

Community Challenge | Provide housing for homeless

Campaign will help to ensure people don't die on the streets

Feb. 26, 2012

Although I serve as the director of The Coalition for the Homeless, my life (like all those around me) is so fast-paced, isolated and scheduled that I do not have time or the opportunity to think about the humanity of most of the people I see on a given day.

Randal Scott Wilson was just one of the people who I ignored as I rushed through life in downtown Louisville. For over 30 years, while others went to and from work, completed their weekly chores and drove through town in heated and air-conditioned cars, he lived on these very same streets striving daily just to find adequate food, warm shelter and cigarettes to make it through the day.

But in September of 2011, Randy's life finally intersected mine in a meaningful way. I was one of 100 community volunteers who came together over three days to interview our fellow citizens living on the streets through a campaign called Rx: Housing. Randy was just one of 250 people interviewed during that week. He was shy, younger than he appeared from his years living on the streets, and unable to take advantage of most community services due to symptoms from a severe mental illness. He was also ranked as one of the top 75 of that group likely to die on the streets due to health-related issues as a result of living in the elements.

Thanks to housing subsidies set aside by the Louisville Metropolitan Housing Authority and case management provided by staff at Family Health Center-Phoenix and Wellspring, this meant Randy was assessed and helped to apply for a housing voucher allowing him to move into his own apartment as early as February 2012.

That process was well on its way when, on a relatively warm Jan. 1, 2012, Randy was found dead on the streets of Louisville. While I did not know Randy well, I cannot tell you how deeply I feel this loss and how unfair it seems that he will never have the opportunity to get the key to his own place to call home.

There is no reason anyone else should have to live, or die, on the streets of Louisville.

As we start this new year, my resolution is to remember Randy and the other 249 we interviewed in September of last year, and to dedicate myself to work to make a better life for those without housing in our community.

Fortunately, I won't be alone. Hundreds of volunteers have joined the Rx: Housing campaign and are raising funds for deposits and furniture as each new person is ready to move into housing. If you would like to join us, please contact The Coalition for the Homeless — www.louhomeless.org or 636-9550 — to learn more about Rx: Housing and learn how you can help make dying on the streets of Louisville a thing of the past.

NATALIE HARRIS

Director, Coalition for the Homeless

Louisville 40208