



Reaching out, moving forward:

How a local homeless shelter is reaching out and spreading hope to the community

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The faces of 25 men stare down from the bulletin board at the desk, which is scattered with Bibles, sermon notes and cards proclaiming "God Bless You."

The phone rings — a woman with a felony requesting a place to stay.

"We don't have anything for ladies here at Alamance Rescue Mission," Pastor and director Chip Sellew says into the phone. "Our mission here is only for men."

Before he hangs up, he gives her the number of the Durham Rescue Mission, which was converted from an old hotel into a place for women and children to live.

"I hate, oh I hate saying no to folks like that," Sellew says. "I'd love to see a ladies ministry get started, and we're working toward, that but right now, we just haven't had the open doors."

But, in the majority of cases, Sellew and his staff don't have to say no to those who come to them with need.

Where It All Began

The mission, founded in 1988 by Robert and Pat Jones and relocated to the old Glenhope Elementary School in 2003, strives to offer a "hand up, not a hand out" for men in the Alamance County community in need of food, clothing, shelter and guidance.

Typically, this includes those struggling with drug and alcohol addictions.

"When the men come here, a lot of them have drug and alcohol problems, and in that process, they've lost their family, their job and their home," Sellew says. "Many of them, when they come here, they don't have anything."

Such was the case for resident Clifford Rutledge, who came to the mission six months ago after struggling for years with addictions to drugs and gambling.

"I was just about at wits end, thinking of robbing a bank or suicide," he says. "When my sister first asked if I'd be willing to come to this place, I thought it was a cop-out. But I agreed, and it's the best thing that's ever happened to me."

Since he arrived, he has begun to work in the kitchen at the mission and obtained an outside job, and he says he plans to stay at the mission a little while longer.

For the first 30 days of residency, the men are

considered under "restriction," according to Sellew. During this time, they are not permitted to make phone calls or have visitors and are expected to work around the building or at the Good Samaritan Super Thrift Store, which is run by the mission. They are also required to attend Bible studies and church services throughout the week.

"Because this is a Bible-based ministry, what we try to do is to get them to see that there's a better way. They don't have to go back to where they were when they get off restriction and begin to touch base with the real world," Sellew says. "We want to let them know they aren't just an accident. They can be a constructive part of the community."

Working Their Way into the "Real World"

Once off restriction, the men can remain at the mission, paying a \$55 per week contribution and going into the community to look for a job.

"We try to get them in the process of being able to deal with paying and saving," Sellew says. "The fee doesn't pay for everything they have, but it does help offset costs."

After his initial 30-day stay at the mission, resident Ricky Rimmer chose to continue living there as he works to overcome his past struggles with alcohol.

Though he says his family has been supportive and understanding of his situation since he came to the mission, he knows his actions in the past let them down.

"I'm trying to get everyone back to where they will trust me," he says. "Right now, I'm in a situation where I can understand them not trusting me because of what I've done."

Rimmer's situation is a typical one for many men after the restriction period, Sellew says, especially when families see a difference but don't necessarily trust them yet.

"The (men) have been trying to get bridges rebuilt and relationships reestablished with the intent that family will invite them back home," Sellew says. "Hopefully by the time that happens, they'll be able to step back into their family as a different man with different goals and a stability they didn't have when they came here."

For those that choose to leave the mission after the restriction period, Sellew says he rarely hears from the men and wonders how much difference is actually made in their lives.

"I worry about them because they're thinking if they last the 30 days, they can go back to their old lifestyle. It doesn't benefit them," he says.

While few are mandated to be there and have them to leave at any point, Sellew says the men are "brought with principles" intended to strengthen them and encourage them to move in the right direction.

The "tight ropes" the mission upholds for the men have led to positive changes in Rimmer's life, he says, including strengthening his faith in God and lessening reliance on alcohol.

