

What is the value of 519Pursuit? I am a volunteer with them for 5+ years. My other outreach volunteer experience was with Sister of St Joseph Soup Kitchen for 14 years and I am still active with The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVP) 30+ years. I have witnessed the relentless struggles of many with homelessness, addictions, abuse, generational social welfare recipients, mental health issues, employment skill deficiencies and so many other short comings. Sadly, the numbers of people struggling continues to grow with very few signs of improvement. Many of the well-intentioned past assistance programs over the past years simply have NOT worked...this can be a topic into itself as it must include submissions from City Departments Managers AND Outside Agencies with Detailed Budget Forecasts, Ongoing Benchmark Reporting and Accountability of funds used...but what does work...

My attraction to 519Pursuit is their Friendship Based approach. It mirrors the values of SSVP, where face to face contact is central to ALL interactions. Additionally, this contact embodies that Respect, Non-Judgemental, and Compassionate communications that take place. While material support with a hot meal, drinks, clothing, hygiene packs plus more are supplied, the value of Face-to-Face contact cannot be understated. We live in a world where virtually every contact now is 'on-line', very impersonal, very difficult to express yourself outside rigid controls. Many who suffer lack skills on how to communicate in this fashion as well their access and ability to this kind of communication format may not exist. The bottom line, many struggling persons are totally lost, their self esteem destroyed. They become more withdrawn from society; they see no future.

I have met several hundred struggling individuals. When I first approach them, they seldom make eye contact, they step back displaying many insecurities. As part of my interactions, I often ask if they are comfortable to share their circumstances How They Became Homeless. I listen intently to their story, I do not pass judgment, I let them freely speak. Once I hear their stories, the struggles they have experienced no longer are just stories. I see their emotions transform, they may smile, cry, relax, exhale...I have given them a reason to feel better about themselves at that moment. I have given them a reason to look beyond the moment. All interactions conclude with Sincere Thank You's, they can live for another day instead of just survive for another day.

The reality is homelessness will be with us for many years. Hopefully leaders at government AND social agencies accept the fact that past well intended efforts have largely failed. The problem has evolved over decades. There are multiple homeless avenues that must be addressed. Additionally, in this dialogue, there are other victims that need to be respected...Business Owners who have invested all their life savings trying to make a living for their families and employees risk losing everything because homelessness is on their doorsteps, hindering their ability to succeed. They do not blame the homeless, they critique the absence of attainable avenues to assist homeless to find shelter.

So, in the interim, how does 519Pursuit fit in. Interactions with homeless persons focus upon.... Giving them Hope, a Reason to Regain some Self Esteem, a Pathway to continue to survive/live daily until the much larger housing, mental health, addiction, employment and many more issues are better dealt with.

I welcome any requests for further information about my experiences.

Phil Bondy