

THE TACOMA RESCUE MISSION:

HOPE FOR THE HOMELESS

ORAL INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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I'm Diana Jeffery, working for the Tacoma Rescue Mission, and Administrative Assistant to Dr. Liz Griffin. And, I've been with the Mission for 10 years.

Diana, could you tell us a little bit about what you have done since you've been employed by the Rescue Mission and some of the changes that you've seen in the last 10 years?

When I first came to the Mission, I was the Manager for the Family Shelter -- the emergency family shelter where we house people on a temporary basis while they are getting into their long-term housing; and jobs; and financial security. I worked there for about 2½ years -- that's at another location from here. I came down to this facility in the men's division ... for about 5 to 6 years I was Executive Secretary and helped in all seven departments at that time; in all the administrative area. And I was the Director of Donor Development for a year, working with the donors, and helping Mr. Ellis create that department to be able to help facilitate the Mission and their funding. I was the Capital Campaign Director for two years for a new campus that we hope will be able to "break ground" any day now. And now, I'm down at the men's facility again ... and helping ... being the Administrative Assistant to Dr. Griffin while she re-makes the curriculum for our program ... and getting to a better program ... and helping people change their lives more quickly.

Some of the things I've seen change in the Mission -- there are more families than 10 years ago. Being at the Family Shelter at that time, we only had 21 beds, and it was only a 3-night stay, and we weren't full all the time; we only ran one-half to three-fourths full. And the people were able to help get the help within the 3-

day time. Now, we have ... more than doubled -- we're at 48 beds and they can stay up to 14 days -- and they are always full. The number of children ... it's just terrible to see the number of children that are having to live without the shelter; without the homes. So, they are living with us ... and through all of our facilities we help them ... "where they're at" in their time of need; try to help them on a long-term basis, even through the Family Shelter. Being there for the short, 2-week time, we help them by having parenting classes; money management classes; help them ... in how to do their banking ... we try to make an impact on their lives even when we have them for that short a time. And, a lot of them come back later to ... volunteer; because they felt that compassion when they were with us. And they wanted to help after situated on their own; so they come back to help. And, in our New Life program -- we've had that for eight years now -- that is for the single men that are on their own; and, through that we have all the classes of: money management; anger management; how to back and how to go back and be doing personal hygiene correctly; how to keep your room; parenting classes also. So, we help the whole person: the body; the soul; the mind -- everything. It's not just "Get them off the alcohol or the drugs at the moment" and then say, "Go out and get it. You can do it" ...

(It's not getting the job that's the problem for the people. / It's changing the problems that they have ... that is the reason why they lose the jobs. So, we help them through a 6- to 9-month period, to replace the habits with better habits. And get them substance-free ... to be able to help them live a self-sustaining lifestyle from now on. Again, a lot of them come back to help us, too ... if they're not helping us, they come back to let us know what they're doing; we have an alumni club; so they can come back and share with each other, and uplift each other. And then, they have graduation, for those that have gone through the program. And the graduates are there; and they can come and be inspiring for the ones that are just

graduating, or the ones that are going through the program at the time. And, that is a real helpful way that they've been able to help in that respect.

How many come to the program each year, compared to, say, 10 years ago?

I think ... it's probably about the same. Since the beginning of 8 years ago -- we started slow, of course, like you usually do on anything new -- but you've made yourself; we didn't take it from someone else's and implement it here. We created it ourselves, because of the unique situation of the people that we're working with. So, to begin with, it started slow ... but, I would imagine in 6 to 9 months it was ... full ... So, we probably had 25 to 30 at that time. So, through ... kind of waves ... we were able to have a "full house" and help them, and then they graduated -- one time, we had twelve graduate. So, therefore, it goes right back down. And then, we have a new group of people come in. So, I would think it would probably be pretty consistent; right now we have 13. But, we are building that up, because of staff change; and just word-of-mouth ... that we thought we ... might be cut back ... of the ... program. People were not coming in ... and also, during staff change, not knowing how this is going to be arranged. We weren't accepting at that time, because we didn't want to have them come in ... and they were already unstable ... and come into an unstable program ... wasn't fair to them. So, we wanted to have it easier for them when they did come in ... So, now we have the 13 and it's growing each week.

What is the capacity of the New Life? How many people? And do have anybody who repeats the program? Or may they repeat it?

Up to 30 people. / Yes, sometimes they do -- last week,

as a matter of fact, we had one gentleman come back ... he had come through -- at that time it was a 6-months program -- he had gotten to his 5th month ... A lot of times they sabotage themselves; the fear of ... success. They sabotage themselves to where they're comfortable, and ... they drop out. Well, this might have been his case. And then he came back in; and we assessed the situation; we said, "Okay, come back in ..." So, he was in for about two months; and he dropped out. He said he had a job; So, as I said before, getting the job is not the problem; it's the attitude and the other internal problems they have. So, therefore, he was back again, asking us. And, that was, like, two years ago, last time he came ... So, we worked with him and said, "You know, on the program, these are some guidelines you have to follow; you have to go to these particular meetings outside of the building so many weeks -- like A.A. -- like three times a week, and bring us back notes that you have attended; and do your regular work; and attend the classes -- so, in a month, we'll assess, after 30 days, if you're real serious. He did make it. So, we do work with them on an individual, one-on-one basis; it's not that, "well, you were here before, you can't come again ..." We work with them one-on-one ... to see "where they're at".

Do most of them complete the program that start it?

It's similar to ... college. You have a large group of "freshmen" and the "sophomore" is smaller ... and juniors ... and then you have the "prizewinners" that graduate. It's the same here. You have a large group -- right now we have the 13 ... a few months from now, a few of them might drop out ... and, then again, they might not, too -- where this is 6-9 months; it's more rampant, and you see a quicker drop; where college, it's over years; and you don't miss "John" when he dropped out 3 years ago. So, it's about the same range as college -- and that's about the 25%

that graduate from the college, so we have about a 25% "graduation percentage". But, there again, depending upon, if you want graduation statistics, or success ... And, we go for the success. One year, we had a professor, from the University of Pennsylvania, here. He didn't need the 6-9 months; he came in -- we talked with him; worked with him, one-on-one; counseled with him and his wife; we had contacted the family, and they were able to work through their troubles, and he went back home.

Tell me, of those gentlemen whom we just talked with -- which of those do you think will complete the program, if you know them -- Richard?

Yes, I think he will. Yes, I definitely do.

And ... Lewis?

I think so -- he's so new that ... I really don't know ... I believe he will; I see good progress in him. I understand his background and ... I hope he does. I do not know, for him, because you have interviewed two brand-new ones so ... but, I think he will.

And, Duane?

That, again, I don't know ... I've not talked with Duane that often to know him, but I hope he will.

And, Brad?

Yes, I definitely think he will. Yes.

And, you're able to know the ones that will complete it after a month or two, and those that won't?

No, not always ... no. Like I say, you see them go through ... graduation ... they're anxious ... and, a lot of times, they mentally sabotage themselves. It's hard for some people to understand that ... But, some of us do it in a smaller way; we procrastinate. And, it's easier to put a flowery name like "procrastination" on it, instead of "sabotage". So, these men, they actually sabotage -- unknowingly. So, they could be your "star pupils"; and, 2-4 weeks before graduation comes, they leave ...

Do you think it could be because, once they graduate, the expectation would be more than they are able to cope with?

Yes, and that's where they sabotage themselves, because they don't believe in themselves to the point that, "I can do it on my own . I've been this way for 40 years, And now, 6-9 months I've been in this program, they've assisted me in getting my ... style changed. But, now, I have to prove to myself." And that's one thing we tell them in the graduation -- this is not the hard part ... From day one, when you step out of here, on your own, that's when you really see if you've graduated; because that's when the program starts is going through it and doing all your daily ... lifestyle ... on your own; and being able to make those progresses; when you get upset, instead of "blowing up", you take a deep breath and handle it the correct way ... and communicate. And work through that program instead of just walking away, and doing some damaging things to yourself, through substance.

And, this program started 8 years ago?

Yes.

And would you say, perhaps, then, 25% have completed it successfully? And, then, have gone back into the mainstream of society; and they're able to live on their own now?

I wouldn't say all who graduated are able to be on their own ... some do falter ... But, I would say, the majority of those who have graduated have been on their own, and have stayed on their own. You'll have some who -- just like college -- when they graduate, they don't use that field that they graduated in; these men don't use all those skills that they graduated with. So, not all of them have stayed substance-free; some of them didn't handle the situation right if they were angry ... they didn't work through it; they fell back into the old habit of ... using the substance ...

And, then, what happens to them, Diana?

Sometimes, they come back, and they have counseling with us; and we work through that with them again. But, sometimes, they just need to come in and say, "Hey, I blew it ...", and we put a little "self-believability" in them again. And then, they go out and they do it fine after that. But, there are some that don't; some that we never see again ... whether they're successfully living, or they aren't. And, some that do fall back to the substance and, it hurts us; but, a lot of times, it's -- as most people know -- that it's the timing that's right. Through education ... if you're too young and rambunctious, you don't have success in college; so they might ... a little bit later in life. Same thing here. Sometimes, the first time through, it doesn't grasp; so, therefore, they might need to go out on the street. When they grow from the program, being so helpful; and they see that self-esteem rise ... and they go back onto the street -- they know that they made the wrong choice ... They know that this



is the place where they need to get the help that they really do need. And that's, a lot of times, why they come back. And, we ask them, "Why did you come back?" And, they said, "As soon as I left, I knew that I needed to come back here, because this is not getting me anywhere positive in life." So, they do come back because of that; so, that's why we have them come back into the program.

So, the change you've seen has been more families that are homeless over the past 10 years ...?

That would be the more noticeable ... sect ... You always have had your single men ... you always have had a little ... number of single women and the largest boom that you see is the families. Another area that is largely seen and noticed is the mentally ill. Before, they had laws that they would have them in "safe places", they would be able to get the help that they needed, and the assistance that they needed -- and the care they needed -- and now, through the law changes, they aren't. They call it "warehousing" people ... Well, now they turn them out on the street, and they have to fend for themselves, and they don't know how. They just cannot function on the street; it's not a regular life, like a lot of people ... and they have to learn how to function in a regular life ... and this is not the life, on the street; it's called "normal", or "regular". So, they come to us; we try to assist them through being able to have a place to eat ... and clothing ... and a night's stay ... and sometimes, we're able to counsel with them to help them to go to the right place that they need ... but, they need a longer-term -- like, a payee situation ... where they have a home to go to, and they have someone taking care of the funds for them for their meals; their groceries; their utilities. We are having a facility being made, and it's starting this June ... and it's an s.r.o. -- single-residency-occupancy. And, through that, like the gentleman that we were talking

about ... that we're his payee ... He would go; then we would pay his bill; would have the meals, or the groceries paid for ... and a lot of the time, it's the low-income or those that don't have jobs; but they do have some funds; and they would stay there under our guidance. And it would be a program ... and they would have classes, also. And we would be able to help them take care of themselves, in that situation.

How large is the facility going to be?

I don't know the number ... every time I hear, it changes a little bit ... because it's still under architectural drawing stage. But, we'll be able to have, I'm sure ... 30-40 in there, I'm assuming. But, we're ... not trying to focus in on what we see now ... and help put a band-aid on that problem; we're trying to help the whole concept of the person ... and look forward to the future. We want to see, how can we help them for a long-term lifestyle change. And through that, we have the s.r.o.; we have a place where they can go to; there's no place in Tacoma like this; the only ones we saw were in Texas or in California. And, we've gone down there; we've checked it out; we saw how it was run; and we brought it back ... And now, we're trying to implement that into one of the buildings that was donated to us -- like 6 to 7 years ago -- and we were trying to find some way to use that ... and now that we've seen the s.r.o., now this is what we're going to be doing.

And this will be for people who do have some source of income -- low-income?

Yes. Yes.

Diana, is there anything else you would like to add?

No, I think I have just about covered everything.

I would like to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk with me. It sounds like you are all doing a wonderful job here. Thank you, again.