

# Metropolitan Social Services

Special Edition - Stories from the Front Lines

October 2016



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## Masthead

Last month, the U.S. Census Bureau released the 2015 American Community Survey. It is good news that Davidson County's poverty rate for all people decreased significantly, from 19.9% in 2014 to 16.9% in 2015, reflecting a downward trend across the U.S. Despite the improvement, Davidson County still has about 111,230 residents who lived in poverty during 2015. Disparity continued, with poverty even worse by characteristics such as race/ethnicity, age, educational attainment, etc. MSS has a [Poverty-Income Update](#) from the 2015 American Community Survey available online.

Metropolitan Social Services (MSS) provides services to many of Davidson County's low-income residents. In this newsletter, we share two stories - one that had a positive ending and one that, so far, has not. The needs are often far greater than the resources available (The customers described in these stories gave permission for their information to be shared.)

We invite you to read these stories and to consider the experience if it happened to you or your family.

In addition, this newsletter contains information about how MSS and other organizations provided assistance as residents of the Ft. Negley encampment moved to other locations in July.

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## From Eviction to Stability - Thanks from a grateful family

To Metro Social Services

From Sharika McMillan

Our family would love to thank Metro Social Services for all that they have done in assisting my family with finding permanent housing. It feels like your department saved us from being homeless and hungry. You have saved us from the hardship of trying to find housing that is so scarce.

We did not know which way to go until Metro Social Services and its Social Worker stepped in and guided us along the way. Our landlord sold our place, right up under our noses, so we were out of a place with little advance notice. We were not behind on rent payments but we did not see this coming.

Thank God for Metro Social Services because you all jumped right in and helped us with housing. My five kids and I would not have been able to pay for a hotel, nor did I have any family members that we could stay with until we found another place to stay. It had gotten to a point where I did not know where our next meal was coming from.

All of a sudden, the blessing from the Lord started pouring down. Metro Social Service stepped in and gave us food and then gave us a food card to go to Kroger's so that I could feed my five kids. While all of this is going on, I got sick and I thought I was about to lose my kids and my husband. Then Metro Social Services stepped in and gave us a hotel room at Super 8 on Spence Lane (and we had to have two rooms due to the size of my family).

When you do not have a stable place to stay and it seems that you are about to lose everything, you really do not know how that feels until you go through it. Metro Social Services lifted some of the stress off me, so I was able to get my high blood pressure under control and focus on what our family

needed to do come out of this hole.

After getting a caseworker (Mr. Smith), things really changed. Mr. Smith talked with my kids and they even seemed a little happier. He also talked with my husband about getting another job. The following week Mr. Smith called my husband with a lead on a cooking job. My husband went and filled out for the job and got the job the next week. I was already working at Loews Vanderbilt Hotel cleaning rooms, but this additional income is going to help us afford a place of our own. After that, MSS got my old bill from NES and arranged for it to be paid it off so that when we find a place that would not hold us back.

While working with Mr. Smith, he gave us several tasks to complete on our own. The one that I remember the most is calling and going out to find places to stay and check for vacancies. After doing this for the last several weeks, I know about places in Nashville that I had no idea where they were located.



We finally found a place after being at Super 8 for the last two months. The assistance from MSS was not over yet. Not only did they pay for the hotel stay, the arrears at NES, the security deposit and first month's rent, they also brought beds for everyone and pots and pans, towels and other household items.



MSS, you have to help us move forward and become whole and have a reason to keep sticking in there. It is nice to know that there is an agency in this city that truly cares and is willing to help you, so again - with all my heart, my family and I thank you so much.

The McMillan Family - Sharika, Anthonie Sr., On'drea, Anthonie Jr., Zen'drea, Ladia, Anthonie III, Shondria

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## Can ANYBODY help Rachel?

A few years ago, Rachel and her husband, Henry, and came to Metro Social Services with several of their children. They worked, but had no specialized skills so they were always at low paying jobs. They just need a little assistance and supportive case management, which MSS provided. From time to time, Rachel and Henry needed a little help . . . until 2016.

Henry had to spend a few months in jail, due to an old felony from many years ago. In the meantime, Rachel and her 10 children lost their housing when the Section 8 landlord refused to renew their lease (possibly because of the large family size, which continued to grow with the addition of a 2-year old and an infant).

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*A few weeks ago, Rachel's family came to the offices of Metro Social Services to receive services and were there during lunchtime.*

*The hungry family was served lunch by MSS employees, Carol Wilson and Nicole Rucker.*

*While this is not a typical service, the meal was provided because of the extreme need of the family.*

After the family moved out of the Section 8 housing, Rachel could not find another property that would accept her family and then her Section 8 eligibility expired on July 31. They have tried to get public housing but have not been able to do so.

This family's challenges are enormous, particularly without sufficient income, with 10 children ranging in age from the baby to the teenager. Right now, Henry is staying at the Men's Campus of the Nashville Rescue Mission, while Rachel and the children at the Women's Campus of the Nashville Rescue Mission across town.

After Henry was released from jail, he is required to work and provide community service, and had a job paying \$8.50 (far from adequate to support a family of 12). He recently got a job paying slightly more, but because it is through a staffing agency he receives no benefits and his hours are uncertain. In addition, transportation is difficult for Henry and the rest of his family without a vehicle. Sometimes they have gone to churches or other organizations to obtain funds and sometimes these organizations make referrals back to Metro.

Right now, Rachel is receiving a substantial amount in Food Stamps, but she is unwilling to apply to apply for Families First/TANF because she fears government intrusion in her life.

After MSS set up appointments for both Rachel and Henry to be screened for mental health problems at a local mental health service provider, Rachel went to her appointment and received a prescription (that she has not yet filled). By that time, Henry had become ill and was in the hospital (and has since been released).

All of the children are enrolled in and attending school, except for the two youngest. Without child care, it is difficult for Rachel to look for work or to go to appointments for various services. The same reluctance Rachel has to apply for Families First/TANF also keeps her from seeking a child care certificate for the two youngest children.

Rachel has received notice that her time at the Family Life Center will be ending in another week. They have concerns that Rachel has not done enough to help herself. While Rachel possibly could have done more to help herself and her family, it is not clear that she has the capability to do so for a number of reasons. When a family is this large, has very limited resources, has challenges in obtaining resources, without supportive family or sufficient income, in circumstances where systems are not designed to meet a magnitude of simultaneous problems, the options are limited.

**And so many more . . .**

Of course, there is much more to this family's story, but the family is not the point of the story. There are many more families and many more stories, including the family with 12 children or the family with 8 children, or families with other kinds of problems.

There are common features in all the stories: difficulty finding jobs that pay enough to support a family, lack of safe and decent housing the family can afford, challenges with transportation, child care, medical treatment . . . and the list goes on.

In the meantime, these children and many others across Nashville are likely to experience the Adverse Childhood Experiences created by the toxic stress of poverty. They are witnessing parents who cannot find decent jobs or adequate housing for the family. They see parents split into different locations, dependent on the charity of others. Without intervention, the generational cycle of poverty will continue.

Metro Social Services will continue to work with all the Rachels and Henrys who seek services. However, resources are very limited and the unmet needs are tremendous. People in these circumstances need far more than is available in the community because the human/social service delivery system does not provide the level of services needed to provide meaningful help. Organizations will continue trying to help Rachel, but there are not enough resources to provide what this family needs.

The real question is how many more of these families are in our community. When the needs are extreme and the systems are not sufficient to address them, damage to the family will occur. **In the long-term, what is the long-term cost of the suffering, loss of opportunity and other damages that occur through extreme poverty?**

For additional information on how poverty affects children, please see [Children, Poverty and Lasting Effects: Transforming Disadvantaged Communities](#); and the section on "Consequences of Childhood Poverty" (page 129) in the [2015 Community Needs Evaluation](#).

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## Ft. Negley Summary

For many years, some homeless people have lived in various types of encampments, not only in Nashville but also throughout the United States. Sometimes these are on public property, others on private property and vary in size and organization. For a number of different reasons, homeless camps move or close.



A few years ago, efforts began to close the homeless encampment at Ft. Negley in Nashville that was in same area as the Ft. Negley Visitors Center and Park and the Adventure Science Center. In July 2016, there was a well-publicized closure of this encampment. At that time, there were 54 people who lived in the Ft. Negley camp.

Beginning in March 2016, MSS employees went regularly to the encampment, and most residents did not believe that the Ft. Negley encampment would close. This was complicated by misinformation and rumors that traveled through the Ft. Negley camp. People who lived at the Ft. Negley encampment were hesitant to address the situation, even though the outreach team continued to inform them that the closure would happen and efforts to identify housing should begin then.

After talking with each resident and discussing their stories with them, MSS identified their housing history, their personal barriers to housing, efforts to obtain housing, employment situation or other income and working with the community to help each resident identify housing.

Metropolitan Social Services (MSS) and other organizations were regularly at the camp during the weeks leading up to the closure to help identify alternative housing. MSS provided case management to 12, with partner agencies that served an additional 5. There were 5 others housed at Green Street with the goal of having their own tiny homes, including the gentleman with two cats who now lives in his own tiny home.

With the help of the Downtown Partnership, Traveler's Aid and the Mental Health Cooperative, 5 more individuals were provided bus travel arrangements for the destinations they selected (Memphis, California and Arkansas). One woman moved to the Family Life Center, the women's facility operated by the Nashville Rescue Mission. Six others left to go stay in hotels or motels. One of the people living at another campsite receives his Section 8 voucher in late September and another person at a campsite continues to work with MSS and should receive her Section 8 voucher in the future.

During the months the MSS staff and partner organizations continued to work with people who lived at Ft. Negley, including those who had been placed in hotels/motels, a wide array of services designed to meet their individual needs. Services included housing navigation, counseling, paying rent/deposits for those who obtained housing, household supplies/welcome kits, bus passes/transportation, food, hotel vouchers, assistance with necessities (clothes, shoes, suitcases, jobs, etc.), assistance getting

birth certificates and IDs, household.

MSS/Metropolitan Homelessness Commission thank the partnering organizations that worked to provide assistance and facilitate housing for residents, including Metro Nashville Police Department, Metro Parks & Recreation, Mental Health Cooperative, Open Table, Operation Stand Down and Urban Housing Solutions.

Many of the former residents of the Ft. Negley encampment expressed gratitude for the assistance of MSS and other agencies, especially about how they were helped throughout the transition. One resident compared his previous experience at being removed from a homeless camp as being “treated like an animal.” He said that during the closure of Ft. Negley, he had been treated with respect and wanted to thank especially the Mayor and MSS for what they had done to show they cared about the homeless people. He indicated that was especially important to him because he is a military veteran.

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Preventing and ending homelessness is a complex and long-term issue. The [Metropolitan Homelessness Commission](#) plans and coordinates efforts to address homelessness. It involves advocates, nonprofit organizations, for-profit businesses, government agencies and the general public to collaborate on solutions for homelessness in Nashville. For plans, strategies and additional information about addressing the issue of homelessness, please contact the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission at 615-880-2360.

The Homelessness Commission developed a community campaign in 2013 - [How's Nashville](#), dedicating to ending chronic homelessness.

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