



MTM *newsletter*

Demonstrating the compassion of Jesus
to individuals and families.

+ Exciting Updates:
A&E Recap, Volunteer
Opportunities &
Board Spotlight

Rick is officially out
of homelessness.
one life at a time.

June 2023



The Hidden STRUGGLE

MENTAL ILLNESS AND HOMELESSNESS

Last month was Mental Health Awareness Month. Mental health is personal for me. I have battled depression and anxiety panic disorder most of my life. When I was growing up, mental health was not something we talked about—at least not without negative stigma. For me, the darkest times included trips to the emergency room when I believed I was dying of a heart attack, rather than a panic attack. These times were battles with the voices in my head telling me I was not good enough, reminding me of the times I had failed. I remember crying out to God asking why? Why am I like this? Please help me! I don't want to feel this way.

If you had encountered me, you would have never known I was struggling. I would have laughed and interacted with you and given you every impression that I was doing great, but that was far from the truth. Today after decades,

I still struggle on occasion. However, thanks to my faith and incredible family, friends, doctors, and medications, I am doing so much better than I was before; yet it was such a long and embarrassing journey. **Mental illness is often a hidden disease.**

Many of the guests we serve are battling mental illness, and most are severe cases—far worse than mine. However, the majority of these individuals do not have the resources and support I had and still have today, so they suffer alone. They do not have access to top notch mental health care, so they self-medicate by drinking to numb the pain. But when the numbing wears off, the pain comes rushing back and the only thing they can do at that moment is once again find something to mask the pain. Before they know it, they are in a cycle of addiction.

Mel Trotter himself once said that no one ever wanted to become addicted. No one chose that lifestyle; life just became too hard. We all feel that at times, don't we?

Recently in our city there have been intense conversations about unsheltered people living on the streets, in business doorways, etc. Some have asked why these individuals don't go into shelter at MTM or elsewhere. The answer is because many are suffering from mental illness and do not have the capacity to make a different choice. Imagine battling schizophrenia and then entering a large shelter where





there are 500-600 people. They can't fathom doing that, so they stay on the street. Some people have asked why we don't simply prioritize these individuals for housing. This is a great idea, but the truth is many have been housed and ended up back on the streets because their housing did not come with support services. If someone has never lived in a stable environment, combined with the ongoing mental health battles they are facing, it simply does not work.

Decades ago, our country decided to close most of the mental health institutions. The decision may have been well intentioned, but it was not well thought out. **Our jails, homeless shelters, bridges, and city streets became the new living centers for those suffering from mental illness.** We have an amazing mental health system in West Michigan. At MTM we work closely with, and are incredibly grateful for, Network 180, Pine Rest, and others in the mental health space, but they are overburdened and underfunded to meet the true need.

The majority of individuals experiencing homelessness who are battling mental illness do not have necessary resources and support. So, they suffer silently in shelters, under bridges, in doorways.

They self-medicate with the only substance readily available to them. They engage others in ways that may not be appropriate, but when viewed through the lens of mental health, may at least become understandable.

My hope in sharing this is to remind you that if you struggle with mental illness, you don't have to hide and suffer. **There is help and there is hope; you are not alone.** I also share to offer a better understanding of one major reason so many people are experiencing homelessness and living unsheltered on the streets. I seek to call our community to more empathy and less judgement and condemnation. I also want to ask you to help.

Jesus said that when we see a person in need and we do not help, in some way we are refusing to help Him. When we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for those who are sick—including mental illness—we are doing so for Jesus. In Mel Trotter language, we are "Demonstrating the compassion of Christ."

Friends, will you consider how you may be able to help? Will you consider how you may be able to demonstrate the compassion of Christ, and open your heart and mind to those who are suffering?

Grace and peace,



Dennis Van Kampen
President/CEO
Mel Trotter Ministries

A&E RECAP



Mel Trotter Ministries' second annual Art & Experience Auction was a huge success! Thank you for being with us and taking part in community—and to help those within it who are experiencing homelessness.

Huge shout-out to our presenting sponsor, Campus View, along with all our other sponsors, and to each committee member. We could not have had such a fantastic event without you. There was so much excitement in the room from beginning to end!

Mark your calendars! Next year's Art & Experience Auction will be on April 18, 2024 at the Goei Center.



From Homelessness...

TO HOPE

"I was praying to God to lead me to another job..." said Angela. While praying and attending community college, one of Angela's professors told her about a job fair and encouraged her to go, despite feeling emotionally exhausted. When she arrived, she met staff members from Mel Trotter Ministries (MTM) and received an application. "I kept hearing God say 'MTM.' I had the experience I could relate to and meet people where they are. I was once homeless and addicted to drugs. I could relate to the brokenness."

Angela works as a Triage Specialist at Mel Trotter Ministries, helping guests get back on their feet by assisting them with obtaining necessary documents like Social Security and state ID. She once needed a helping hand, and now she is

using her experience to help other people, like Rick Edinburg.

"I continued to lift up Mr. Edinburg...encouraged him to hold on when he wanted to give up."

Angela Inge

Rick grew up in the Gull Lake area with his sister, two brothers, and parents who have all passed away. He worked in demolition for over 20 years in Kalamazoo. He never married or had kids. "I like being by myself," said Rick. He poured his whole life into his career.

In 2015, Rick was injured by a crane while working in demolition, and that is when the doctors uncovered his lung cancer.

During his years of demolition, he lived in a motel because he traveled so much for work. The life he built and the heart and soul he put into his job were torn down when his friend that owned the demolition business retired. Rick was left without work and because his housing was paid for through his job, he lost that too.



He was able to stay with his friend for a while but eventually left. As challenges mounted, he showed up at the steps of Mel Trotter Ministries. He landed at MTM because he couldn't find work in Kalamazoo despite visiting many temp agencies and being in and out of the hospital for cancer treatments.

Angela has been a monumental part of Rick's journey. She stuck with him from the beginning to help him get what he needed so together, they could end his homelessness once and for all. Angela knew for Rick, that meant housing. "I only want a chair, a bed, maybe a microwave, and a radio," he said. "Nothing fancy."

Angela walked with him each step of the way by scheduling and rescheduling his doctor appointments and helping him obtain all the necessary documents and income he'd need including a birth certificate, Social Security, food stamps, state ID, and medical insurance. She was his biggest advocate in getting him signed up for SSI and ultimately, into permanent housing.

Securing housing is not an easy task, but Angela communicated with various property managers to get Rick into a forever home. "I continued to lift up Mr. Edinburg...encouraged him to hold on



when he wanted to give up," said Angela. As she smiled and patted him on the sleeve, Rick looked at her and sighed a huge sense of relief, believing their collective prayers were about to be answered. "I'm excited to totally relax. That is all I care about," he said.

Even though the process was daunting, the day had finally come – Angela found Rick a place to call home! He almost didn't believe he had a place of his own. He said, "I'll believe it when I see it," and Angela reminded him, "believe it."

Rick signed the paperwork, was given a tour, and got handed the keys to his new place. Through tears, Angela said, "He is officially out of homelessness. One life at a time. Neither of us could have done it without our Lord and Savior. I am just a servant of God."



No effort is too small, and each of us can do our part. We could not do this work without our faithful volunteers!

VOLUNTEER OPPURTUNITIES

Get involved, make a difference.

By volunteering at Mel Trotter Ministries, you can help individuals and families experiencing homelessness feel loved, valued, and empowered to follow the calling God has placed on their lives.

There are many different areas where you can volunteer at MTM:

- Activities, hospitality, and events
- Administration
- Ministry
- Clinics
- Internships
- Facilities
- Food Services
- Thrift Stores
- Outreach

Scan to learn more about our
volunteer opportunities



A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR NURSING STAFF



The Mel Trotter Ministries' nursing and clinic staff do such critical work around the Mission day in and day out. Their hard work, dedication, and the compassionate care they provide to our guests does not go unnoticed. In 2022, 789 appointments were provided at the medical clinic and 1,041 New Hope Sobering Center visits were made. Thank you for all you do to demonstrate the compassion of Jesus Christ!

Our newly renovated New Hope Sobering Center, along with our medical, dental, vision, and chiropractic clinics provide a caring, non-judgmental, and compassionate environment for everyone who walks through the doors. We believe every person is

made in the image of a God who loves them and has plans for their lives, and therefore deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.

The New Hope Sobering Center aims to provide care for our most vulnerable guests—those who are profoundly intoxicated or under the influence of illicit substances. It offers a safe and quiet diversion from hospitals, jails, and the streets where individuals are provided with a dignified space to sleep, eat a nutritious meal, shower, and receive a change of clothing.

Any individual experiencing homelessness can make an appointment or walk-in for general medical exams, sick visits, and primary care referrals.

HEARTSIDE UPDATE

The Heartside Ministry Day Center has moved to 225 Commerce Ave.

This move to the main Mel Trotter Ministries campus will allow us, first and foremost, to continue providing radical hospitality for all guests, along with the amazing art therapy programming originated by Heartside Ministry. Secondly, it



will allow us to be the best possible stewards of your generous donations.

We are grateful for the impact Heartside Ministry has made in our community, and we are committed to carrying on its legacy.

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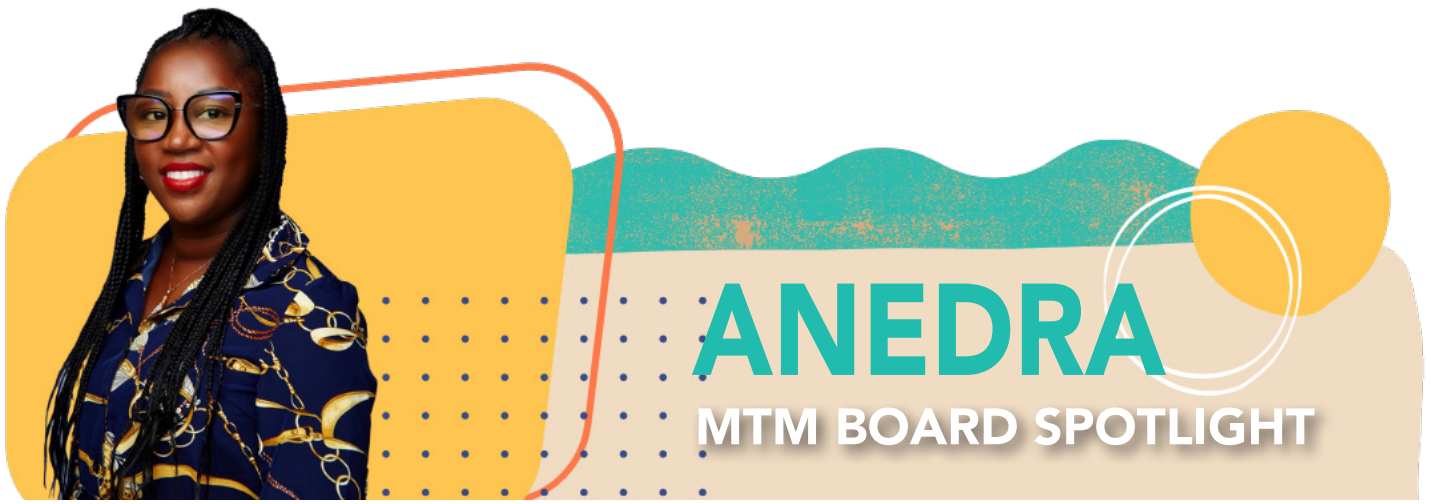
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Anedra Eatman was raised by a mother who served. Her mom volunteered at the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans and brought her children with her, where they learned what serving those in need looked like. As an adult, Eatman realized her passion for service was still in place and she has stepped into that passion at Mel Trotter Ministries.

Eatman is VP of People Operations at Nexben Inc., a role that has her taking care of employees in new ways as they transition out of the pandemic. MTM Immediate Past Chair, Tonya Moyer, a long-time friend, recognized Eatman's skills long ago and had invited her to ministry luncheons hosted by the ministry. But it wasn't until challenges given by her church had Eatman rethinking her dedication to serving those in need at Mel Trotter.

"The next time Tonya invited me to a luncheon, I really listened and learned. Much like the veterans my mom served when I was a child, the people at Mel Trotter were struggling," Eatman said. "I decided to get my hands dirty and volunteer. Being at Mel Trotter opened my heart and ears to needs there."

As a board member serving on the Finance Committee, Eatman puts her fundraising skills to use. She was part of the campaign to raise funds to revamp the men's living area, which hadn't been touched in 60 years.

"My fundraising and campaigning will actually change the way individuals experience Mel Trotter Ministries. I ask myself what I can do to champion the people served by MTM," she said. "When you give to Mel Trotter, you're touching so many people: children, women, men, those looking for more education, those looking for permanent housing.

The money stretches so many different ways."

She sees a future in which Mel Trotter Ministries connects on a national level with similar organizations and shelters, perhaps becoming a hub that connects people with family in other states or cities to help them develop relationships that can get them into permanent housing near family. That collaboration mirrors collaborations and partnerships with local organizations that have the same goal of ending homelessness. What happens locally can also happen nationally, she reasons.

Eatman sees MTM as headed in the right direction from a diversity standpoint and is eager to continue educating the public on what the ministry does, who it reaches, and how it can change the face of homelessness in Grand Rapids. She wants the public to see that Mel Trotter Ministries is a community within a community. "There is more going on than meets the eye at Mel Trotter," she said. "Love is patient; it takes time to develop and grow and nourish relationships with people experiencing homelessness. I really want people to see the growth and nourishment we see at Mel Trotter in the homeless community."

For Anedra Eatman, love is an action word. It's about giving to the community, helping those who need it most, building relationship with and coming to know each person she meets inside and outside the doors of MTM. "I rarely say 'no' to whatever Mel Trotter Ministries asks me to do," she said. "I put my 'Yes' out front before the Father, so when I'm asked I say yes."

Anedra Eatman began serving as MTM Board Chair in March of this year.

MEL TROTTER
MINISTRIES

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meltrotter.org

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season *of* hope

Join us on October 5 at the JW Marriot for our annual Season of Hope Gala with speaker Ashley Ward.



Ashley Ward is the Founder and CEO of W Talent Solutions, an executive and talent consulting firm based in Grand Rapids, MI. On a mission to create a socially conscious business, Ashley founded W Talent Solutions in 2017 to give ten percent of its profit to nonprofits that empower our community. She leads talent strategy, brand management, and national expansion efforts for the firm. Founding W Talent Solutions was a way in which she reclaimed her voice during adversity, domestic violence, and trauma.



To register,
scan the qr code or visit
meltrotter.org/seasonofhope