

Students hear, and experience, how homeless spend night

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Written by

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When Dan lost two of his toes due to complications from type 2 diabetes, his health needed restoration. His life, he admits, needed a transformation.

“I had lost everything – my job, my cats, my furniture. I was homeless and I was scared to death,” the 58-year-old former Boone County resident said. “I had already planned how I was going to kill myself. I was at the end of my rope.”

Silence filled the room in which Dan spoke Thursday night.

“Wow!” a student whispered.

Dan stood in a Walton Verona High School classroom in an attempt to give students a glimpse into the life of a homeless person. After Dan shared his experience with more than 30 students, the teens handed over their cell phones and car keys and loaded onto a school bus. They rode to the school’s nearby sports complex, where they pitched cardboard boxes and slept through the night.

The over-night sleep was open to any high school student who signed up. Unlike many homeless people, the students had the comforts of blankets and sleeping bags.

This is the second year a former patient from the non-profit Center for Respite Care in Cincinnati has come to the school district in an attempt to enlighten young people about the plight of homeless people.

The only one of its kind in the region, the center offers medical care to homeless people who need a safe place to heal after a surgery, broken bone, or any medical setback. A graphic photo showed a man’s black and blue feet after he had suffered frostbite. It’s a common occurrence among the homeless.

Homeless people not only have a hard time healing after a surgery, but they also are an economic burden.

It is estimated that there are about 1,300 homeless people in the region. Because they cannot heal properly, they end up being repeat patients in the local hospitals’ emergency rooms.

Source: http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20131119/NEWS0103/311190007?nclick_check=1

On average, patients stay about 30 days in the respite center, giving social workers there time to find housing for them.

“Ninety percent of our patients are released into a more stable environment than they were in when they came to the center,” said Development Director Charlotte Boemker. “We not only help a homeless person, but we help the community.”

Many of the Walton Verona students had never met a homeless person, until the talk. Students were surprised that Dan was educated and articulate.

“I lost my job,” Dan said. “After 10 years of going to the same job every day, my company downsized, so they could hire someone to replace me at minimum wage. I ended up later losing all of my toes.”

Whether it is poor choices or a series of unfortunate events, such as Dan’s case, no one is immune to homelessness.

“At any given time, anyone can become homeless,” Dan, said. “But I have learned that homelessness is a situation, not an identity.”

Dan, who now lives in an apartment, is planning his next career. He enjoys working with the computer program Microsoft Excel. The possibilities are limitless. The future filled with no hope, now appears bright

“I always thought homeless people played a role in their situation,” said Haley Mangan, a senior. “Bad things happen. People lose their jobs.”

“I think that it is great that our speaker stayed close to his beliefs,” said sophomore Emily Wells. “It is true that homelessness can’t steal you identity.”

Boemker told the students about employees at a local hospital who had dropped a homeless patient off at a curb last week. The patient’s case was too severe for the respite center.

Since it opened in 2003, the center has cared for about a thousand patients. Respite care costs about 5 percent of what a hospital stay costs. It is estimated that the center saves the community about \$10 million by helping alleviate frequent ER visits by homeless people.

Wells found that ironic. “It is costing communities a lot of money when homeless people repeatedly go to the ER and yet they aren’t even getting the care or the respect that they deserve,” she said.