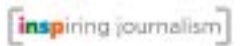


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STREETZine is a program of The Stewpot and a member of **International Network of Street Papers**



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Collaboration Is Key in Serving Vulnerable Populations

By Nicole Kiser

Working as a service provider for those experiencing homelessness in Dallas requires being really, really good at group projects. “We are always seeking outside counsel, outside expertise and finding ways to connect our neighbors experiencing homelessness with the best providers who offer services outside of our scope,” says Wayne Walker, founder of **OurCalling**, a faith organization that serves those experiencing homelessness in Dallas.

Service providers such as OurCalling work with a plethora of other agencies in order to provide services to those in need. Because of the services that providers usually supply, many providers work with the same agencies. Collaborating with other organizations allows each service provider to focus on providing high-quality essential services without needing to provide every service those experiencing homelessness may need.

For example, **North Texas Food Bank** and other food pantries help supply food to providers, with the North Texas Food Bank often working to obtain SNAP, food stamps and other benefits for clients. **Dallas Metrocare Services** and **Parkland HOMES** also work with providers like **The Stewpot** and **Austin Street Center** to provide medical, dental

and behavioral health services to those experiencing homelessness.

And service providers are not competitive, frequently directing clients to other service providers so they can receive the best care. Though many services are common to most service providers, some service providers have specialized programs to help clients.

Family Gateway is known for its work sheltering families, and the **Salvation Army**, **Austin Street Center** and **The Bridge** have the most robust rapid rehousing program. The Stewpot is often recognized for its large-scale identification assistance program, and the Salvation Army, Family Gateway and OurCalling currently provide the rapid COVID-19 testing required for shelter intake.

In February 2021, the teamwork between service providers was tested by the subfreezing winter storm that covered the state of Texas. In anticipation of the freezing temperatures, service providers worked to move as many people as possible off the street and into hotel rooms run by the City of Dallas and a coalition of service providers, including **Oak Lawn United Methodist Church**, the Salvation Army, Austin Street Center, The Bridge, OurCalling and The Stewpot.



An abundance of volunteers at the ready-to-serve lunch distributed at the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center during the winter storm in February. Courtesy of Betty Heckman.

Organizations contributed funds and asked for donations to rent even more hotel rooms, with The Stewpot alone receiving a donation of \$45,000 to pay for rooms. With Oak Lawn United Methodist Church leading fundraising and management of funds, **approximately 350 people** were placed in city-owned hotel rooms, hotel rooms paid for by nonprofits and church groups, and other spaces supplied by service providers.

Service providers knew it wasn't going to be enough. Shelters like Aus-

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WHAT SHOULD WE COVER NEXT? FILL OUT OUR SURVEY AT:
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STREET *Zine*

STREET *Zine* is a program of The Stewpot.



The STREET *Zine* 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 STREET *Zine* seeks to raise awareness about the issues surrounding homelessness and poverty. At the same time, the monthly publication offers financial opportunity for homeless 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 STREET *Zine*.

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A Letter from the Executive Director

By Brenda Snitzer

“Making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring” is the goal of organizations in Dallas and Collin counties that comprise the Homeless Collaborative. This collaboration is convened by Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance (MDHA), which helps facilitate what is known as the Continuum of Care (CoC) in Dallas and Collin counties. (The federal government funds organizations that provide housing for people experiencing homelessness largely through regional or local CoCs.)

Nonprofits like The Stewpot, and city and county organizations, are part of the Continuum of Care in these two North Texas counties. Their mission is to end homelessness in them through a collaborative and strategic effort. Combining the strengths and resources of participating organizations and the communities they serve is the key.

In January, the member organizations elected a new executive council to lead the CoC. Dr. David Woody, CEO of The Bridge, is the chair, while I was elected vice chair. Elected as directors were Blake Fetterman, CEO of Salvation Army; Ellen Maganis, CEO of Family Gateway; Karen Hughes, CEO of Vogel Alcove; Yolanda Jones, COO of Aids Arms; and Daniel Roby, CEO of Austin Street. The Collin County representative will be elected by the CoC membership in April.

I am proud to serve in this role as we work with all the member organizations and the MDHA board to end homelessness in Dallas and Collin counties. Currently, we are working on “system transformation,” drawing upon the expertise of consultants who have helped Continuums of Care in other cities become more effective in reducing and ending homelessness.

The organizations now have signed onto a plan by the board of directors to effectively end veteran homelessness in 2021, measurably reduce chronic unsheltered homelessness by 2023 and similarly reduce family and youth homelessness by 2025.

A reorganized homeless rehousing system will be essential to meeting

this goal. So will a coordinated, efficient structure, a shared vision, shared measurements for outcomes and aligned resources. This is how we plan on creating a system that makes homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring.

In my three years of working at The Stewpot, I have never been more hopeful. Every year I have seen the leadership of the organizations that help people experiencing homelessness work more closely together. The latest evidence occurred in response to the massive February snowstorm. More than 25 organizations came together with the City of Dallas to house more than 1,300 unsheltered people during the week.

For the last three years, six of these organizations, including The Stewpot, have been leading the charge together during inclement weather. These organizations, along with others in the CoC, have been increasing their working partnerships to end homelessness. The goals of ending veteran homelessness in 2021, reducing chronic homelessness by 2023 and reducing family and youth homelessness by 2025 are achievable. With God’s help and everyone working together, we will get there!

Brenda Snitzer is executive director of The Stewpot.

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The Pastor's Letter

By The Rev. Amos Disasa

This essay is adapted from a sermon Rev. Disasa recently delivered at the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas.

Recently, I spent a day paying close attention to how often I promised to pray for others. It's likely the results of my brief research experiment were skewed because my job is to actually pray for people. Nonetheless, the total was more than I expected.

At about the same time, I was reading about Jesus' angry outburst in the temple corridors. He was angry that money changers were running a racket and dove sellers were jacking up their prices. His response to the desecration of the temple wasn't comforting, like a promise of prayer from a friend might be. But are there times when a promise to get angry on behalf of someone, instead of a promise to pray, is the right response?

Before answering that question, let me admit that I don't want my Jesus to get angry.

I like the Jesus that promises to go after one sheep that is lost, leaving 99 others behind; not the Jesus who drove sheep out of the temple with a long whip.

I like the Jesus that was serenely baptized in the Jordan River while a gentle dove flew overhead; not the Jesus that sends doves flying at the whip of a cord.

I like the Jesus that calmly shares parables about not burying your treasure in a field; not the Jesus that clumsily empties treasures on the Temple floor. I don't want my Jesus to get angry.

Some of us have fared well through this pandemic. Our accounts may have more in them now than they did 13 months ago when the

marketplace, or what we call the economy, ground to a halt. But for many of God's children, the pandemic invited us to wonder if God was angry with us.

The violent, messy, uncontrollable and chaotic destruction of the marketplace we'd come to know as the sum of our work, our relationships and our shared rites of passage like weddings and graduations, makes me long for answers from God.

In the blink of an eye, our tables were overturned, our sheep driven out and our doves released. Demoralized and downtrodden, we've been left asking: Why? We said our prayers, shared out of our abundance and stayed out of trouble by following the rules. We provided goods and services and acted with honor and dignity. We weren't doing anything wrong so: Why is our table turned over?

But if you're poor, the difference between an unblemished animal and dinner is zero; you're eating the lambs first and worrying about your religious devotion later.

Something set Jesus off that day in the temple. We don't know what it was exactly. But we do know that God doesn't brandish a whip of cords to punish us for the sins of the past. That's not how the gospel of Jesus works. And it's clear that Jesus wasn't punishing the money changers or the dove sellers for something that they did in the past. That's not gospel either.

And still, we can't escape accountability. Jesus' outburst is a reminder that we should expect the righteous to be angry when we restrict access to God and the gifts of creation. The money changers and dove sellers set up



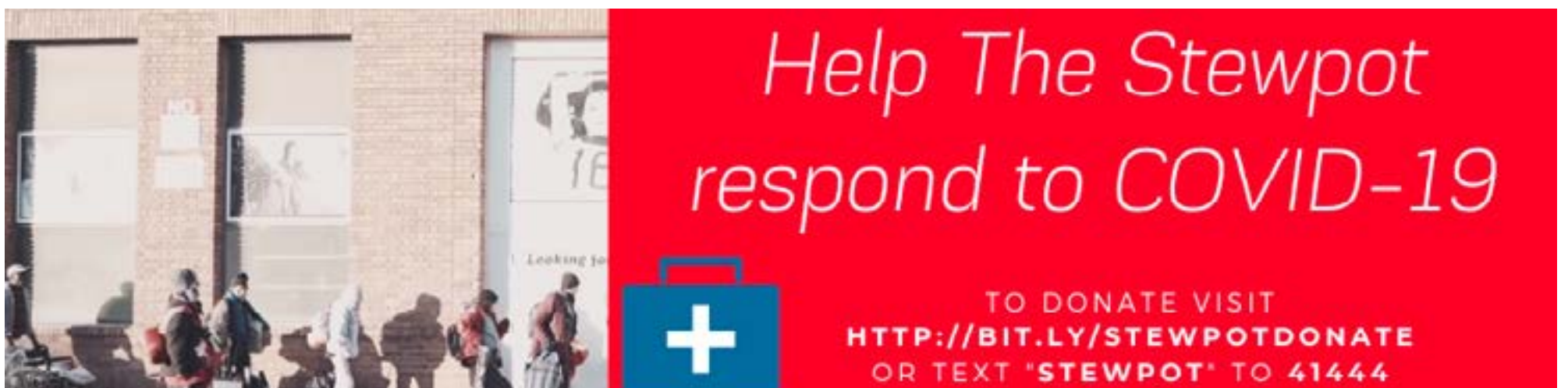
a marketplace in which they functioned as gatekeepers between God and God's people. The holy and visible ruckus Jesus invoked revealed the corruption of a marketplace that taxed people for seeking an audience with God.

There is enough to go around, but the clearing out of life as we knew it has revealed that not everyone can afford to deal in the marketplace of life. Jewish religious tradition demanded that unblemished animals and coins unblemished by Caesar's head were necessary to be forgiven by God.

But if you're poor, the difference between an unblemished animal and dinner is zero; you're eating the lambs first and worrying about your religious devotion later. So then, the liberation of people from marketplaces that value transactional relationships defined by profit and loss, winners and losers, buyers and sellers, is the gospel.

May we find the courage to make promises to get angry, and not just pray, whenever we notice a child of God trapped, by no fault of their own, in the corridors of life, standing outside the temples in which love, justice and peace are available for free.

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



Responding to Severe Weather Requires Planning and Partners: A Conversation with Rocky Vaz

By Bill McKenzie

Rocky Vaz has been with the City of Dallas for 32 years, nearly 13 years of which have been in the Office of Emergency Management (OEM). He serves as director of that office, which responds to emergencies from severe weather, like February's paralyzing snowstorm, to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the Ebola virus to people seeking refuge from hurricanes along the Gulf Coast. He spoke with STREETZine's Brenda Snitzer, Nicole Kiser and Bill McKenzie in mid-March about meeting those challenges, including how the city and other organizations can help people experiencing homelessness and other at-risk individuals during emergencies. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

The Office of Emergency Management defines its main objective as “build[ing] a resilient community that withstands all hazards, adapts quickly to disruptions, and rapidly resumes day-to-day activities.” What strategies work when it comes to people experiencing homelessness?

You need to start with a good plan that you execute quickly. We do tabletop exercises to prepare for a cold-weather event, long hot spells and other conditions that may result in a catastrophic loss of power.

Let me start by saying that we are a coordinating and planning agency. We don't have boots-on-the-ground. We coordinate resources across Dallas with city government, non-profits and various agencies, including at the state, regional and federal levels, and apply those to the emergency at hand.

Before the city created the Office of Homeless Solutions (OHS) about three years ago, OEM was more in the forefront of sheltering people in inclement weather. Now, we coordinate resources, working with the Parks and Recreation Department, the Code Enforcement Department and the libraries.

Every department has a role to play when we set up a shelter in an emergency. We are in the background, providing the support and resources that OHS needs to pull off a successful operation.

What have you learned about strategies that work well in coordinating these responses?

You need to start with a good plan that you execute quickly. We do tabletop exercises to prepare for a cold-weather event, long hot spells and other conditions that may result in a catastrophic loss of power.

We had plans in place and were well-prepared for the February snowstorm, but we were not prepared for all of the city to lose power. We have plans to move people from one part of the city to another if power goes out in one area. We have recreation centers and libraries identified where we can move people, and we have their floor plans and their compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

But, in this instance, when the power went out across the city, and Oncor could not guarantee they could keep the power on, we had no choice. We learned that we need to focus on the infrastructure. We had plenty of generators, but some of our facilities were not wired for a generator. Luckily, our convention center is like a city in itself, and it had multiple backup generators and ample water supplies. Caterers also could start providing meals.

Since we couldn't use rec centers and libraries to shelter people, we had to adapt quickly. One thing we did was rent coach buses with restrooms and deployed them throughout the city. We parked them in front of the rec center or library where people seeking shelter normally go during an emergency. We had the

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No Internet, No Vaccine: How Lack of Internet Access has Limited Vaccine Availability for Racial and Ethnic Minorities

By Tamara Burns Loeb, AJ Adkins-Jackson and Arleen F. Brown

In the U.S. at least, racial and ethnic minority communities that lack internet access have been left behind in the race to get a COVID-19 vaccine, say three researchers who study health disparities. They outline their findings which show that if the online gap was narrowed, vaccine roll-out would be smoother.

Racial and ethnic minority communities that lack internet access have been **left behind** in the race to get a COVID-19 vaccine. The **average monthly cost of internet access, about \$70**, can be out of reach for those who can barely afford groceries.

Reporters and scholars have written about the effects of **lack of internet access in rural areas in the US and developing countries**, but they have paid less attention to the harm caused by lack of internet access in racial and ethnic minority communities in **major cities**.

As **researchers who study health disparities**, we are concerned that even when vaccinations are offered in these communities, those at greatest risk for COVID-19 may be unable to obtain appointments without the help of **family or friends**. This includes **racial and ethnic minority communities and older adults**, the age group that is currently being vaccinated.

Our research suggests that lack of internet access may be an important reason. And for the almost **13.8 million older adults** in the US who live alone, asking for help may not be an option.

The computer as COVID-19 connector

During the pandemic, the internet has been an indispensable health tool to millions.

Telehealth services have provided a **safe way** for

patients to make appointments for COVID-19 testing and other types of **medical care**. In fact, there was a **154 percent increase in telehealth visits** during the last seven days of March 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. This was most likely due to public health mandates that required a shift away from in-person care.

In addition, patients receive communications from their providers through **email and other messaging systems** that offer access to health care, health information and test results. And **departments of public health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** have relied on their websites, online events and social media to educate the population about COVID-19.

Access to the internet is essential during a pandemic; this has been particularly true as the vaccine has been rolled out. Signing up for the vaccine has predominantly occurred **online**. This means that far fewer older adults from under-resourced racial and ethnic minority communities have been able to make appointments.

In 2018, more than **one in four Medicare beneficiaries** had no digital access at home. Those without digital access were more likely to be 85 years or older, members of racial or ethnic minority communities and from low-income households.

How internet access can determine health

Over the years, medical and public health experts have identified social factors — structural racism, a person's neighborhood, access to fresh food, exposure to toxins, income and education — that play a major role in health. These factors are often called the **social determinants of health**. Experts consider structural racism, or racism ingrained in social, business, educational and health policy and practice, to be one of the most damaging determi-



Photo by Hakan Nural on Unsplash.

nants. These factors in turn ultimately lead to **more disease and death**, as they have with COVID-19.

Early data on the case numbers and deaths from COVID-19 showed that structural racism likely increased **exposure to the coronavirus** among racial and ethnic minority communities. And racial gaps also impeded access to **testing and affected quality of care**.

The pandemic has also illuminated the risk of infection to our **aging population**. However, **research** has placed less emphasis on how **aging** affects **some populations** more than others, such as the effects of structural racism and income.

Now, it appears that **internet access** is emerging as a new and troublesome **determinant of health**. This appears to be particularly true for under-resourced racial and ethnic minority communities and **aging populations**.

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Left Out in the Cold: Gerald's 100-Hour Ordeal

By Poppy Sundeen

Living in your car is challenging enough. But when the car isn't driveable and the temperatures fall below zero, it can turn from difficult to deadly. That's the situation Gerald found himself in during February's week of record cold and power outages.

"That Monday my car was out by a vacant lot near Parkland Hospital," he says. "It doesn't run, and my phone was dead, too." Gerald had no way to reach help as temperatures plummeted and power outages plunged the surrounding area into darkness.

A heavy blanket of snow combined with below-zero wind chills made travel by foot an all-but-impossible option. "I tried to walk to a church in Oak Lawn, but ended up back in my car."

Gerald knew he could take shelter at the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center, but with bus service shut down, there was no way to get there. Nearby stores and buildings where he might have been able to warm up temporarily were closed due to storm conditions and electrical blackouts.

100-plus hours below freezing

As night fell, taking the temperatures down with it, Gerald realized there was nothing to do but wait. Meanwhile, his cousin Melvin tried to come to his aid. "Someone told Melvin I was out there stuck in the ice, so he went out looking for my car, but didn't find me."

Gerald's dilemma went from bad to worse. "I was out there from Monday until Friday." A good Sa-

"By Thursday, I just knew I was going to die. I figured I'm going to go to sleep, and if I don't wake up, I know I'm dead. I was ready for the Lord to take me."

maritan in the neighborhood brought food and blankets to his car, but nothing could ease the bone-chilling cold.

"By Thursday, I just knew I was going to die. I figured I'm going to go to sleep, and if I don't wake up, I know I'm dead. I was ready for the Lord to take me."

Waking up and warming up

Gerald survived through the night. On Friday morning, the sun came out and with the worst of the cold and power outages passed, he managed to walk to a reopened store. "I was sick, and my feet were so cold they felt like blocks of ice."

Once inside the store, he began to warm up. "I stayed there about five hours just to get everything circulating again." Some friends came by and bought food for him. "I began to get my energy back."

When the sunshine melted some of the snow on top of his car, water seeped in, soaking his upholstery and blankets. "Yeah, I still had problems, but I survived the storm."

A born survivor

Gerald learned a thing or two about survival during childhood on his grandmother's farm in Ferris, Texas. "My mama gave me to my grandma to raise." As a young man, he worked alongside his

grandfather in the family's landscaping business.

When his grandfather died, Gerald found himself unable to take over the family business. Chronic health problems added to his challenges, but Gerald kept trying to get a foothold on self-sufficiency.

Stabilized by medication, he found a place to stay and a new start at the Salvation Army. "I was just getting back on my feet when I had to leave and go help out my grandma." After his grandmother's death, he returned to Dallas.

Help from friends and family

At 61 years of age, Gerald's health issues are compounded by dental and hearing problems. "I went to The Stewpot, and they helped me get dentures. They got me [an] ID and my birth certificate, too."

He's also getting a helping hand from Melvin, the cousin who went looking for Gerald during the cold snap. "He told me I could stay at his house," says Gerald. "He's clearing out a space for me to sleep with room for my own little bed. It's got a light and a door. I'm so happy about it, I could jump for joy."

In return, Gerald plans to help Melvin with his janitorial work. "I'll do whatever he needs."

In the short term, Gerald is focused on shaking off his harrowing experience. "I'm going to eat home-cooked meals, get my clothes washed, get a hot bath, a shave and a haircut."

Gerald doesn't expect his life ahead to be easy, but with his medication and a little help, he knows he can face whatever comes his way. "I take one day at a time, and I manage."

Poppy Sundeen, a Dallas writer, is a member of the STREETZine Editorial Advisory Board.



Continued from page 1

tin Street, The Bridge and **Union Gospel Mission** were already at **full capacity**. Several nonprofits and church groups pushed the City of Dallas to open the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center as an emergency temporary homeless shelter. Once made available on February 12, it took everyone to keep the convention center open for the storm, says Brenda Snitzer, executive director at The Stewpot.

The coalition of service providers running the hotel rooms for inclement weather sheltering were pushed into overdrive to manage the convention center. OurCalling temporarily closed its downtown headquarters to staff the convention center around the clock. Oak Lawn United Methodist Church, The Bridge, The Stewpot, The Salvation Army, Austin Street Center and the City of Dallas provided staff support. When one organization's staff was depleted, another organization would step in, says Snitzer.

“The needs of 1,300 guests were beyond that of any single organization, and it was the combined effort of many organizations that made the impossible possible,” says Walker. **While the city provided the convention center and security, other service providers supplied necessary help.**

The Stewpot, Salvation Army and Oak Lawn United Methodist Church, with the help of several Muslim organizations and a number of restaurants, ensured people at the convention center were fed and prepared regular meals. Shoreline City Church donated masks, and the Salvation Army provided cots for the center. Austin Street Center, OurCalling, The Stewpot and Union Gospel Mission helped by driving people to the center.

However, the recent storm was far from the first instance of service providers working together to help vulnerable populations. “The general public would be surprised to know the deeply woven integration between the partner agencies,” says Walker. The leaders of the coalition of service providers that coordinated the inclement weather sheltering for the recent storm talk almost weekly to collaborate and support one another.

In particular, service providers have organized inclement weather shelters for years. The service provider coalition and the City of Dallas work with other partners months in advance to prepare for both freezing temperatures and high heat.

In the past, The Stewpot and the city's **Office of Homeless Solutions**, as well as partners such as **Downtown Dallas Inc**, have provided transportation to shelters with available capacity. The City of Dallas opened the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center as an emergency temporary

homeless shelter for the first time in **November 2019**. Then, OurCalling and Oak Lawn United Methodist Church served as **overflow shelters**.

Additionally, each year, as part of a Homeless Collaborative led by **Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance**, providers work to conduct the **Annual Point in Time Count**. Service providers help MDHA survey Dallas to count how many people are experiencing homelessness in Dallas and Collin counties. This Annual Point in Time Count helps the counties properly evaluate and allocate resources to homeless services.

The Homeless Collaborative also coordinates with the city to provide rental relief and rental assistance and prevent renters from becoming homeless. Since the pandemic, these efforts have expanded to help those affected by COVID-19. Between 2019 and 2020, MDHA and the Homeless Collaborative **decreased homelessness for the first time in years in Dallas**. Though the pandemic will surely affect their progress, MDHA and the Homeless Collaborative have specific goals to effectively end veteran homelessness by 2021, reduce chronic unsheltered homelessness by 2023 and reduce family and youth homelessness by 2025.

However, working together is not always easy. In November 2020, a Dallas City Council ordinance passed that explicitly allows churches to be inclement weather shelters. Created and advocated for by the coalition of service providers that work to provide inclement weather shelter, this ordinance was considered a huge victory.

But the ordinance was passed with some caveats. Churches seeking to be inclement weather shelters have to complete a lengthy application process. And a **last minute amendment** prohibited organizations within half a mile of the central business

district of downtown from applying.

The Stewpot and OurCalling, which had helped create and advocate for the ordinance, are included within the buffer zone. Currently, **no faith organizations have applied** using the ordinance.

Nevertheless, service providers take their differences in stride. “There are always challenges where the tactical operations of one organization might step on the toes of another,” says Walker. “However, we are continually working on ways to support each other.”

“[Service providers] work well together, and we are constantly reminded that we need each other,” says Walker. “From sharing PPE supplies, to providing other material and operational support, we are a team. We may wear different logos, but at the heart of all of our missions is the desire to love our neighbors.”

Nicole Kiser is managing editor of STREETZine.



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Continued from page 4

buses for three or four days and worked with council members on the best places to park them. And we made rec centers and libraries available once the power came back on.

Emergencies like the 2018 transformer fire at The Bridge or the enormity of February's snowstorm obviously don't come with much warning. Did you have a plan for something like an all-out snowstorm?

We didn't have a plan for the entire city to be shut down. We have emergency plans for different parts of the city and isolating them during something like a tornado or hail storm. We learned a lesson quickly during the snowstorm about not having power everywhere and plan on getting this fixed correctly, like having one or two places in each council district where we could power-up and have a warming station for people who have lost power.

Let me ask you a question about another subject that impacts people experiencing homelessness, and that is COVID-19. Your office brought together service providers and shelter operators as the pandemic broke out. Can you share why that was important in planning for the pandemic? And had you done anything like that before?

COVID was new, just as the Ebola virus was new to Dallas, so we didn't have a playbook. When infections started, the mayor hosted various groups, including the city's homeless

coalition, to discuss the next steps in the city. The homeless coalition came up with a plan that we supported, and our office worked with OHS on it.

For example, we had a contract with a hotel in Farmers Branch, and we kept it running for a couple of months, moving people in and out. We also provided shelters supplies like PPEs. And we worked with OHS, shelters and Parkland on testing for COVID when it became available. We helped coordinate work on the ground and kept meeting with coalition members.

We also were very involved with setting up the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center as a large congregate shelter once the shelters in the city couldn't house everyone who needed shelter. We were involved with coordinating the work at the convention center, including getting cots from FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency].

So many alert systems depend upon technologies. What alerts work for people who lack access to modern technologies like a cellphone?

We have an alert system, and we have a database that does robocalls. But people's phones do go dead or are not charged, so we work with every council member to get the word out to people. We did that during the snowstorm to let people know about the buses they could get on for warmth.

The key is targeted asks. The best thing is to give money to places that need [it]. Or donate to places that do donation management. We can go to them for what we need.

We also have a wireless alert system through FEMA and can get messages out to particular communities if we know an emergency might be coming their way. It's like an Amber alert for life-threatening situations in particular areas. We are looking at doing some of that now that registrations for vaccinations are open.

We are looking at ways to improve our protocols. And we would love to hear from shelters and others about how to improve reaching people. We are happy to partner with shelters to get text messages out during an emergency, like we do with our own city employees.

Severe weather storms often spark a desire among residents to help people experiencing homelessness. What is your advice for people who want to help at moments like that?

Donation management is the biggest disaster after every disaster. People empty out their closets whether you want it or not. They provide things that may or may not be helpful. We saw that during [Hurricanes] Katrina and

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A View from the Street: Surviving the Storm

By Sarah Disasa

When Robert heard the news that a historic winter storm would be hitting Dallas in mid-February, he knew that he had to do something. Robert has been homeless off and on for 14 years. After a divorce and battle with depression, Robert found himself on the streets. “I lost everything I had,” he said. “My whole life was flipped upside down.”

Camp Rhonda has been Robert’s home for a while, and recently, this camp has been relocated multiple times around Dallas. Each sweep requires this homeless community to uproot and start all over again. “We are homeless, and we’ve got no other place to go, and the shelters can only hold so many people,” he said as we spoke recently. But even if the city’s shelters were not crowded, and even if we weren’t in the middle of a pandemic, Robert would prefer to live outside rather than in a shelter. He has a community of about 45 people at Camp Rhonda, and that’s his home for now.

Robert checks the weather every morning on his government-issued phone. “I’m able to keep track of the weather on my phone,” he said. “That’s one thing you want to do is keep up on the weather at all times.” He explains that he plans his day according to the weather report. For Robert’s homeless friends who do not have phones, he keeps them up to date on the weather so that they can also be prepared.

The winter storm of 2021 was the first time Robert has taken shelter for weather-related reasons. “I’ve experienced extreme cold temperatures and stuff like that. But this year is the first year I ever went in,” he said. “The only reason I went in this time was because I saw the weather of minus 4 degrees, the windchill, for like 2 or 3 days...I didn’t want to take the chance of being out here and freezing.”

Robert explained that as the weather turned cold with this latest storm, he, along with other people experiencing homelessness, first went to hotel rooms that were provided by the city. After the second day of the storm, when Robert’s hotel had lost power, DART buses transported all the people from the hotels to the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center.

Robert explains that although he was thankful that he was not out in the severe elements, he had concerns about staying at the convention center. Each person entering the convention center was allowed only one bag. “I went and stashed my stuff

DAMAGE FROM THE STORM?

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when I found out how many bags we could have,” he said. “I only took one bag with the most important things, like my birth certificate, my wallet, my phone, my charger, a few clothes.” Robert explained that he had to leave everything else he owned, and he just hoped that it would be there when the storm had passed.

Robert explained that he had to leave everything he owned, and he just hoped that it would be there when the storm had passed.

Another concern for Robert was the pandemic. Although COVID-19 tests were administered before entering the convention center, Robert’s diabetes places him in a high-risk category for the virus and staying in a big room with hundreds of people worried him.

In the hotel room, Robert felt safe from the virus. “I actually have been trying to practice safe distancing, mask-wearing, washing hands, doing what the CDC recommends for you to do,” he said. He knew that the convention center would be one giant room, a closed environment. “I had to do what I had to do. It was there or back outside,” he

said. “We had no choice but to stay at the convention center and take the risk of being exposed to the virus.”

Robert’s other concern about staying at the convention center was the safety of his belongings. “There was quite a bit of stealing,” he claimed. He unknowingly watched it happen when he saw someone take a backpack from a cot and keep walking. Robert didn’t think anything of it at the time, but later realized that the backpack was taken by a random person, not the owner. An increase of police presence helped with this issue, but, according to Robert, there were so many people in the convention center that it was overwhelming to monitor everything that was going on.

Now that spring has sprung, Robert is no longer threatened by the snow and ice that Dallas experienced several weeks ago. But he is still checking the weather every morning to make his plans and preparations for each day. And he is still hopeful for a sustainable housing solution that would enable him to get his life back. “If you can give a person a little hope,” he said, “it goes a long way.”

Sarah Disasa is a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas and the STREETZine Editorial Advisory Board.

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Harvey. We had 18-wheeler truckloads of donations that we had to give to Salvation Army or Goodwill.

The key is targeted asks. The best thing is to give money to places that need them for particular needs. Or donate to places or companies that do donation management. We can go to them for what we need.

Is there a logistical problem in storing donations?

Yes. Water distribution became a problem during the snowstorm. We used two large exhibit halls at the convention center to store water. We spent over \$350,000 in purchasing water. In addition, a million dollars' worth of water was given to us. We just finally finished delivering all the extra bottles of water to apartment complexes that needed running water.

Storage is a big deal. We bought a warehouse to store PPEs, gloves and face-shields for frontline workers. Fortunately, the convention center has two million square feet, so we can use that for storage even during most of our large conventions.

The focus of your department has been on preparing people for disasters. Is there a particular way that you reach people experiencing homelessness ahead of time to prepare them for extreme weather like tornadoes?

We don't reach people experiencing homelessness directly, but we work through the Office of Homeless Solutions and street outreach folks. They get trained.

We have community preparedness classes and community emergency response teams. We have a cadre of 5,000 people who are trained. They have neighborhood-style captains who take care of their neighborhoods.

We do a lot of community preparedness presentations and training for groups, so we are more than happy to work with the city's homeless coalition to do something like that.

There are so many puzzle pieces to preparing for and preventing a disaster, especially when you work with so many organizations. How do you know where to start when you are trying to coordinate a response?

The first piece is you always have a plan. We

plan in advance for any event. We have tabletop discussions for different scenarios and practice for them.

When an event occurs, we activate our emergency response center. We have department directors and key players there. We have had times when we have been there for seven-to-ten days straight.

We get information from the field so the decision makers can provide the resources the field commanders need. The field commanders make the decisions about what they need, and we facilitate getting them the resources they need as quickly as we can. As things escalate, we can bring in subject experts and other decision makers, like the city manager and the mayor.

We are now working with the county, state and FEMA on getting vaccinations rolled out at locations around the city. We are coordinating that through a unified command. That is how we work an event.

Bill McKenzie is a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas and the STREET-Zine Editorial Advisory Board.

Jokes and Riddles

Teacher: "If you put your hand in your pocket and find five dollars, and put your hand in the other pocket and find three dollars, what would you have?"

Student: "Somebody else's pants."

Overheard at a party: "Boy, that guy's not very amusing, is he?"

"Nope, he couldn't even entertain a doubt."

"This is an ideal spot for a picnic!" one friend said to another.

"It must be. Fifty million ants can't be wrong," the friend replied.

A termite skittles into a bar and asks, "Is the bar tender here?"

A skeleton walks into a bar and says, "Give me a drink and a mop."

Q: What thing can you always count on?

A: Your fingers!

Q: Why don't cannibals eat comedians?

A: Because they taste funny.

Q: Why are the Medieval centuries called the "Dark Ages"?

A: Because they were Knight times.

Q: What goes up and down hills but never moves?

A: A road.

Q: What is it that dogs have but no other living creature has?

A: Puppies

Q: How many coders does it take to change a lightbulb?

A: None. That's a hardware problem.

Q: Why is the most discontented man the most easily satisfied?

A: Because *nothing* satisfies him.

Q: Who is the one person you always have to take your hat off to?

A: The barber.

Q: Where can you always find happiness?

A: In the dictionary.

Q: What occurs once in a minute, twice in a moment but never in a thousand years?

A: The letter M.

Q: Is there a word in the English language that contains all the vowels?

A: Unquestionably.

I'm wide at the mouth,
I have a bed,
I rise and fall,
I have a head.

What am I?

Answer: A river

I've many teeth, but I don't bite;
In fact, I keep you looking right.
What am I?

Answer: A comb

I have one perfect eye,
But still I cannot see,
Yet with that one good eye,
I'm useful as can be!

What am I?

Answer: A needle

Key to February's Eat Your Peas! Word Search



Continued from page 5

Although people can make appointments for a COVID-19 vaccine by telephone, call centers are frequently overwhelmed. **Hold times** can be extremely long. Access to the internet, having an internet-enabled device and understanding how to use both have been necessary to sign up for the vaccine. Many advocacy groups and public health experts have begun to see internet access as a fundamental **civil rights issue**.

During the fall of 2020, we looked at this issue in more depth with Black and Latino individuals who are **HIV positive and at risk for a cardiovascular event**. In **our research**, we found that 17 out of 30 patients had no internet, no computer or lacked knowledge of how to use the internet or a computer. They, like many people with health issues or from under-resourced racial and ethnic minority communities, are affected by numerous social determinants that amplify the negative health consequences they experience.

While online health services could be used to increase access and retention in care among vulnerable groups, not having access **widens existing disparities**.

Solutions exist, but they must be implemented

To address the internet gap, policymakers must identify lack of internet access as a barrier and protect against its effects. This could include reserving vaccines in under-resourced racial and ethnic minority communities for local residents and designating senior hours for those 65 and older.

Policymakers could also mandate timely reporting of demographic information, even within **medical settings**, to monitor equity. Public health administrators could also partner with organizations that work with vulnerable populations, such as Meals on Wheels, to deliver food and vaccines to individual homes.

Departments of public health also could work with organizations and trusted community leaders to

produce culturally consistent multimedia information on vaccinations and other health topics. They could also arrange for billboards, freeway signs and posters at local restaurants.

In addition, health care professionals and organizations can help by teaching patients about **government subsidies and internet programs for low-income individuals** from internet service providers. They can also provide training on **how to use the internet**, which would be at least a good beginning for these vulnerable groups.

Tamara Burns Loeb is adjunct associate professor at UCLA Center of Culture, Trauma and Mental Health Disparities at the University of California, Los Angeles. AJ Adkins-Jackson is a research fellow at Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Harvard University. Arleen F. Brown is professor of medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Courtesy of The Conversation/INSP.ngo

Stewpot Artists



Above left:
February Frost
Darrell Plunkett

Above right:
So Watery
Edwin Fuller

Left:
Starlyn
Sam Cooper

Around The Stewpot: Soup's On! 2021

By Nicole Kiser

For this month's Around The Stewpot, STREET-Zine spoke with Dominique Anthony, The Stewpot Alliance president, and Stephanie McKee, The Stewpot Alliance coordinator, about Soup's On! 2021.

Like many events over the past year, Soup's On! 2021 looked a little different than its previous iterations. Rather than gathering for a lunch prepared by some of Dallas' finest chefs, sponsors watched a virtual program prepared by The Stewpot Alliance.

However, Stewpot Alliance Coordinator Stephanie McKee noted that translating an in-person luncheon that has been going for over a decade into a virtual event was not easy. "People who show up to Soup's On! every year are a special group, and we miss seeing them and the energy they bring to the room," says McKee.

People who show up to Soup's On! every year are a special group, and we miss seeing them and the energy they bring to the room," says McKee.

Despite the difficulties, The Alliance worked to maintain as many "cornerstone elements" as possible. While the chefs organized by Chef Brian C. Luscher, culinary director of 33 Restaurant Group, could not prepare meals for those attending the event, they donated their time toward preparing meals at the Second Chance Cafe to be served to clients of The Stewpot. And though they could not be served with the typical soup dinner, Brad Oldham and Christy Coltrin of Brad Oldham Sculpture designed their annual commemorative spoon for the event, which was sent to sponsors.

The loss of contact brought on by the pandemic also made marketing the event a challenge for The Alliance. The Stewpot's strong support and vol-

Right: The Soup's On! 2021 commemorative spoon designed by Brad Oldham and Christy Coltrin of Brad Oldham Sculpture. The design incorporates the beet to honor event speaker Chef José Andrés, author of "Vegetables Unleashed" and founder of World Central Kitchen, a nonprofit devoted to providing meals in the wake of natural disasters.

unteer network had made word-of-mouth a reliable form of spreading news in the past, but the social distancing resulting from the pandemic made communication and event planning difficult.

However, the shift to a virtual event presented a host of new opportunities. The week before Soup's On! 2021 was set to premiere, a winter storm plunged Texas into subfreezing temperatures, making roads dangerous for travel and overloading the power grid. The Stewpot worked overtime to house and feed clients to ensure they made it through the storm.

The virtual platform allowed The Alliance to easily push the event date back, allowing The Stewpot time to focus on clients and giving Texans time to recover from the storm. The Stewpot's support of the community during the winter storm earned national news coverage, and, with a virtual platform, people from around the country could donate to and attend Soup's On! 2021, says The Stewpot Alliance President, Dominique Anthony.

Soup's On! has been known for its illustrious guests over the years. Last year, Judge Craig Mitchell, a Los Angeles Superior Court judge and the founder of the Skid Row Running Club featured in the documentary Skid Row Marathon, was a guest speaker, and Robert Wilonsky, the communications director for Heritage Auctions and an op-ed columnist for *The Dallas Morning News*, emceed.

This year, going virtual allowed The Alliance to use pre-recorded segments during the event,

which made coordinating with guests easier. This year, Soup's On! Emmy-Award-winning news anchor, host and reporter Jenny Anchondo took over as the emcee, allowing Robert Wilonsky to interview chef, restaurateur and founder of World Central Kitchen José Andrés, who was in Austin at the time of his appearance.

The use of pre-recorded segments also allowed for a behind-the-scenes look at some of the services at The Stewpot. Segments about Michael Haynes and Rob Guild's work in food services and Gloria's path from a participant in The Stewpot's Children and Youth programs to a Stewpot employee showed "a ground level view of what your dollars are doing as a donor," says McKee.

The Stewpot raised over \$25,000 in donations on the day of the Soup's On! 2021 luncheon, receiving a matching \$25,000 donation from the Ben E. Keith Foundation. The art show has also sold 23 paintings, donating over \$4,000 directly to Stewpot artists. The final figures for the total amount raised by Soup's On! 2021 will be announced at a later date by The Stewpot Alliance.

As the final figures roll in for the entire event, it is certain that the pandemic and winter storm did not stand in the way of a successful Soup's On! 2021.

Nicole Kiser is managing editor of STREETZine.



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