What have you learned that other programs might learn from your experience?**

With about 4,000 homeless people currently living in Dallas County and Collin County, if every church, synagogue, and mosque, all 3,000, took on just one person or family, we could collectively make a big difference. If you add businesses, schools and service organizations, the safety net of help gets even bigger.

Granted, this is complicated. You have to accept families as they are, not judge them for their past mistakes, and stay with them for the long haul – as long as they are honest with you and continue to help themselves – in hopes they will be able, at some point, to sustain themselves.

*Granted, this is complicated. You have to accept families as they are, not judge them for their past mistakes, and stay with them for the long haul – as long as they are honest with you and continue to help themselves – in hopes they will be able, at some point, to sustain themselves.*

Wonderful Larry James with CitySquare told me from the beginning that what we’re doing is not scalable; he’s probably right. But there is no more fulfilling work that I have ever done.

**For more information, please visit the website [www.shearith.org](http://www.shearith.org)**

## Eight Reasons People Experience Homelessness

- Lack of affordable housing
- Living in poverty
- Lack of employment opportunities
- Decline in public assistance
- Lack of affordable healthcare
- Domestic violence
- Mental illness
- Addiction

Source; National Coalition for the Homeless



*Photo courtesy of Matt Collamer through Unsplash.*

# Stewpot Artists



Cornelious  
Brackens, Jr.



Charles William



Leon Pollard



Gershon Trunnell



Flying B

# Around The Stewpot: Serving Families Through the Children and Youth Program

By Alma Reyes

I can't begin to describe the excitement that filled the air last fall as students started to come in through the Welcome Center at the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas. Since the beginning of March 2020, our programs had gone virtual, and we had to quickly adjust to accommodate to the world around us.

Kids' Club (elementary), Junior Crew (middle school) and Venturing Crew (high school) students participate in our programs year-round, including during the summer. We've had the pleasure of working during those months with our community partners at Our Friends' Place, University Crossroads, the Perot Museum, the Dallas Museum of Art, and Noggin Educational Foundation. And we have formed new partnerships with Project Management Institute- Dallas Chapter, Hope Cottage, and Dallas Cred – just to name a few organizations. All of them provide excellent resources to our students in order to expand their minds and give them the tools necessary to succeed as they go through and graduate from the Children and Youth Program.

I certainly couldn't have done this without our staff and volunteers that have adjusted to the online programming and have worked arduously to give more than 100% despite the circumstances. Oscar Espinosa, who has been with the Children & Youth Program for upwards of 15 years, states that "as difficult as it has been, we are trying to make sure everyone has the right equipment/access, [...] that we are a constant for the kids. Whether they are in person or virtual, they know we are here for them - to help them succeed."

Currently, we have a 100% passing level for all grades, have had 100% graduation rates, have about 62 students enrolled in higher education (trade, college/university, grad and doctoral), and have 36 students receiving the Com-

munity Ministries Scholarship. While our numbers have decreased during the pandemic, like they have for many after-school programs, we still see the great impact that our program has with the students that have continued to participate despite the circumstances. I'm proud to share that one of our current Venturing Crew students interviewed with Harvard in February!

*"We are happy to be back so we can visit with our friends, virtual was hard. I am glad that we still had programs while we were at home [because of COVID]."*

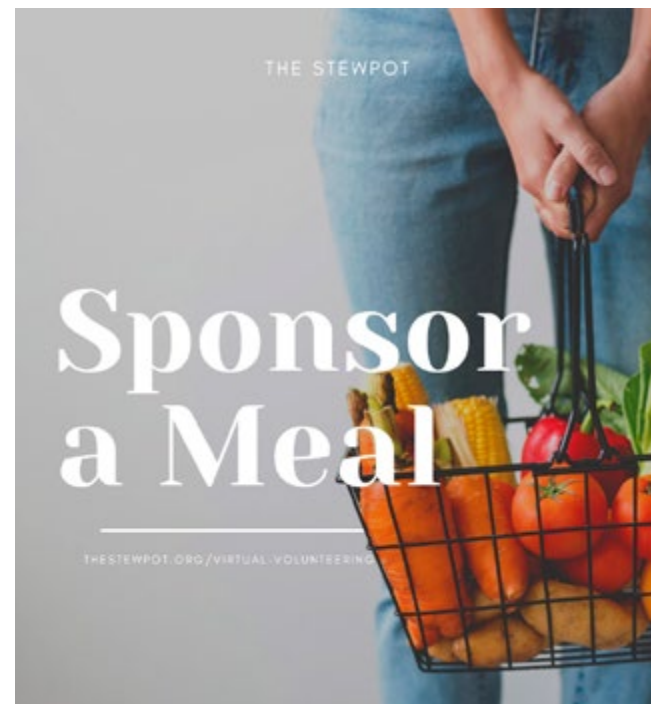
—Crystal M., a ninth grade Venturing Crew student

Bridget P., currently a student in 9th

grade whose older brother graduated from the program and who has participated since the first grade, puts her experience this way: "[C&Y staff] always made sure we were involved and it made all the difference." Ultimately, that's our goal and I couldn't be more excited to see our program expand.

Our next mission is to begin mentor and tutoring opportunities to support our students. Registration for C&Y programs begins typically in March and the excitement of summer is around the corner. For more information, please contact me at [almar@thestewpot.org](mailto:almar@thestewpot.org).

*Alma Reyes is manager of Children and Youth Programs at The Stewpot.*



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Learn about more ways to connect at [fpcdallas.org/starthere](http://fpcdallas.org/starthere).

# Street Newspapers - A Voice for the Homeless & Impoverished

## What is **STREETZine**?

**STREETZine** is a nonprofit newspaper published by The Stewpot of First Presbyterian Church for the benefit of people living in poverty. It includes news, particularly about issues important to those experiencing homelessness. **STREETZine** creates direct economic opportunity. Vendors receive papers to be distributed for a one-dollar or more donation.

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