



NEWS RELEASE

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Homeless Task Force seeks to centralize services into one campus

One-stop shop approach would provide service to at-risk community where needed

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. — The Murfreesboro/Rutherford County Homeless Task Force is seeking to centralize services into one location. First established in 1999 by Mayor Richard Reeves, the task force brought together a group of organizations and citizens interested in addressing the problem of homelessness. The task force today is headed up by Scott Foster, who is the executive director of The Journey Home—a Christian Community Outreach center for the homeless and at-risk residents of Rutherford County.

“About 15 years ago the mayor’s office embarked on getting social service providers together in order to better serve our homeless and low-income community.” said Scott Foster, chairman of the Homeless Task Force. “The Homeless Task Force was organized at that time and we went through some changes in order to become a more effective vehicle for collaborating on projects.”

To view a YouTube video of the Homeless Task Force, visit <https://youtu.be/FkcbSFHK2Hs>.

The Homeless Task Force is now known as the Homeless Alliance of Rutherford County (HARC)—an association of service providers of health, housing, social services and education. HARC works to come up with the best possible alternatives for the low-income community in Murfreesboro.

“We not only have bylaws and a board, we re-organized the way we went about doing the work of the organization,” said John Callow, a Homeless Task Force board member who serves as Community Development director for the City of Murfreesboro, a department that coordinates low-income housing.

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“We have resources here in Rutherford County,” said Eric Murry, member of the Homeless Task Force. “I couldn’t name all the resources that we have here. If a person wanted help, they could get help. The issue is a lot of times help is all over the place and people do not know about the help.”

Getting various services to the homeless population is a challenge for many different reasons. If a person has to travel around the city to get the help needed there’s a good chance they won’t have proper transportation. So the Homeless Task Force plans to create a centralized campus that will house community resources for a one-stop shop approach. The Task Force recently presented the concept to City Mayor Shane McFarland.

“What we’re really looking at is a campus philosophy where people can have a transitional place before they go into some type of permanent housing,” said Murfreesboro Mayor Shane McFarland.

“We are just in the initial stages of embarking on a campus-style program or campus-style project to bring service providers together in one geographic area,” added Foster. “When we can bring a wide range of resources together in one area, we help overcome a lot of obstacles.”

Foster said the campus approach has proven effective in other cities.

“There are some places like the Haven of Hope in San Antonio where they have this wonderful campus and bring all these services together in a small area,” stressed Callow. “In Columbia, South Carolina a program called Transitions is similar on a smaller scale.”

“If we can centralize and organize where homeless services are located, it would be a great component for our community, especially for the people who are in need,” said Murry. “We have to provide services that facilitate engagement in their own recovery.”

Since the process is in the early stages, concepts of exactly what the facility or facilities would look like vary. Foster said, “It will depend on property we can find available, but if we can be in a short walking distance or centralized enough to make pathways from one building to another that would be ideal.”

The Task Force foresees a lengthy process with obstacles to overcome. For now, members are in the research and planning stage.

“We are finding what works, what doesn’t work,” said Foster. “Obviously, we can benefit from what hasn’t worked and learn ways to make it work Murfreesboro.”

The Task Force is presenting the centralized services concept to donors while at the same time organizing additional key service providers to establish a core list of participants in the campus. The early stage development also includes a computer data-base of those in need of service.

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“What you’re looking at ultimately are policy and funding issues that means the community will have to be on board,” said Callow. “The Mayor [McFarland] is a champion and that will make it a whole lot easier to talk to the foundations.”

Mayor McFarland says the goal is for people to be able to move from homelessness into stable homes.

“One of the key elements is that we have to provide the services where the people are located,” said Foster. “We have to become part of the community in which they live and exist because we want the community members that we are serving to be invested in the process.”

Each individual, no matter what the circumstances has value. Building a whole community requires that every person is brought into the community with assets that make the entire community a better place.

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Photo attached

1. *Homeless istock photo.jpg*

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