

# TOPEKA RESCUE MISSION MONTHLY REPORT OCTOBER 2021

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# WHO WILL HELP?





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***He crouches in the trees of a neighborhood park, waiting for the people to pass him by. It's a warm, sunny afternoon in early autumn - the worst kind. The kind of weather that brings everyone out in the neighborhood wanting to take walks, have picnics, stretch their legs. The kind of weather it's almost impossible to hide in.***

He watches a father, mother and two kids look for a place to set their lawn chairs nearby. Please, please move along, he thinks. They hesitate, looking into the trees he's watching them from, seeming uncertain. He knows they can't see him, but he also knows what will happen if they do. He holds his breath. They spread a blanket on the grass several yards away and unpack a cooler, and his stomach sinks. They're going to be here awhile and he's going to have to continue hiding until they leave. They bring drinks and

sandwiches out of the cooler and he debates for just a moment on going up to them and asking for some - he can't remember the last time he had a meal that wasn't scraps from a dumpster - but then he remembers how he must smell. It's been even longer since he's showered or changed his clothes. He knows living in the trees surrounding a community park is technically not illegal, technically within the rights of his civil liberties. What he's doing is not wrong. He repeats this to himself multiple times a

day, a mantra to protect himself emotionally against the realities of the world he lives in. Because no civil liberties protect him from the glares, the accusations, the threats he encounters every day when people see him and are afraid of what they see. He's not really sure what's wrong with him, although strangers like to tell him constantly. He knows it's not normal to live unsheltered in the woods. It's not normal to sleep outside and eat from garbage cans or the scraps of food people litter in parks.

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It's not normal to bathe in the river during the summer and go all winter without bathing at all. But he knows a lot of people like him, other unsheltered people who don't fit into society. He knows some who are angry about it, who like to argue and debate with anyone who will listen. But that's exhausting to him - he just wants to hide. For as long as he can remember he has felt the need to hide from people. He's never fit in with society. He didn't fit in at school, where he was told he was lazy and stupid and eventually dropped out because of the bullying. He didn't fit in with any job he ever tried to have...his anxiety was so bad his voice and body would shake uncontrollably whenever he tried to talk to people. Most of the time he never even passed an interview. The few times someone felt bad enough to hire him, his mental and physical difficulties always

got in the way and he didn't keep the job for long. Now that he's a lot older, and his mind is so fuzzy he can't remember details and his body is so broken he can barely walk, he knows no one would hire him at all. He's had a couple well-meaning strangers tell him they care about him. It's rare but it does happen - when rather than yelling at him, calling the police or running away, someone actually comes up to him and asks how he's doing. They might give him a couple dollars, a couple bags of chips, soda or whatever they can scrounge up from their car, and a phone number to call for help. Some of the braver people might shake his hand or pat him on the back and tell him he's not alone and it will get better. **But then they leave again and he's back to his reality: one of the unsheltered homeless trying to survive in a world not built for him.**

The unsheltered, mentally ill and chronically homeless often make us uncomfortable. They don't fit in with our lifestyles, our neighborhoods or our communities. As compassionate as we may feel, sometimes we don't like to look at suffering in our own space - especially when it's right in front of us and we can't turn away. But more than that, we often feel like we have no resources to do something to help someone like this. For most of us, it's in our nature to look around for someone to call and take care of the problem, rather than addressing it ourselves. That's why our community has TRM, mental health services and law enforcement reaching out to the unsheltered, but they can't do it all. What happens when, in someone's moment of suffering, we're the only ones who can reach out and help them? What can we do to help the

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Refreshed after a shower at MAP.

unsheltered, the chronically homeless and the mentally ill, right where they are? We can give of our time and resources to provide fresh clothing, fresh socks, a way to take a shower, do laundry and get a hot meal. We can provide them as much dignity as we know how. But helping them in the moment is part of a bigger story. What do we want to be as a community regarding the larger picture and the future of these individuals? Do we want to follow the past ways of doing things, or create a new strategy? Do people like this matter, or do we want to continue hiding them away or calling someone else, hoping someone else will take

care of the problem? These are not people who can live at TRM or homeless shelters forever. They need to be integrated into our communities in a way that makes space for the challenges they face - even when we can't personally understand those challenges. At TRM we continue to ask our community to have these important conversations surrounding the unsheltered homeless. As a community, as individual neighborhoods, what do we want to build? How can we best help them? **We cannot look for a quick fix. It takes everyone coming together, deciding WHO we are, WHAT we**

**want to do, and how we are going to create the resources and opportunities to do it.** As TRM's MAP program and our partnerships with Valeo, Topeka law enforcement and Stormont Vail continue to go forward in our efforts to help and encourage the unsheltered homeless, we are more grateful than ever for your love and support. Already you have enabled us to help so many people who have nowhere else to turn - people who have been segregated and shunned by society for most of their lives. With your support, we will continue to ask the important questions and help our community find new ways to face these challenges in the days ahead. †

**Thank you for walking and serving alongside us!**

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