

THE Amplifier

A Voice for Social Change

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Over the next several issues, The Amplifier will be running a series of articles on Knoxville Area Rescue Ministries (KARM). This paper exists to provide a platform for Knoxville's homeless community. The stories and information are based on personal accounts from the homeless community – drawing upon their perspectives and experiences. The Amplifier is a place where those experiencing homelessness can fight back against the systems and powers that perpetually oppress them. It is not our intent to bring slander upon KARM, but rather to present the unheard side of the story. The Amplifier's goal is to give voice to Knoxville's homeless, never to take away.

- Eddie Young, Publisher

GRAB WHAT YOU NEED

by Ryan-Ashley Anderson,
Managing Editor

The person being interviewed requested anonymity for fear of further retribution.

Last week, just like every other morning, I walked toward my car and started to wave at my neighbor, John, but just before I was about to let the wave go, my eyes focused on four men standing below his stoop. One of them was yelling.

I couldn't hear what the words were, but I could hear angry shouts as he threw an arm in my friend's direction. He used his body in the way I've only seen parents and teachers and other authority figures use their bodies to intimidate and threaten and punish, and seeing that worried me.

I hollered from across the street – "You ok?"

No answer. John's back was turned and I could see him moving through his space in a way I hadn't seen before – uneasy, harried, hunched.

I crossed the street and walked into his yard, past the men, who I was careful not to acknowledge. There was a truck there – a city truck – and it looked like the kind of truck that

picked things up and took them away before anybody even noticed they were gone.

"Hey, you ok?" I asked.

He responded so quietly, I couldn't hear him.

"What's going on? What's happening?" I asked.

"They're tearing my house down."

And just then, one of the men said, "We told him. We told him twice he was going to have to go. Now we're hear and we have to clean this up."

Clean this up.

It still wasn't registering. Nothing was dirty. Nothing was broken. Nothing bad or frightening or disruptive was happening here.

Again, the man – "We told him we'd give him time to grab what he needed."

I began to understand. I watched John fill a shopping cart, then I turned back to the man and said, "I'm pretty sure he can't fit what he needs in that cart, but anyway, I'm not here to talk to you, I'm here to talk to him," and the man backed away.

John has been my neighbor for the entirety of my time in Knoxville, which is just a year, but it means something.



Clean-up trucks from the city arrive to tear down John's home.

Photo by The AMP

We wave to each other every day, borrow from and offer things to each other as opportunities arise, and offer each other the security of knowing that we're each watching out.

It hit me. He wasn't going to be my neighbor anymore. We weren't going to greet each other at the beginning or end of the day any longer and it's not because he decided to move. He was being cleaned up.

I watched him add to the shopping

cart and a knot of helplessness formed in my stomach. I didn't know if there was anything I could do, so I just began taking pictures. Documentation was the only thing I had control of. I took pictures of him, of the truck, and of the area, so that when I contacted the mayor's office about it, I had visual reference.

As I gathered data, a man who I didn't even know was in the truck came out and started yelling at me,

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We Begin Our Eighth Year in Print

by Eddie Young,
Publisher

The challenges that street papers face don't change much from year to year. Many, like us, publish with the work of an all volunteer staff – deadlines come second to family, work and school schedules. Many, like us, struggle to consistently operate in the black. And many, like us, through all the difficult days and years, stay committed to sustaining a paper that provides a venue through which the oppressed in our city can speak.

The Amplifier launched in November of 2010 during Knoxville's mayoral

and city council election year. That year, the Knoxville Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness had been "shelved" and a new plan was being anticipated. Compassion Knoxville, an effort to gather input from the broader community, would play a significant role in shaping a new plan. The Amplifier would be one of a three part initiative to engage those experiencing homelessness with the process. Members from the homeless community held mayoral and city council

candidate forums to address issues on homelessness, and we conducted voter registration drives within the homeless community to inform them on where the candidates stood in regards to issues that directly affected their lives and to involve them in the process of electing those they believed had their best interests in mind. The Amplifier served to "amplify" the voices and concerns of those whose lives would be impacted by the decisions made from those elected.

Today, eight years later, we are still providing the homeless community with the only venue through which they can speak to the forces that effect their lives. Everything is not as it appears, and the narratives need correcting or completely dismissed by those who know and live the truth. Although we often speak on their behalf, or use false names because of their fear of retribution from these forces... *this is their voice.*—AMP

PULLING BACK THE CURTAIN

by Eddie Young, publisher

The person being interviewed requested anonymity for fear of further retribution from KARM.

Eddie: Okay, so I'm just gonna ask you some questions... how many nights ago was it?

Jared: Three

Eddie: Three days ago, you had been staying at KARM, right?

Jared: Yes, a little over a month.

Eddie: Okay, so you'd stayed at KARM a little over a month, and one day you just decided to take a picture of your meal.

Jared: Yes, in fact it was Wednesday afternoon.

Eddie: So tell me exactly what happened.

Jared: I went to lunch Wednesday afternoon and took a picture of my lunch tray, and...

Eddie: What was on your lunch tray?

Jared: Two biscuits, a little bit of gravy

and a cup of Kool-Aide...

Eddie: So that was your...

Jared: That was our lunch for the day.

Eddie: So you took a picture of your lunch tray and...

Jared: one staff member seen me take a picture of the tray and asked me why I took a picture and I told him that I always take a picture of my trays, and he said, "Well, you're not allowed to take any kind of pictures inside our building, of, you know, stuff that we do. So we're not allowed to take a picture of the trays, we're not allowed to pictures of anything that happens inside the building. And he asked me to remove it off of my phone, and I said "It's on my phone, and whatever's on my phone, I should be allowed to keep." And he told me that I was being barred off the property and I had to talk to pastor Michael to get back in, I talked to pastor Michael and...

Eddie: Let's back up for just a second, so were you aware of this rule beforehand?

Jared: No.

Eddie: So there's no signs posted or anything like that, that say no photographs or no filming, no etc.. so you had no idea that this was a rule?

Jared: No.

Eddie: Okay, so they came up to your table, they don't give you like a warning or anything, they didn't give you a chance or anything, like, "You can't do that in the future." They just said...

Jared: They made me leave.

Eddie: That's it.

Jared: I didn't even get to eat my lunch.

Eddie: So what did they do then? You left, did you go see pastor Michael then?

Jared: I went back the next day and I talked to pastor Michael and pastor Michael said he was going to talk to pastor David and find out what was goin on, and that night I was criminal trespassed off the property.



Jared discusses his negative experiences at the KARM shelter.

Photo by The AMP

Eddie: And that means what:

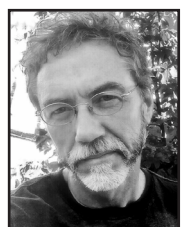
Jared: It means that if I go back on their property, I go to jail. The only place I'm allowed to be near KARM is over across the street on the sidewalk.

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KNOXVILLE HOMELESS COLLECTIVE

THE Amplifier
A voice for social change

by Eddie Young, *Publisher*



Wednesday night, Nov. 15.

The Knoxville Homeless Collective has been holding weekly meetings at the Lost Sheep Ministry's Under the Bridge Outreach Service for nearly two years. The event takes place every Wednesday night under the I-40 overpass between Cooper Street and Second Creek. Anywhere from 150-250 people sit at rows and rows of metal folding tables where they are served a meal, or stand in lines for clothing and blankets, or are directed to trailers where periodic medical and dental assistance is offered, all to the backdrop of a Christian church service. There is a "prayer table" and most nights an altar call stirring to repentance those for whom I presume are the "lost sheep" and needing to be found, a reference to one of Jesus' parables. In this parable, the lost sheep is a sinner in need of repentance and bringing back into the fold. It's difficult to stomach the arrogance of this organization's sentiment of the poor it serves – transparently evident in their very name. But it is unapologetically thick with this Christian message and intentions directed towards these ones who are predominately from the homeless

community.

Because it's a scheduled event that the Collective members regularly attend, it's been convenient for them to meet on these nights and with the large number of people from the homeless community who also attend, it's been one of our best recruitment opportunities. Every table is involved in some conversation, ours just happens to be our work at hand. We've never been a distraction nor have we undermined the event or the organization that runs it, regardless of our opinions of it, but on this night our table conversation was interrupted by the very unnerved and angry operations manager. Looking at me and my coworkers, "Ya'll need to come with me right now! Right now! I need to talk to you behind the trailer.. right now!" We left the meeting and followed. After being interrogated about our political intentions, and having one of my colleagues threatened with the cops removing her, we agreed to respect their organization's space and leave.

My appeals to their Christian bible fell on deaf ears. The prophet sums up all of what is required of humans in Micah 6.8, and that is "to do justice and love kindness (or mercy)." It's no surprise that the Christian communities

have excelled in loving mercy, even if not for the purest of reasons, but have failed miserably when it comes to doing justice. The pursuit of justice costs far more than blankets and food, it requires us to call out and change the systems that create and perpetuate the need to hand out blankets and food. I explained to the operations manager that our works of justice should be seen by them as complementing their works of mercy in completing this holy directive. I argued in vain that justice is achieved in the political realm as the terror in his countenance only confirmed my wasted breath. It's easy to conclude that organizations like this fear the threat of making redundant the mercy industry, but what's probably closer to the truth is their fear of the threat to political machines that they support and reinforce their posture – that the poor are sinners and they have no one to blame but themselves for their being marginalized outside "the flock."

The Knoxville Homeless Collective will continue it's work, and our objective is to ultimately put organizations like Lost Sheep Ministry out of business. But shouldn't that be their objective as well? Shouldn't we all be working towards just communities that no longer require people to depend upon the mercy of others to survive? –AMP

Visit us at:

www.etnpeaceandjustice.org

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Our Mission

The Amplifier exists to give voice and economic opportunity to those living outside the mainstream of our community and to address the social issues that affect them.

Our Representatives buy their papers from us at four papers per dollar and offer them to the public for a suggested donation of one dollar per paper. All of your donations go directly to our Representatives. The money we collect from them goes directly towards our printing costs.

The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of *The Amplifier's* staff, volunteers, sponsors and advertisers.

I FOUND MY HOME IN KNOXVILLE

by Ryan-Ashley Anderson, *Managing Editor*



Hey there, my name is Ryan-Ashley Anderson and I've been living in Knoxville for about a year now. I spent 30 years wondering if I would ever know what it feels like to really feel like home, and then I moved to Knoxville and let out a heavy, heavy breath. I'd found it.

I'd found my home.

And that's why I decided to get involved in the discussion about people experiencing homelessness here in Knoxville, because I believe that no

matter who you choose to live or where you end up or how life goes in and out of your favor, every person deserves to safely move through this world.

When I realized that's often not possible here – moving safely through this world as a person without traditional housing – I knew I had to do more than talk.

I joined up to work on *Amplifier* because although I don't tend to be a marcher, I have the ability to shed light on the issues of our city through writing. We all have something to give, and writing is what I have right now.

We all have a voice, and I couldn't be more proud to use mine to help il-

luminare and support as much as the community as possible – business owners, neighbors living in and out of traditional housing, the unemployed, the employed, the young, the old, and the have's and the have-not's – because I want to live in a city that helps raise up its citizens in their times of need so they can go on to lead fulfilling, meaningful lives, full of hope and opportunity rather than fear and dread.

We wrote a Declaration of Independence stating that every person has the inalienable rights to, "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," so let's rep that in Knoxville.

If not here, where? –AMP

THE SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

by Cara Jenkins, *AMP Contributor*

Have you ever watched a social experiment? How about one featuring a homeless man?

You know the ones I'm talking about. The ones where poverty-stricken men and women are used for entertainment and self-pleasure. Often, they are given a large amount of cash and are subsequently recorded to see what they will do with the generous donation. Videographers are using homeless men and women as tools for self-promotion. This is completely unfair and stereotypes a group of people. I mean, if someone handed you \$100 would you want to be followed around and secretly videotaped? Would you want others in your shoes to be judged based on your actions?

Now, I understand that it makes those of us who have handed a homeless man or woman cash feel better. I get it. You prayed that the money that left your hands would go to more than alcohol or drugs, and after watching these videos, it looks like it could have.

But here's the deal:

Once you give somebody a gift, you lose ownership of it.

We were all taught that sometime between kindergarten and middle school. If you give something away, you don't get to control it anymore. That fact

doesn't change just because someone is homeless. Human dignity is a right, not a privilege. They have dignity. They don't need to be spied on or have their privacy invaded for others to feel like they are worth the change thrown in their direction.

They are homeless for various reasons. They are homeless for various reasons, and none of those reasons negate their humanness. If you stop to listen to their stories, you may even find something in common. Whatever it is that caused them to be in a state of poverty, it's not anything that we can judge them by. No matter their previous circumstance, they are now dealing with a state of life and a hopelessness that most of us can't imagine. Your generous actions should be left at that--as generous and loving. So, if you hand somebody a dollar and they turn around and buy alcohol or anything else they want in order to cope, you don't get a say in that.

If you are worried about what somebody will buy, ask people what they need and then buy it. In fact, most would rather have a conversation and be treated with respect and dignity than be tossed a dollar. So next time you want to be generous, offer to buy lunch and casually talk. Ask about their lives and really invest in who they are. That's what human beings deserve. –AMP



The Valley

by Juniper Stinnett,
Vice President, Knoxville Trans
Empowerment Project

*Ye salt of the soil,
All clamour and cruising
Gone, lost in the valley
of living and losing,
So fairness is false, oh
but here we find grace
In the face in the cloud,
In the warmth of this place
and the taste of the bloody,
Can all be forgiven?
Unknown in the valley
of losing and living.*

“MOVING ALONG” AND “CLEANING UP”

by Tyler Wall, *AMP Contributor*

A fact of life for people who are homeless in the United States is that their very existence is criminalized. This is certainly true of Knoxville’s homeless community, which on any given night consists of 800-1200 people. To be homeless is to exist at the whim and mercy of the police. Those without stable and affordable housing are constantly subjected to all sorts of police commands, from “you can’t

utter margins of American life, there is no place to hide from the incessant harassment of police and the forces of legal coercion.

In Knoxville, the compulsory displacement of the homeless can be seen in a variety of ways, such as the policing of the Market Square district or the prohibition of panhandling at busy intersections. One anonymous individual told The Amplifier that recently they tried to walk into the Market Square

arrest anyone this time. Reed openly admitted that he suspected those who moved out onto the street so that the bulldozers and cleaning crews could “clean the place up” would soon re-occupy the camps. However, he did say that one day he might “be told” to make arrests, to evict people for an indefinite amount of time, and if he receives those orders he will have to follow them. Several homeless people expressed to us that they were unsure

“taking out the trash” or “sweeping the streets.” Often forgotten about today is that one of the chief tasks of the earliest police, in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe, was actually the cleaning up of actual trash and debris, even using brooms to sweep the dirt off of public walkways. Dirt and trash were seen as a threat to the emerging capitalist order, just as the poor and working class were seen as signs of disorder, largely because of their



In Knoxville, the homeless population is subject to arrest if they don't gather their belongings and migrate during the city's "clean-up" procedures.

Photo by Tyler Wall

sleep here” or “you can’t sit here” or “you can’t be asking people for some change or a hot sandwich.” To be homeless is to live in a state of forced mobility, characterized by the familiar police command “move along.”

In fact, it is the police who are often on the frontlines of policing homeless people, and creating the very condition of homelessness through the practice of forced eviction. It might seem strange to suggest the homeless can even be evicted. To evict usually means to kick someone out of their home so the property can be re-possessed by the landlord, government, or bank. This would not only be a shortsighted approach to eviction and homelessness, but it also paints an inaccurate and even harmful picture of those who currently are or have been homeless. Why? It implies that those who are homeless have no right, no legitimate claim to occupy the places they must occupy and inhabit. That is, it is harmful because it repeats the very logic “the authorities” evoke to justify policies and tactics of forcefully removing the already economically marginalized and dispossessed.

In its most stripped down meaning, eviction is simply a practice of displacement, a tactic that forcefully removes a person or group of people from a desired place to a space not of their own choosing. Many members of the Knoxville homeless community speak of forced mobility as a common, routine, and degrading experience. This is fact of urban living in a city that has little affordable housing and a local government that has outsourced most of its social services to private religious organizations like KARM (Knoxville Area Rescue Ministries). This is all to say that any discussion of homelessness is fundamentally a spatial question: Where are the homeless supposed to be? Where are the homeless supposed to go? As geographer Don Mitchell put it in his study of anti-homeless laws: “we are creating a world in which a whole class of people cannot be – simply because they have no place to be.” For those on the

area, but a cop turned him around before he could enter, sternly warning, “no, you can’t come in here”, forcing them to leave the district. Indeed, to be a homeless person walking through any public space, especially places like Market Square, is to take a great risk of being stopped, questioned, moved

if the police were going to evict them indefinitely, let them back in that space to camp again, or arrest them. The anxiety was clear and palpable, and a stark testament to the ways that uncertainty, fear, and ambiguity structure concerns about their immediate future.

disheveled outward appearance. Today across the United States the same racialized power dynamic is at play in the policing of the homeless, including here in Knoxville.

In August of this year when Officer Jason Cunningham referred to Knoxville’s homeless community as “animals”, captured on dash cam, we shouldn’t forget that his stated evidence for this was the visible, literal trash and debris scattered under the bypass. It becomes clear that to “the authorities”, including the police, the litter of Snickers wrappers, or even empty beer cans or potato chip bags or tattered blankets, is nothing but evidence that the homeless are the embodiment of disorder, mere “filth” that requires short-term polishing and eventual removal. It makes sense to think of these apparently bi-weekly “clean ups”, and really the policing of the homeless in general, as a type of what sociologists have called “status degradation ceremonies”, meaning rituals that expel, that is, to cast out or banish someone from a community by assigning them a lower status than those who are in charge of administering the ceremony or ritual. It is clear that to the defenders of the current status quo in Knoxville, the homeless are not really considered part of the “community” – they merely exist as outside the community as either nuisance “animals” or pieces of litter. At best, they are treated as if what they need the most is charity and pity, when what they really need first and foremost is housing.

We often hear about the police “protecting and serving”, but we have to ask the simple and admittedly predictable, but nevertheless critical questions: Who do they really protect and serve when they move along the homeless? Whose interests are really being served by compulsory displacement? The answer is clear: they are protecting the interests of business owners, elites, middle and upper-class tourists, and many college students. The police serve the high priests of urban administration such as many local politicians, urban planners, and shop owners who insist that the homeless in “public view” sends the “wrong message”, which is just code for “bad for business.”—AMP

“To be homeless is to live in a state of forced mobility.”

along, and even arrested or subjected to police force or violence, to say nothing of being denied service by private businesses, who always have police on speed dial.

The displacement of the homeless is probably most clearly seen in the “clean-up” of those who live and sleep in a camp or other less permanent spaces. As local newspapers, including The Amplifier, have reported for some time, police reliance on “cleaning up” the camps, which sometimes involves eviction or arrests, is not a new thing but a historical feature of Knoxville’s public policy. A few homeless camp residents told The Amplifier that police sometimes give written eviction notices and other times they don’t give any written warning or notice so they have little time to collect and move their sparse belongings. Sometimes, as one individual told us recently, the cops actually confiscate their belongings.

On Friday, October 13, The Amplifier observed the “clean-up” in the mission district under the bypass on Broadway, talking with an Officer Reed who was overseeing the project. Officer Reed informed us that about every two weeks he and city workers go from camp to camp in order to “clean it up”, and he said he had about 6 more camps to address on the same day. To do this, he oversees a cleaning crew that uses heavy machinery, such as bulldozers, large metal trash bins, city trucks, and workers in hard hats. He stressed that he wasn’t planning or wanting to

In this particular case, the ostensible justification was to clean up the debris and trash and not to evict. The point was basically to clean up the literal trash that is visible to passersby. We here at The Amplifier can certainly appreciate legitimate concerns over hygiene and sanitation, but it is also clear that the “clean-up” is really not for the health of the homeless community. Rather, the “clean-up” is nothing if not a precursor to something much more perverse: the future forced displacement of the homeless community so that they will no longer be as visible to all of the “upstanding” obedient workers, consumers, real estate developers and urban planners. This is also why the city’s new plan for a “homeless courtyard” needs to be understood as but the newest stage in the long history of displacing the poor and dispossessed in Knoxville. Not only are the homeless imagined and treated as if they are always “out of place”, the powers that be also want them “out of sight.”

Let’s be very clear: the “trash” being “cleaned up” is more a violation of largely white middle class sensibilities that equates cleanliness with godliness, hygiene with purity, sanitation with potential profits. Of course, it has been well-documented by those who research the history and politics of policing that cops frequently refer to the marginalized and dispossessed as “trash”, “dirtbags”, “scum”, “filth”, even referring to police arrests as

“WHAT DO YOU NEED?”

by Monique Freemon,
AMP Contributor and Layout Designer

Being homeless is not a crime. It is a situation that can happen to anyone at any moment in their lifetime.

In the last issue of The Amplifier, we featured data, interviews, undercover stories, and firsthand accounts about Knox Area Rescue Ministries (KARM) treatment of the city’s homeless. The Amplifier explored how this monopoly has created more harm than good for the homeless population. Additionally, there are, issues with the Knoxville Police Department’s treatment of the homeless population. How does Knoxville counteract these situations? How can Knoxville build a dialogue with the homeless to improve the conditions?

Originally, the intent of this article was to contact the police departments of major metropolitan cities like Chicago, Ill., Hartford, Conn., and Providence, R.I. — cities who’s states have passed homeless bills of rights and ask how these laws have affected their work. Unfortunately, Providence never responded and Chicago could not comment except for citing the 775 ILCS 45 Bill of Rights for the Homeless Act General Assembly. Officer Jim Barrett, of the Hartford Police Department gladly gave an interview about how he and his fellow officers are creating, building, and sustaining a relationship with the homeless community.

“A lot of it, I do it on my own. I kind of spearheaded this [building a relationship with the homeless]” Barrett said. Currently we have fourteen hundred homeless people in the capital city of Hartford. I take care of twelve hundred, I monitor five hundred of them. That’s not including my police duties. I do this on the side.” On a weekly and bi-weekly basis, Barrett checks-in with an estimated 800 people just to make they are doing well.

“Everybody has a different story.” This is in reference to reasons why individuals become homeless. In Issue 46, The Amplifier featured a pie chart on the back page that reported the top causes of homelessness in Knoxville, Tenn. According to the Knoxhmis.org, the top nine were: null, mental/health

reasons, no affordable housing, loss of job, eviction domestic violence, underemployment, criminal activity, and other. The causes listed deal reflects socioeconomic issues (i.e., income, job loss, affordability, etc.) and less on the person themselves. As reported in the last issue, the Knox Area Rescue Ministries has rules and programs that are more hurtful than helpful for the homeless population.

Barrett describe multiple incidents and situations of people who went from having powerful careers as “head hunters,” six-figure salaries and families, to losing everything in a short amount of time. Barrett’s goal is to find long-term solutions for those who are experiencing homelessness on a daily basis. He even transformed his office door into a revolving door for individuals to come for help. In an article on Fox61.com, Barrett said, “It’s like a safe haven for them in city hall, whatever your needs are I’ll address them and if I don’t have the resources, I’ll make certain phone contacts to obtain them,” he said. “A lot of these guys lost hope of believing in themselves and once you start seeing them spark a light or some energy, they’re like, I can do this, I can get out of my situation and be successful in life.”

BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP

According to Barrett, in Hartford, there are limited resources for those who have committed a no crime, but there are more resources for sexual predators and felons. He talked about one of the individuals who was in jail for a DUI and did not have an adequate lawyer to defend the charge. Thus, the individual went to jail as a result. After time served, he lost his job, apartments, and his money. Barrett helped the man get on his feet and he got a job. However, he needed Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standard steel toe boots, which cost money. Barrett reached out to the Footwear with Care program and they provided the boots. The homeless man told Barrett he was going to break into several homes and cars to get money for the boots. How-



To build a relationship with Knoxville’s homeless population, the police department should view how places around the country interact with their homeless populations.

Photo by The AMP

ever, Barrett noted because of their “strong relationship” the individual felt comfortable telling him the original intention to acquire the funds. Instead of Barrett arresting or punishing him, he helped him. Barrett is breaking the cycle by doing follow-ups, working with community partners, taking his own personal time to better the community.

“They don’t look at the uniform anymore. They look at you as you. They don’t look at the

uniform as a police figure. They look at you as someone who believes in them. Give them some

sort of hope,” he said. Due to police brutality and shootings, especially of African Americans, in America, there is a stigma attached to seeing someone in a police uniform.

Barrett said “Hearing a voice from a police officer, making contact, talking about their [homeless person’s] personal life and actually genuinely concerning and caring... it blows their mind.” He will ask about how their family, how a relationship with a significant other is doing, do they need help with their apartment and so on, whether two weeks or three months has passed. If strong, solid relationships are built, then this will break down stereotypes associated with the homeless and law enforcement. Bar-

rett will ask “what do you need” or how can he help better the situation. One individual needed an air conditioner, so Barrett arranged for one to be donated.

The efforts spread and it has helped build better relations between the police and homeless community. There are officers in his department who go buy coats, hand warmers, and socks for the night. According to Barrett, modern policing has changed compared to old school policing, it was always “arrest them,” “lock them up,” “get them off the street.” He theorized is instead of locking them up, get to the source of the problem, “These guys are career criminals because it is for survival.” For example, the individual he helped with the OSHA boots was going to break in cars and home to get shoes for his job. However, if he was arrested, he would end up back in jail. So, the goal is to find the core problem, breakdown barriers and discover a solution which helps the homeless and taxpayers. This solution could potentially spread throughout the country and house millions of unsheltered citizens.

“It is just not me. I’m not the only one who is doing this. Behind the scenes, there is a lot of volunteers get me the materials and supplies,” said

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KARM LAUNCHPOINT PROGRAM PROBLEMS

by Krystal Gourley AMP Contributor

I attempted to obtain firsthand information about the policies and practices of the LaunchPoint program established under Knoxville Area Rescue Ministries (KARM). I made several attempts to contact Sue Renfro (Director of Marketing and Communications at KARM) asking, if not pleading to gain KARM’s insight. However, Ms. Renfro has failed to adhere to my request. Therefore this interview comes from Cathy (alias), who is a former participant in the Launch Point program. Under the bridge on Central Ave on a warm Wednesday, I met with Cathy to gain insight on her past experiences with KARM’s LaunchPoint program.

a few that made it hell on earth for people in the program, and they were the higher up staff. They would talk at you and made you feel uncomfortable for asking them for anything like extra blankets, or figuring out how much money they would give me this week-

Krystal: Wait a minute . . . money? They give you money?

Cathy: Well . . . yes and no. If you receive SSI or SSDI they automatically take over access to your account, and ration out so much a week.

Krystal: What is their reasoning behind that?

Cathy: They say it’s a part of a safe money managing program to help us keep track of our money.

Krystal: Well how does it help you keep track of your money, if they

guidelines thoroughly with you?

Cathy: No, they just kinda expected you to go over this information on your own, it’s really all just a set of rules added on top of the rules that KARM has as an emergency shelter, so just more rules to follow.

Krystal: Did you agree with the information that was given to you when you first came into the LaunchPoint program?

Cathy: No, not really, but I knew that I couldn’t really complain or else I would be homeless.

Krystal: So were you asked to leave?

Cathy: No, I just left because I knew there was no way for me to receive any additional help because I’m over 50, and nobody is going to hire me, plus I receive SSI, so I can’t work.

Krystal: So what happens once you graduate from the program? Do they not find way to provide permanent housing? And what if you are having a hard time once you leave the program?

Cathy: At that point, it really depends on who you get to help you, even still they can’t really offer you anything other than the emergency shelter that KARM has because you can’t re-enter the program.

Krystal: I know that things are wrapping up but would you care to explain, that you can’t re-enter the program?

Cathy: Yes, if you leave involuntarily, or voluntarily, or even if you graduate you cannot return to the program.

So if you are having a hard time trying to make it after you graduate the program the best they will offer you is just space in the emergency shelter for a little while. Sometimes they may refer you to certain services, but they are not really within walking distance and sometimes when you get there the person that they referred you to sometimes won’t even be in the office, on vacation or either they have left for the day. Sometimes you may luck out and find a few people there who may or may not help you . . . but either way they don’t really want to be bothered with you.—AMP

“I knew that I couldn’t really complain or else I would be homeless.”

Krystal: So, I understand that you had participated in the LaunchPoint program.

Cathy: Yes, it wasn’t what I thought it was.

Krystal: Care to explain?

Cathy: Yea, I could deal with the staff for the most part, but it was definitely

won’t even let you know how much they will give you each week?

Cathy: Exactly, that is the same thing I said to the staff, but they just told me that it was for the best for compliance through the program and that it is a part of the guidelines in which I signed, to help with compliance.

Krystal: Did they go over these

Krystal: So you left because you sensed that it was more so a waste of time?

Cathy: Well yea because the only place I would be able to stay is with on somebody’s couch, because they didn’t say that they would be able to find us permanent housing.

cont. Grab What You Need

“Don’t take my picture! Don’t take my picture!” and even after assuring him that I didn’t, he continued to yell. So I offered him evidence. I offered to show him the photo to prove he wasn’t in it, at which point he yelled even louder that I was, “copping an attitude,” a thing I haven’t been accused of since I was in middle school, by my parents.

It’s certainly not the way I expect to be spoken to by a city employee in response to a perfectly legal action. The moment people begin getting punished for asking questions, is the moment to start getting scared, and I was.

For as long as John has been living behind the Greyhound, I’ve never felt more unsafe than in that moment, as I was being yelled at by this city employee, and I left feeling completely defeated, because I knew that when I returned at the end of the day, the landscape across from my window would be scraped up and pulled away.

I called the mayor’s office; I called friends; I tweeted at news stations; I cried into an Instagram live video. I did everything I could because nothing could be done, and I knew it. But things were done. I ended up hearing from the mayor’s office and had a calm, engaging conversation with somebody from their office, but as friendly as it was, it was also incredibly alarming.

Excuses were made for the city worker who supposedly, “... wasn’t trying to be rude,” to which I responded, “This isn’t up for debate. He absolutely was trying to be rude. Rude doesn’t even cover it. He was trying to intimi-

date me.”

I assured him that my intention and hope would never be for somebody to lose their job and find themselves in the position to struggle to support themselves and their family, but I wasn’t going to lie about what happened. I had no reason to point my finger at one out of five men.

“Cleaning up,” is a phrase the man on the phone used more than a couple times and I couldn’t help but laugh.

“If you’re concerned about cleaning up, just wait until that yard fills with

themselves in unsafe and insecure circumstances that, for whatever reason, are impossible to escape, learn to love those circumstances. Not really love them, but it’s basic survival. How do you go on if you don’t wake up in the morning and say, “This is my choice.”

Acknowledging it’s not, after oftentimes years of trying to escape it, is just too heavy.

The conversation ended with an acknowledgement by the mayor’s office that yes, at least having a social worker present during these “displacements”

and require so many hoops to be jumped through throughout the day to earn a spot for the night, that even having to miss just one “chore” because of a meeting with your lawyer or visitation with your children leads to your being banned. These are all substantiated by members of the homeless community.

No, Karm isn’t an option for most. So where’s the choice? Stay on the street and be vulnerable but free or go inside and be vulnerable but impris-

Clean this up.

trash and broken bottles and people are afraid to walk to their cars because it’s dangerous. You’ll be getting far more calls about that than about John. He’s the one who kept this block clean and safe.”

Nobody should have to earn the right to stay in a place by cleaning it, but it certainly didn’t hurt his case that he acted as an active member of our neighborhood, showing pride in his space and community.

A mention was also made of how a lot of people experiencing homelessness choose to stay on the street, and despite the city’s best efforts, people just won’t accept the help that’s being offered.

The sentiment was, essentially, that since they chose to continue living in non-traditional homes, those homes weren’t theirs to protect and they didn’t deserve protection themselves.

I reminded him that Psych 101 teaches us how anybody who finds

was a good idea. My argument was, overwhelmingly, that although these don’t look like homes to you, they are, and it destroys a community to watch each other’s homes getting destroyed.

I don’t know what I’d do if I came home to find a shopping cart and an eviction notice and there was no one there to help me transition into some other kind of housing. Where would I go? I guess I would just walk. And then maybe walk some more. And hope to find an awning to hide under or dark corner to slip behind.

Because I couldn’t go to Karm. Not when they encourage participation in their Launchpoint program, which exists in part to help their members to find work, but ironically, leads to folks having to quit their jobs in order to participate in their “programs.” KARM penalizes, bans and discriminates against; provides dirty and unhealthy sleeping arrangements; offers meals so tiny they would hardly feed a child;

oned?

A shelter with 21 stores can afford to provide clean blankets, full meals, and to employ a staff. It doesn’t need its visitors to work for free, especially when it means for so many of them, losing a stable source of meaningful income.

A community is destroyed when displacement and destruction becomes commonplace. Watching our neighbors be hassled and harmed, desensitizes us to the human condition. Seeing a person be taken from who has nothing to take, by people who have it all, makes us animals.

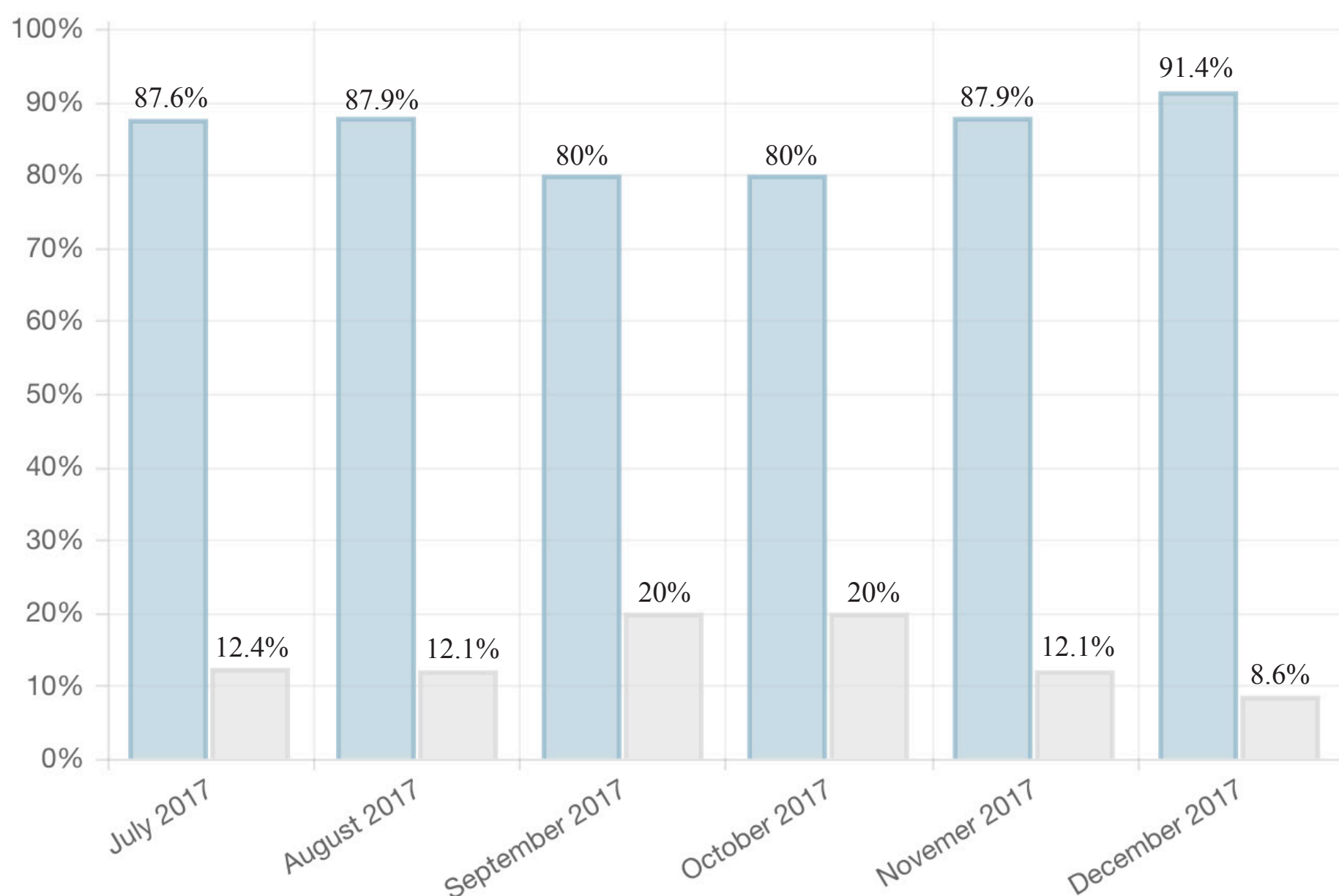
This isn’t the wild. This isn’t about competition or survival of the fittest. This is a city. And it’s filled with all kinds of people who deserve to live safely among each other. I’d like to see the people who have, take care of those who don’t. Because empathy is what makes us human.

At least... let’s try not to bulldoze them. That would be a small start. — AMP

Bed Utilization by Program Type

Utilization
Available Capacity

Emergency Shelter (Total Bed Capacity: 371)



Benchmark: Maintain capacity to demonstrate the need for service; 65% or greater occupancy by project type (i.e. ES, TH, PSH)

Bar graph from Knoxville Community Dashboard on Homelessness: Quarter 4 2017 (Oct. 1, 2017 - Dec. 31, 2017).

From July to December 2017, the numbers for emergency shelter housing are similar. On the Knoxville Community Dashboard on Homelessness, there are statistics for permanent housing and transitional housing.

cont. What Do You Need?

Barrett. “We have a lot of citizens stepping up to the plate.”

Barrett suggested instead of focusing on the big organizations, let’s take care of our own community in the region. This idea is similar to a grassroots movement, which is the potential end result of what Barrett is creating. Also, he said to make police officers more approachable, so have police officers “walking the beat,” talking to people, shaking hands, “engaging in the community.” One of the organizations Barrett works with is WEWOOL, an organization that creates products, but also donates high quality wool socks to the homeless. One night, during the winter months, the group came

out with Barrett to donate socks to the homeless.

RESHAPING MODERN-DAY POLICING

In the WEWOOL video, Matt Siracusa, owner and CEO of WEWOOL, walked around Hartford

with Barrett. He said the homeless do not go to shelters because they do not want to feel like a burden or ask for things. Many of the homeless population are veterans or they do have jobs, but they cannot afford housing. In the WEWOOL video, Barrett mentioned one of the homeless people he knows works at a high-end restaurant, but the people he serves do not know he is homeless. Then after work, according to Barrett, they walk 15 miles underneath the bridge to sleep. Barrett said, the state of Connecticut does

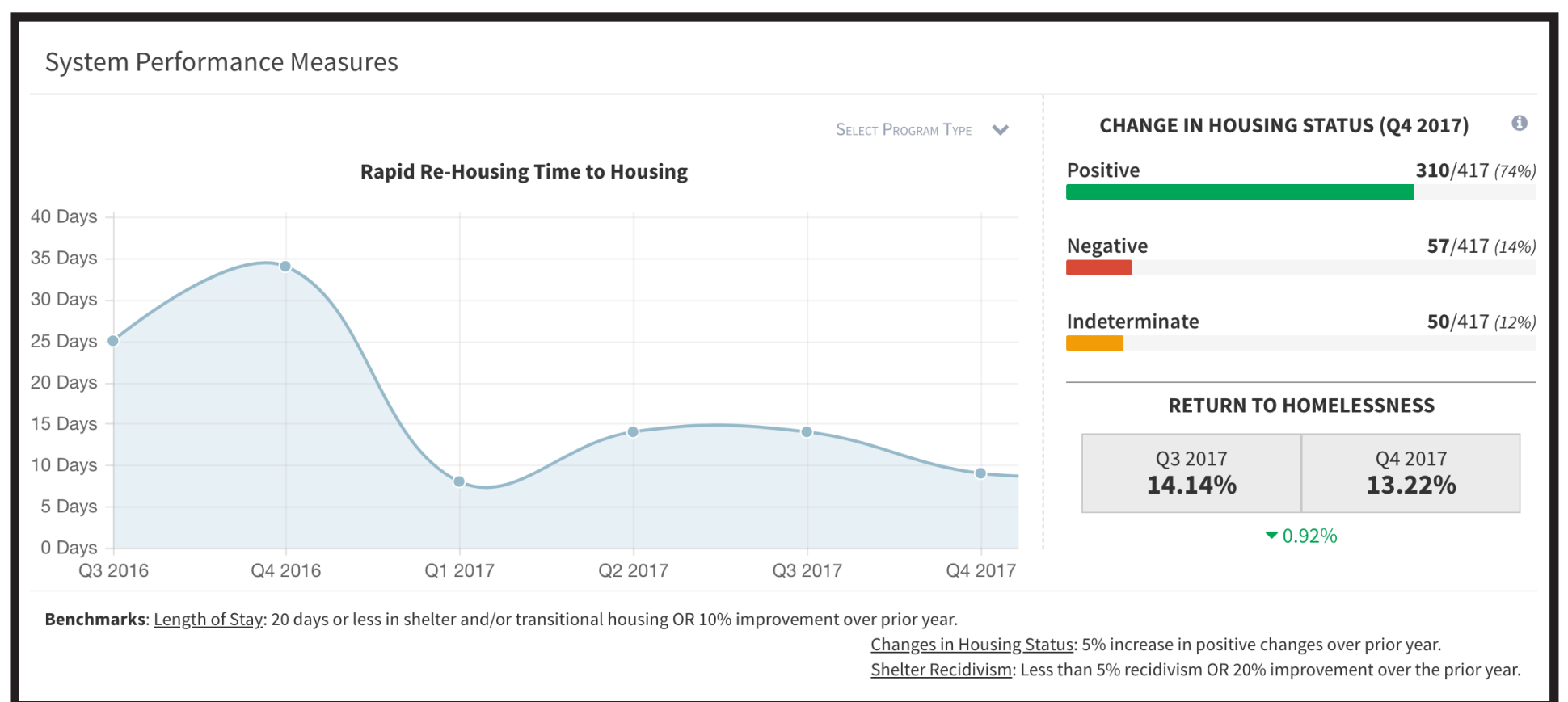
not have designated campsites, which deals with politics and the citizens.

“There’s a lot of people who refused to go to the shelters because they get their stuff stolen all the time. They get strong armed. Sometimes...it is not fair that they don’t have people monitoring the other individuals. Some of these guys are getting threatened, getting their money stolen,” said Barrett.

The homeless in Hartford feel safer out on the street than in the shelter, similar to how the homeless in Knoxville might prefer the streets to KARM. According to Barrett, most of the homeless in Hartford are from towns closer to suburbia surrounding Hartford. Many citizens consider the homeless an eyesore, like the stigma associated with the homeless in Tennessee. “The homeless guys are the

forgotten ones,” he said. “Especially, if you are homeless and committed a crime.

Now, the million-dollar question is how does Knoxville build this rapport with the homeless community? Barrett said using combat veterans as a course of action for grassroots is the first option. He said officers who want or are currently engaging in the community outreach officers. Also, the officers need a passion for the homeless and community engagement. For Knoxville, instead of looking at the homeless population as a whole from the top down, start from the bottom-up. Go out and research, talk to the homeless, truly listen to their concerns about their treatment in Knoxville.—AMP



Bar graph from Knoxville Community Dashboard on Homelessness: Quarter 4 2017 (Oct. 1, 2017 - Dec. 31, 2017).

Rapid re-housing emphasizes housing search and relocation services with short- and medium-term rental assistance to move people into permanent housing.

cont. Pull Back the Curtain

Eddie: So now you have to sleep outside.

Jared: Yep.

Eddie: And they know that.

Jared: Yeah, they know. I slept outside on the sidewalk Wednesday night, Thursday night and Friday night.

Eddie: And so you went and appealed to pastor Mike, and he said...

Jared: And the next thing I know is that I went in to see if I could talk to pastor Mike again and they said I was criminal trespassing and called the cops. The cops came and told me that they were gonna give me a verbal warning but if I came back on the property, I will go to jail. And I haven’t been back there since.

Eddie: Were they aware that you were gonna have to sleep outside?

Jared: Yeah, but they don’t care. They’ve criminal trespassed six people in the last five days, over stupid stuff. One guy got criminal trespassed be-

cause he took a.. he takes everything out of his book bag and puts it in his clear bag. Well he takes his book bag, rolls it up and puts it in his clear bag too. They criminal trespassed him cause he took his book bag in. Cause you’re not allowed to have a book bag inside the building. And he didn’t have anything in it, it’s just the fact that it’s their way of having control over someone.

Eddie: Did they give you any sort of period of time that this would last, or it’s just indefinite.

Jared: It’s just indefinite.

Eddie: Did they give you any recourse, did they say, “Come back and talk to us in a week or a month or...”

Jared: No. Nothing like that. Nope. All over a picture.

Eddie: Did they seem upset, or disturbed or angry? Or was it just...

Jared: I mean, they were all calm about it, it seemed like more to me like they were worried about the pictures getting to someone they didn’t want them to get to.

Eddie: Because.. why? Why

wouldn’t they want people seeing what you’re eating?

Jared: Because honestly, I’ve seen them on certain days when they serve, you know, good meals, they have people come in there and take pictures and video of them giving people that meal. But they don’t do it when they give us a tray like they gave us a tray Wednesday for lunch.

Eddie: So you have seen people come in and video...

Jared: Oh yeah! They’ve done that on Thanksgiving and two or three other times since then. But they only do it when they give us full trays of food that they think looks good to them.

Eddie: And it shows the community that they’re giving you...

Jared: Good food, good meals. But that’s only once every two or three months. They don’t have them come in there any other time. They don’t have them come in there and take pictures of the food that, like the tray we had Wednesday for lunch. They don’t want nobody seeing that, because that’s not a real meal. Two biscuits and a little bit of gravy wouldn’t fill

up my twelve year old daughter. And they don’t want people seeing that. And I think that’s the main reason why they criminal trespassed me cause I wouldn’t take the picture off my phone. But I should have the right to take a picture of anything I want, that’s my right.

Eddie: So what are your plans now?

Jared: Gotta work and keep trying, I don’t know how I’m gonna do it, cause I got nowhere to take a shower now. I mean, I’m gonna keep going to work and eventually get my own place. It’s gonna take a little while, but I’m gonna do it.

Eddie: Are you a person of faith?

Jared: Yep.

Eddie: So KARM says it’s restoring lives in Jesus’ name, or something like that, how does that sound to you now?

Jared: I don’t think that they really do try to restore people’s lives, for some people, they make their lives worse.

Eddie: Does it feel like a Christian organization to you?

Jared: No. Not at all.—AMP

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