

RUSS PULLIAM

Restoring hope for the homeless

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Overwhelmed by an increase in the number of the homeless seeking shelter and a drop in donations, Wheeler Mission recently had to cut back on its community initiatives.

After news of the retrenchment broke, a group of concerned citizens began wondering how they could help Wheeler address its financial deficit. The result was the launch this month of Operation Restoration. The initiative's goal is to highlight the plight of the homeless, with a focus on how Wheeler not only offers shelter but also provides long-term efforts to help men change their lives and return to the work force.

Prominent local media figures such as Dave Calabro of WTHR (Channel 13) have spent this week "homeless" at the Speedway, including nights on the golf course inside the track. That may seem like merely a symbolic gesture, but it's helped raise about \$400,000 to support Wheeler's efforts.

As another part of the initiative, local resident Cindy Palmer has helped connect a women's organization called Kaleo with service opportunities to help those in need.

"We're trying to get as much awareness as we can that the homeless are a community responsibility, and the homeless include women and children," she said.

Along with the Hoosier Christian Foundation, Kaleo invited scholar Amy Sherman to speak about Indianapolis' response to those in need. Sherman is affiliated with the Indianapolis-based Sagamore Institute and has researched local ministries such as Wheeler.

Speaking at Second Presbyterian Church last week, Sherman said concerned citizens should not only help individuals through missions such as Wheeler but also think strategically in addressing the needs of the homeless.

Her advice to concerned citizens working on Operation Restoration: "Don't just do the personal hands-on things," she said. "But have a bigger vision to network all your influence for city transformation."

She cited the One by One Leadership Foundation of Fresno, Calif., as an example.

"They've got initiatives in 25 housing projects, putting in a police substation and a Christian community center, sponsored by a local church," she said. "They brought in the faith community, the law enforcement community, the housing community and the philanthropic community. It is a classic example of what I call multisector collaboration."

One practical and important result from the public-private initiative: "The crime rate has gone down by 65 percent and 70 percent in those housing projects."

May is a busy month in Indy. But that hasn't kept concerned residents such as Calabro and Palmer from trying to help Wheeler and the homeless. If you'd like to donate, go to www.wmm.org/help/restoration.asp.



Russ Pulliam previously was editorial page editor for The Indianapolis News.

He also has been director of the Pulliam Fellowship since 1992.

The fellowship gives college students summer intern experience at The Star and Arizona Republic.

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