



# HOMELESS & HOUSING COALITION OF KENTUCKY

Floyd County Homeless Shelter, Martin, KY - “There needs to be more housing opportunity around here. There’s – there’s more people needing housing than there is housing. People don’t think that’s an issue in these rural areas, but it is.”

Jody Adams is the program facilitator at the Maddiwar House of Hope, a shelter for men and women located in the tiny town of Martin, Kentucky tucked in neatly against a kudzu-covered mountain. There’s a freshly built gazebo out back providing shade in the summer, picnic tables, and a basketball hoop attached to the side of the building. Inside, there are two immaculate shower rooms, a men’s and women’s, both spotlessly clean and stocked with all the necessities, including clean towels. There’s a laundry room which, at the time of our visit, was on track to get upgraded with an industrial set of machines, and a kitchen with a sink, microwave, and refrigerator. “We don’t need to really cook much here on a stove”, Jody said humbly with a shrug and a smile. “The church ladies and those groups feed us three times a day, big meals, dessert and everything after supper. Some people who end up here are real skinny when they arrive, but put on 20 pounds during their stay.” “It’s true, look at me!” a voice calls from the next room, and a round of laughter erupts.



*Jody Adams, Program Facilitator at Maddiwar House of Hope - photo: Chet White*



# HOMELESS & HOUSING COALITION OF KENTUCKY

Operating off of a generous donation from the Maddiwar family, grants, donations from community members, Christian Appalachian Project (CAP), Kentucky River Community Care (KRCC), and a few other non-profits, House of Hope offers shelter and wraparound services for up to 12 people at any time in the Martin area. “It’s generally supposed to be a 60-day program, but some folks need a little longer and that’s ok. If we can accommodate them, we do.” The shelter offers, aside from the aforementioned bounteous food, counseling, a staff of on-site social workers, help with getting signed up for healthcare, sobriety services, and more. “Mental health issues, substance abuse issues – those are what bring a lot of our residents here”, Adams said. “Substance abuse is a big one”, he continues. “Either they’re directly related to it, or their family is. It’s a toxic environment that can cause homelessness really quickly. Mental health problems, as well. Support systems, too – people lose those support systems, they break down – when the substance abuse or mental issues get to be too much for the family to be able to handle. The culture here is for your family to take care of you, but sometimes when one or both of those things get too out of hand, the family has to kind of throw their hands up.” Adams also keenly observes, “mental health issues cause homelessness. But homelessness can also cause mental health issues - they go hand in hand, one can definitely cause the other.”

“I’m about three weeks in here”, Johnny M. tells us when we begin our conversation. He’s seated on a neatly made bed with plaid sheets and a warm, festive holiday themed throw covering the top. “I have to sleep down here on the bottom”, he jokes. “I’m not as young as I used to be.” He’s wearing a fleece lined University of Kentucky jacket, all in the trademark Kentucky blue, with UK socks to match. Johnny speaks so quietly we have to lean in for our conversation. His voice is soft, and he speaks carefully, choosing his words before he decides what to say. Johnny is comfortable sharing his experience, and begins frankly. “We need more resources. There’s got to be help for people. You may be in bad shape, but you’ll turn around and see somebody in even worse shape than you. It’s hard out there, and people at the top don’t know. And if they do know...” he pauses, “if they do know, they don’t care.” Johnny ended up at House of Hope after his best friend, whom he was living with, passed away. The friend’s girlfriend didn’t want Johnny living there anymore, and, in his grief, Johnny decided to make it easier on both of them and leave as quickly as possible.





# HOMELESS & HOUSING COALITION OF KENTUCKY



*Johnny M., Resident at Maddiwar House of Hope - photo: Chet White*

Delighted with his care at House of Hope, Johnny said he felt like “even though leaving was hard, I made the right choice. I’m getting help here I needed – you know – counselors, social workers, help with paperwork – all that kind of thing. The food here is so good, too! I have to skip a meal to make room for the next one some days.” He smiles genuinely, chuckles, and rubs his belly in approval.

When asked about housing availability and affordability in eastern Kentucky, Johnny’s answer was grim, and direct. “You wouldn’t think it’s as bad as it is, but it is. There’s a lot of people around here with no homes, and don’t have a clue where to turn.” After taking a pause to lament the “absolute nonsense” that is Facebook, Johnny continues. “It’s hard out there. People don’t know which way to go. When you try to get help, it’s so hard and confusing, they almost seem like they make it hard on purpose. People are sleeping under bridges because they can’t figure out how to get help with housing, food stamps – all that.” Johnny has lived in several states, cities and towns, rural areas and packed neighborhoods. His perspective on the commonalities he has seen is practical. “There’s got to be more shelters just like this where you’re safe and fed and can get better – whatever kind of better you need to get. But there’s also got to be places regular people can afford to live afterwards. Nobody wants to stay in a



# HOMELESS & HOUSING COALITION OF KENTUCKY

shelter forever, we all need our own space. But even if you're ready to leave here, a lot of times there's nowhere you can go that you can pay for. So then what do you do? Go back to the rough places with bad habits and then you start all over again. It's hard, too, physically and mentally...and it gets harder." Johnny looks forward to getting his own place like many of the folks at House of Hope. Injured at work years ago, his only income is Disability, and he knows he must live modestly to make it work. "That's one of the big problems, being afraid if you can't keep up with it. Finding somewhere I know I can pay for every month is going to be hard, but if I can find one, it will be a huge relief. People do better when they can live one place and not always worry about getting thrown out, you know?"

We met Stacy in the women's dorm. Dressed up in fun, jangly jewelry, color coordinated layers topped with a sleek leather jacket, and with a full face of meticulously applied make-up, she greeted us with a wide smile, and welcomed us warmly into her room. She currently occupies the bottom bunk in one of the rooms' four sturdy wooden bunk beds, made up with zebra print throws and pillows, and plastic tubs for storage. Stacy jumped right in.



*Stacy H., Resident at Maddiwar House of Hope - photo: Chet White*





# HOMELESS & HOUSING COALITION OF KENTUCKY

“I went from everything to nothing”, she told us squarely. “It happened just like that, too. It can happen to anybody - we should have places like this everywhere, because you just never know when the bottom is gonna drop out.” Stacy discussed a life made difficult by a drug addiction that was fueled by a years-long abusive marriage she had no idea how to escape. “I didn’t have nowhere to go. Even when I was working and could pay rent, everything was too expensive if it was close enough to work. I couldn’t leave, I was scared to be homeless, so I kept doing drugs and things to deal with it. There was no way out for me, I was scared all the time.” Stacy is a returning resident at House of Hope; she “got scared of the stability and ran” a couple of times before settling in this time, now for two months. At the time of our interview, she was 60 days clean and sober, and happily looking forward to a better future. Giving an inside perspective on housing insecurity and availability in rural areas, Stacy shared her observation about families living under a local bridge because there was nowhere for them to go all together. “You can’t afford rent here if you need to be in town. Those families are just trying to stay together, but there’s nowhere for them to go – it’s awful.” Stacy teared up, recalling her own struggles keeping her family together in times of housing insecurity. Unable to bring her son with her to House of Hope after rehab, Stacy expressed great comfort that he was able to live with his mamaw, “I know he’s always safe and warm and fed – all that good stuff”, but also sorrow in having to leave him behind. “It was the worst feeling in the world, the hardest thing I ever done, not having a place to take him, but I had to come here to get better, get things turned around.” “He calls me every night, tells me he’s proud of me. He’s gonna graduate in May, and I am so proud of him, too.” Stacy talked about getting her own place soon, mentioning how hard that can be for people with criminal records, especially drug related felonies. “I know a lot of good people, people you can trust and count on. They made a mistake 20 years ago with some pot, some weed or something, and now it’s almost impossible for them to get a nice place to live.” “These are good people”, she reiterated, frustrated by the facts. “Nobody should not be able to get a place to live if they’re working and can take care of it, just because they made a mistake that didn’t even hurt nobody.” As we began to wrap up, Stacy mentioned a life-long hobby of writing, and that being at House of Hope has given her the inner peace to be able to do so again. She brought out a well-loved notebook and out loud, read some deeply emotional verses written in pen, pencil, pages dog-eared, erased, and pages written back over. Her poems speak gently about growth, self-discovery, self-correction, love, and the universal struggle to find oneself. “If I slip and fall, I’ll stand back up, and I’ll stand tall. I will hold my head up high, I’ll wipe the tears away, because tomorrow is the beginning of another new day.”