

# HOMELESS

*in Springfield-* PART I

## THE SUCCESSFUL SIDE OF HOMELESSNESS



Twenty-seven years ago, my family and I started working with the homeless in Sangamon County. During that time, we began hearing concerns being raised in the community about our street homeless. “What’s being done about this?” they would ask. “How can we feel safe going downtown with our children?” and, “It’s embarrassing to have grown adults sleeping in public places.”

After much discussion, caring individuals and agencies began stepping up to resolve our city’s escalating problem. Yet that would prove difficult. Programs were offered, relief was provided, and warming centers were opened, but no one could consistently house the fifty-plus street homeless.

So here we are now in 2020 breathing a sigh of relief after yet another pre-winter-hustle to provide enough indoor space for our street homeless. Another year... and another winter-warming center is now opening its doors. Once again, the immediate need of the street homeless is being taken care of by compassionate people from the Salvation Army.

All of us working in homeless alleviation understand the temporal nature of a winter warming center. It’s a short-term solution for a long-term issue.

In the next few weeks, we want to explore the ongoing issues of homelessness in this ten part series called, *Homeless in Springfield*, now being published in two of our Springfield newspapers. Here, we will look at the types of homelessness, their underlying causes, and the complexities that arise. This will allow us as a community to better understand what is going on beneath the surface as we attempt to work together as a unit in finding solutions.

The views in this ten-part series are coming from our years of experience in working with the homeless at Inner City Mission. Much has been tried and learned along the way, and as representatives of ICM, we want to share what we feel God has shown us.

One of the first things revealed may seem obvious, but it is often overlooked. The homeless

need a *home*. The good news is, as a community, we can lay the foundation for home to become a reality in people’s lives once we work together to find lasting solutions.

Before we explore homelessness further in the days ahead, we want to take a moment and thank the hundreds of hardworking, care-giving people who have spent countless hours coming alongside our neighbors in need. Your efforts have made a difference, and the vast majority of our city’s homeless are being housed or taken care of in some way. We appreciate you!

It’s easy to lose sight of all the good that’s happening in our community, yet in Sangamon County alone, we have a minimum of 289 centers, foundations, agencies, shelters, and ministries that provide services for free or at reduced rates for people in need. Here is the list of services we are blessed with:

- 3 addiction treatment centers
- 5 services for the blind or visually impaired
- 8 childcare providers
- 11 clothing/furniture programs
- 30 counseling centers
- 5 deaf/hearing impaired services
- 11 dental assistance programs
- 12 disability service providers
- 12 domestic violence services
- 14 education programs
- 7 eye exam/eyewear assistance programs
- 29 food pantries/food programs
- 4 legal assistance groups
- 21 medical assistance providers
- 12 mortgage assistance programs
- 10 rental assistance programs
- 14 transportation services
- 11 utility assistance programs
- 6 work programs
- 21 various types of senior services
- and 32 other miscellaneous community resources.



In September during a Springfield City Council meeting, an alderman mentioned how nice it would be to have a list of resources available for people requesting help. Well, that list exists, and you can find the names, numbers, and addresses for the services listed above at the Sangamon County Department of Community Resources website at <https://co.sangamon.il.us/>. On their site, type in the words “resource directory” and you will find the list of services currently available.

That’s not all. Sangamon County is home to more than 150 churches and numerous civic organizations that offer specific resources for people in need.

As far as shelters go, Inner City Mission is one of thirteen homeless shelters in Springfield, each housing a portion of our city’s 271 homeless individuals on a nightly basis. ICM specializes in children, their parents, and single women. Other shelters focus their efforts on veterans, single women, people with HIV/AIDS, unaccompanied children, single men, or those with a disability or mental illness.

Some of our shelters offer dormitory style housing, while others use single room occupancy for individuals or families. Some even provide apartments or houses.

In addition, our community offers 800-plus housing units, and 2,049 Section 8 housing vouchers, which are subsidized housing permits overseen by the Springfield Housing Authority. When we add these numbers together we have over 2,989 units of housing that are free or subsidized for our neighbors in need.

What a blessing it is to have a front row seat to our community’s generosity! As the executive director and communications director of Inner City Mission, we get to see first hand how your services impact lives. One thing is clear: it really does take a community to make a lasting difference. *Thank you!*

Until next time,

**SCOTT & CONNIE PAYNE**



726 N 7th St | Springfield, IL 62702  
[www.innercitymission.net](http://www.innercitymission.net)