

Homelessness - London's Number 1 Issue

As the title states homelessness in our City is a tragedy of humanity and 519 Pursuit has been there to respond to this ever growing concern. 519 Pursuit is a feet on the ground group of volunteers and staff who provide essential life supports for the homeless known to us as our friends.

We pride ourselves on outreach. An ear is lent to hear our friend's concerns and insights. We encourage this dialogue and it is undertaken without judgement. This outreach can take many different directions from family, mental and physical health, housing, and addiction help. The supports we provided are life saving in some of the following ways:

- Wellness checks
- Warm coats
- Footwear
- Meals
- Tarps and tents

519 Pursuit works in partnership with The London FoodBank, RBC Place, and Y.O.U., as we all recognize the severity of our City's most basic community needs.

For 519 Pursuit to perform these critical services, funding is an absolute requirement. The past support of our City has been the key to the services outlined above. Without question, this funding continues to be a number 1 and it is trusted that these words will enable our Mayor and members of Council to strongly support the essential funding required for this key service.

My Personal Voluntary Experiences With 519 Pursuit

I joined 519 Pursuit as a volunteer October 2021, starting with the Saturday morning receipt and sorting of donations for our city's friends in need. With this involvement I became increasingly curious as to those who benefited from 519 Pursuit's support and in March of 2022 I joined the outreach volunteers in the community.

Looking back this was a natural step for me. When I retired I knew I wanted to help less fortunate people and made the commitment to assist voluntarily. This started with Meals On Wheels, then on to mentoring a homeless individual for 5 years, support for refugees to Canada, and currently volunteering with 519 Pursuit. A total of approximately 20 some years.

With 519 Pursuit we have enjoyed many successes and in each situation I do an internal jump for joy. Some examples:

"A" who successfully recovered income tax refunds years later and was able to leave homelessness behind. This was achieved through our outreach efforts and understanding his situation through a developing of trust with him. All he needed was a ride to Service Ontario and a trusted individual to protect his few assets while away.

"C and C" a married couple at the Watson Street encampment obtained shelter at Unity. This was a lengthy effort due to a fear of living with others (a significant concern among the homeless) which had to be addressed. In time we were successful in them choosing the shelter.

“S” had her debit card stolen and had to go to a specific bank branch which was not near her tent. We took her to the bank where she learned that an individual had accessed her account and was laundering dollars. As the account varied significantly the branch put a hold on her account. She advised that there should have been approximately \$900.00 in the account. The branch was able to determine that this was accurate, however, as there was a hold on the account, she still could not access funds. On behalf of 519 Pursuit, I was able to verify that “S” was indeed who she said she was. The bank branch then released \$800.00 in cash to “S”. Cash was the only route as the account remained on hold. It made my day and so too for “S”. Unfortunately, the lack of something as simple as ID is a roadblock for many.

These are a few examples of my personal involvement in outreach support. There are many others, but it is trusted that these situations illustrate the outreach commitment and humanity of the people involved with 519 Pursuit.

Larry Morrow