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FACTS & MYTHS about our
SALVATION ARMY

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The Salvation Army of Dane County faces serious fundraising shortfalls in the wake of bad press internationally, but the local chapter has worked directly with the LGBTQ community for years.

Lost in the din was the Salvation Army’s own response to the controversy, and it’s one that seems to perfectly reflect Carter’s views and those of the staff who work in Dane County: “Members do not believe, and would never endorse, a view that homosexual activity should result in any form of physical punishment. The Salvationist Handbook of Doctrine does not state that practicing homosexuals should be put to death and, in fact, urges all Salvationists to act with acceptance, love and respect to all people. The Salvation Army teaches that every person is of infinite value, and each life a gift from God to be cherished, nurtured and preserved.”

Major Loren Carter cuts a modest figure, even in his well-kept Salvation Army officer’s uniform. His tone is even and sincere when he talks, and though the organization he coordinates is currently in a hard struggle for continued support in liberal Dane County, Carter is more dedicated than ever to continuing the work.

The Salvation Army of Dane County (SADC) currently provides shelter for homeless families and individuals, as well as food assistance, educational programs, recreational opportunities for at-risk youth, case management services, medical and dental care for the homeless, and emergency shelter for families and women.

But that work has been threatened by a recent severe downturn in the amount of donations that come in to the organization through private giving. Carter explains that the SADC gets most of its funding from the community: just $1.2 million of its $4.6 million budget comes from government grants. And the SADC has one of the highest ratings for a social services organization, with 85 cents of every dollar raised going directly into its outreach programs.

And, Carter is sure to point out, all of the money raised in Dane County stays in Dane County. When you put change into one of their red kettles, it goes directly to help your community.

The Salvation Army of Dane County works hand in hand with both Outreach and Willma’s Fund to see that any LGBTQ families or individuals that walk through their doors have their needs specially met.

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Anyone in Need

“I care about anyone who walks through our doors and says, ‘I have a need,’” Maj. Carter says simply.

Indeed, SADC works hand in hand with both OutReach and Willma’s Fund to see that any LGBTQ families or individuals that walk through their doors have their needs specially met. “We won’t turn anyone away,” Carter adds.

Donald Haar started Willma’s Fund specifically to assist homeless LGBTQ people who were not being served by the traditional shelter system, either because they were being turned away by certain religious organizations or because they were meeting with physical and/or mental abuse from fellow shelter inhabitants.

At a conference on homelessness organized by OutReach and Willma’s Fund (with help from the Salvation Army earlier this year), Haar notes that he’d originally had the idea while working at the Salvation Army shelter, where he overheard someone say, “We’ve got no space for transgender persons.”

Indeed, Carter acknowledges the fact that traditional shelter set-ups are often unable—or flat-out unwilling—to help transgender individuals. And that’s why, he says, the collaboration set up by OutReach and Willma’s Fund is so important as they’re able to better meet their needs.

Same-sex families in need are fully welcome in the shelters and other programs offered by SADC.

“We’re relying on [donations from] thousands of people who care about their community,” Carter explains. “We want to be respectful of that, to be good stewards of that.”

Outgoing social services coordinator Leah Weber did a lot to bring SADC up to speed. Carter goes on to say, by organizing educational training sessions that aimed to help staff be more inclusive and sensitive to the specific needs of the LGBTQ community, among others.

Years to come

As for the religious underpinnings of the organization, Carter doesn’t shy away from them but insists that they are never a prerequisite for receiving services.

“We don’t want to impose anything because that pushes people away. It makes it worse, not better,” he says.

Carter explains that part of the intake process for families and individuals seeking help from the SADC involves a sit-down conversation with him and his wife, wherein they explain all of the services that are available—including religious ones. “We may say some sober words, and that’s really unfortunate,” Peterson says of the Craibe incident, “but whether they grow or not is up to the individual; it’s not something we impose on people.”

Scott Peterson, the newly hired Director of Community Relations, recalls meeting a young man who had moved to the area from the East Coast, having been pushed away from shelters there because they did require religious adherence to receive services. He was dubious about going to the Salvation Army at first, but when Carter approached him and said they had a need, the young man accepted the offer.

“People start to look at the entire organization through one man’s words,” Peterson says of the Craibe incident. “It’s not right, but it’s really unfortunate.” Peterson says of the Craibe incident, “But I want to emphasize that donations go right back to the most high-risk, vulnerable populations right here in Dane County.”

And they’ve been doing that for nearly 125 years, since the chapter’s founding in 1890. Carter and the organization hope that, with continued outreach, they’ll be able to continue the mission for years to come.

“If you read our mission statement, it talks about the gospel of Christ,” Carter explains. “The second prong of it is meeting the needs of humanity—without discrimination.”

Spectrum and Welcoming Schools recently to help us create schools become more inclusive to all cultures, races, genders, and sexualities.

It involves changing our language, teaching practices, and curriculum to debunk the gender binary myth. We are invested in creating gender-expansive learning environments and help students walk throughout their lives.

Out of the shadows

“Out of the shadows” is a great title, says Carter, referring to the problem of homelessness, which has been an “invisible” problem until recent years, and we are making strides in raising awareness and supporting not only the teens who find themselves in these dangerous situations, but also their parents. “Spectrum has been a great team of counselors and social workers that are available to anyone (teen or parent) who may feel there is no place to go for help. We have more work to do, certainly. But advancing the conversation around these issues will encourage others to step out of the shadows and potentially save lives.

Supporting fluid identities

In Madison Schools, we are working to debunk the gender binary myth. We are invested in creating gender-expansive learning environments where all children feel safe, loved, and affirmed. This involves changing our language, teaching practices, and curriculum to become more inclusive to all cultures, races, genders, and sexualities.

We are excited to welcome our national partners from Gender Spectrum and Welcoming Schools recently to help us create schools become more inclusive to all cultures, races, genders, and sexualities.

Briarpatch has an incredible team of counselors and social workers that are available to anyone (teen or parent) who may feel there is no place to go for help. We have more work to do, certainly. But advancing the conversation around these issues will encourage others to step out of the shadows and potentially save lives.

Out Going Social Services Coordinator Leah Weber did a lot to bring SADC up to speed. Carter goes on to say, by organizing educational training sessions that aimed to help staff be more inclusive and sensitive to the specific needs of the LGBTQ community, among others.

As a Salvation Army employee and the founder of Willma’s Fund for homeless LGBTQ people in Dane County, I can assure you that the Salvation Army of Dane County DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE against anyone for services or employment.

I wholeheartedly believe in the mission of the Salvation Army, especially here in Dane County.

The only things the Salvation Army asks are “do you have a need?” and “how can we help?”

They do not ask about sexual orientation or gender identity. The slogan “The Salvation Army is all about deeds not creeds” is true; they truly practice what others simply preach.

I am gay and very out here at the Salvation Army, and I have worked here for nine years. Of all the jobs I have had, this is by far the one where I have experienced the least amount of any type of discrimination.

I am also a drag queen, my drag name is Willma Flynn-Stone, and everyone at the Salvation Army of Dane County knows that Willma’s Fund holds drag shows to raise money to help homeless LGBTQ people with a focus on transgender people.

The Salvation Army of Dane County has assisted with housing my transgender clients in hotels on many occasions. We usually split the cost; the Salvation Army pays for a week and Willma’s Fund pays for a week. I am also aware of a family of two gay men and one child that stayed in the family shelter.

The Salvation Army provides hotel rooms for transgender clients not to discriminate but to protect them because they are not safe in any shelter, as the other clients often attack them verbally and/or physically.

This is true at most shelters. Most LGBTQ homeless people I’ve talked to say they feel safer on the streets than in the shelters.

The Salvation Army was a key partner in the 2014 LGBT Homelessness Conference, which was a collaborative project with the First United Methodist Church, OutReach LGBT Community Center, and Briarpatch Youth Services. We gathered 105 people, mostly social service providers that work with the homeless community, to begin addressing the barriers to serving the LGBT homeless community. Major Loren Carter and 15 other Salvation Army staff were in attendance.

I have been involved in the Salvation Army National website. The link includes video interviews with a lesbian and a transgender client who were helped by the Salvation Army in other states.

I also strongly urge you to learn more about the Salvation Army by volunteering.

For more information, please visit the Salvation Army’s non-discrimination statement: http://salvationarmymupa.org/who/needsdiscrimination

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