

RMCHCS partners with IAG for homeless outreach

Written by William Madaras Glass Lantern PR
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Supports those in need of substance-abuse recovery and rehab

Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services announced a partnership with [Immediate Action Group](#) to aid the homeless in Gallup Dec. 11.

The agreement will strengthen and formalize an informal affiliation between the groups that has been ongoing to best serve the homeless. The effort is also designed to help those in need of recovery and rehabilitation from drug and alcohol abuse. Both are 501c3 nonprofit organizations.

“We have been working together for some time and we are formally announcing our affiliation so the community, donors and those who would like to join us can volunteer,” RMCHCS CEO David Conejo said. “We look forward to strengthening our association to better serve Gallup residents, our reservation neighbors and those in need.”

The organizations integrate their services to aid a variety of Gallup residents and others from nearby communities needing food, clothing, and other forms of assistance. RMCHCS provides

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medical services and aids those in need by checking for symptoms of diabetes and similar triage services.

The hospital also offers enrollment in its Behavioral Health Treatment Center's detox and rehab program for those willing to give up their addiction.

The homeless people obtaining assistance are veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, members of the Navajo Nation, migrants, students, and people from all walks of life.

Many are families that have split up for economic reasons whose children are staying with relatives, parents suffering from illness and elderly unable to provide for themselves. Some are struggling to even hang onto their pets.

Residents and others provide most of the donations, which are distributed by the coalition. Donations from various organizations across the U.S. are delivered quarterly on a semi-trailer truck.

Contributions include discontinued products and items from educational institutions, government offices, abandoned storage units, civic and religious organizations, philanthropies and others.

IGA was born a few years ago as an informal outreach program begun by its founder and president William Camarota working with the Lighthouse Church in Gallup. The outreach attracted more constituents and Camarota took over a warehouse donation distribution center operating out of a nearby airport hangar.

IAG now manages the operation with approximately 10 volunteers and organizes a weekly breakfast held Saturday mornings at the Nizonhi Laundromat parking lot at 1733 S 2nd St. in Gallup. The organization stores donations in a 3,000-foot warehouse leased from the city of Gallup.

Keeping Warm Under Outdoor Vents

IAG transports the donated goods from the warehouse in Gallup to the Laundromat, where they are distributed to the homeless and those in need of food, clothing and household goods. The organizations serve anywhere from several dozen to over a hundred every Saturday in rain and snow.

The location for the distribution was founded by Camarota who noticed homeless people huddling for warmth under the laundry building's heat vents.

"It is amazing what we have been able to achieve on a \$75 a week budget and a handful of committed volunteers. We serve our constituents hot meals of rice and beans which are made by the group and brought here in the trunks of their cars," Camarota said. "That \$75 goes for gas, vehicle maintenance, food servings, storage and more."

He cited the generosity of Gallup's Dr. David McKenzie for the group's operating budget.

The food is served by hospital staffers, ranging from administrators to surgeons and nurses, on folding tables and chairs Camarota transports in a van and trailer from the warehouse.

Near the outdoor dining room's serving area are privacy tarps set up for triage by the RMCHCS volunteers. Under the enclosed tarps, medical staff check the blood pressure and examine the feet of those at risk for diabetes. There are also opportunities for those who want to kick their addiction to speak to medical staff about the program.

From Make-Up to Dog Food

"We never know what we are going to be able to provide to people," Camarota said. "We've had donations of cases of toothpaste, coffee, coats, jackets, sox, hand lotions, produce, used shoes, dog food, beddings and all types of things. We had make-up which we donated to a cheer

leading squad.”

He also cited donations of food and clothing from Clayton Homes, items from Goodwill and even housing vouchers from veteran’s organizations.

He cites the organization’s need for out-door heaters and tarps for triage treatment.

“I’ve been in their place, throughout my lifetime. I’ve found myself homeless more times than I care to count, I know how hard it can be and so that’s why I do this,” Camarota, a reformed addict, said. “It starts with a conversation and encouragement. We’re not out here lecturing these guys, that’s not what this is about.... I’m out here because I’m not OK with people dying, and I want these guys out here to know that we care, and we want them to live. They are tired of being sick and tired, and that’s when we begin encouraging, and it snowballs after that.”

From Homeless to Home Dwellers

Those who enter the rehab program for treatment are given jobs by RMCHCS. During their treatment, they are employed as cooks, groundkeepers, maintenance people and in other positions.

The hospital’s 90-day rehab program was so successful it launched the Community Work Service Program, which helps Gallup maintain public buildings and partners with the Police Department to prevent crime.

The program is composed of former addicts who serve in this effort on their way to landing new jobs and returning to Gallup as model citizens who have kicked their habit. Some have even won awards in community competitions such as being selected for art awards among the top 20 from the 1,191 entries made at Gallup’s 97th Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial.

People willing to volunteer or make donations can contact William Camarota at

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