

The Buffalo Burrito Project

Recent Statistics

Affordable rent for Erie County is \$457/month, which is \$247 lower than fair market rent for a 2-bedroom apartment in Buffalo (\$704).

The National Low Income Housing Coalition identifies \$13.54 as the average hourly wage needed to afford a 2-bedroom apartment in Buffalo.

The average hourly wage in Buffalo is \$9.91.

So often, our homeless friends teach us, inspire us, and touch our hearts. This month, we want to help you experience what we see and what we experience each Tuesday on the streets.

We met "M" on the streets in the late summer. He was a young man, in his thirties, and homeless. He was always gentle, polite, and well spoken. He had no place to go – the shelters were full and he said that he might be able to get into a sliding-scale rent apartment by December. He lived in one of the pocket parks on a bench. He was always with a girl, who found placement in a shelter run by Catholic sisters in early fall, so at least she was out of the cooling night air and elements. "M" however, had no options. On cold and blustery nights, we worried about him. We gave him a street card and explained various options to him, but he said he had been to all the shelters and there was no space for a man. It's easier for women to get into shelters because there's less women on the streets, plus everyone is in a hurry to get them off the streets. Men, however, quickly run out of shelter options

"M" took up residence in a pocket park. There were a couple of other guys who lived on the benches scattered around the park. As the nights became colder – and longer – we became more concerned for all of the men on the benches. We found "M" every week, patiently waiting, looking forward to the burritos and lunch and Gatorade we gave him. One night, he asked for a hockey-sized duffel bag in which to keep his very few worldly things. One of our Street Team members had just the bag he wanted in the basement; we brought it to "M" the following week. Each week, we outfitted "M" with whatever he needed- a winter coat, a warm sweatshirt, socks, gloves, underwear, warm blankets. "M" was always a gentleman – kind, patient, respectful, very thankful for what we gave him, very understanding if we didn't have what he requested. He always engaged us in wonderful conversations. "M" had a bright mind. One week, he was sitting at a picnic table in the park reading a beautiful, large white Bible. He said he found it at a Salvation Army – he thought it was an old sacramental Altar Bible from a church somewhere and felt badly that no one wanted it. He showed me pictures in it of many different popes – one, an unusual picture of a pope several papacies ago. "M" loved that Bible, and after he rescued it, we often found him in the park reading the Bible. Someone on the Street Team even provided "M" with a flashlight – for safety primarily, but also quite useful as a reading light.

November came and brought with it some bitter cold nights, as well as some windy, rainy nights – the type of damp chill that settles into the bones. On nights like this, I return home shivering and chilled after a burrito run and can only warm up after a long, hot shower followed by

sleeping with many blankets, sweatpants, and lama-hair socks for warmth. On those nights, as I drift off to sleep, I think about and pray for all those we have just fed, all those who don't have the luxury of a hot shower, a warm bed, a roof over their heads. All those like "M" who literally have no place to go. Despite these struggles, "M" always remained upbeat, looking forward to seeing us, enjoying the burritos, staying optimistic, saying that December was really just a few weeks away, he'd survive, he would be able to get housing. "M" was always smiling, always encouraged. About the same time, one of his park-mates, "E", another mild-mannered, very sweet, older man with an accent, was having some difficulty. He kept losing the sleeping bags and blankets we gave him every week. We started to wonder what was really happening to them. That night, we found "M" at his table with his Bible, and "E" shivering on a park bench with out his blankets. I was talking to "M" and a few other Street Team members went over to help "E." They came back and said, " "E" says his blankets are getting stolen during the day." "M" stood up for "E." "It's true," M said, "He's having a really hard time. His blankets really are getting stolen. He needs a better hiding place for them or something. He's maybe too trusting." We gave "E" another sleeping bag and some blankets and I talked to him about finding a better hiding place, maybe even talking to the nearby church, asking for help. "E" asked if we had a large plastic bag to keep his things in – and to keep them dry, since it was drizzling, one of those cold November drizzles. At the same time, "M" asked if we might have any of those hot packs to put in his boots and gloves to keep him warm. We had none of those items with us, but as the temperatures plummeted, as the drizzle soaked into us and the wind was picking up, we didn't have the heart to make them wait another week. I promised that I would bring the items tomorrow night. They said they would be there - "no other place to be."

The next night, a Street Team member and I gathered up tarps, contractor bags, and the "hot hands" packs. We picked up some chili to give to "M" and "E" but we also thought we would stop by and give chili, granola bars and water to "J" under the 190 and chili, food and a tarp to "T" who lives on a concrete slab on the ground near a parking lot not far from the lake. We delivered the chili to "J" and then stopped to see "T" and gave him food and the tarp. The wind was howling and whipping the rain almost sideways at times. It was a nasty night and the weather channel was predicting freezing rain. We drove to the pocket park. There was "E" on his bench huddled deep inside his sleeping bag, which was now wet with rain. We gave him the contractor bags, chili, granola bars, bottled water and a blessing. We will never forget that beautiful smile, gleaming out from deep inside that sleeping bag.

Then, we turned to find "M." He had constructed a crude shelter against the fence of the playground in the park. He had cardboard on the ground and a tarp tied up to the fence to form half a tent, sheltering him from wind and rain. The tarp had been working most of the time, but on this night, the problem was that the wind was coming from an unusual direction, and the tarp was failing him- the rain was being driven right into his hapless home, soaking his blankets. We called "M"'s name and found him inside his makeshift shelter.

And what was "M" doing on this night – a night of freezing rain and failing shelter, a night of whipping wind and literally not one place to turn to within an entire city? "M" was reading his Bible, that beautiful, old Altar Bible he had rescued from a second hand store. "M" was so happy to see us. We gave him the "hot hands" and the chili, granola bars and water. He explained that his tarp had been helpful most nights, but that the wind direction was different, and it wasn't

working. We offered him a second tarp and some contractor bags, and offered to help build up the shelter so it would protect him. He said it was okay, that it worked most nights and that he would survive this time.

Then the other Street Team member said, "Hey, I have some thick leather gloves you can have, but they're fingerless, so I don't know if they would be of any use to you. If they are, you can have them."

And "M" then said the words we will never forget. "M" who had no place to go, who was being pelted by freezing rain, whose only worldly possessions fit into a hockey bag we had given him a few weeks ago... "M" said,

"I sure could use those gloves. You see, I can't turn the pages of my Bible with regular gloves, and those gloves sure would keep my hands warm while I read my Bible"

Gratitude to God in all circumstances? Praising God regardless of lot in life? Finding blessings every day? "M" taught us what Thanksgiving and Thanks-living truly is, as he lay in the rain, under a tarp, reading his Bible.

Be joyful always, pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (I Thessalonians 5:16-18)

11 Blessings Easy To Overlook *(from AFA Journal, November 2013)*

Clean Water: 884 million people lack access to clean water.

Infant Survival: Dirty water and inadequate sanitation access, combined with other hygiene issues, cause the death of more than 1600 children under the age of 5 years every day. That's more than the under-age 5 deaths from AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined. *(From World Vision Beyond 5 campaign)*

A Bathroom: 40% of the world does not have a toilet

Electricity: 1.6 billion people live without any electricity

Shelter: 2.5 million people in America are homeless and 640 million children worldwide do not have shelter

Food: 28% of children in developing countries are estimated to be underweight or have stunted growth

Your Stove: 2.5 billion people use fuel wood, charcoal or animal dung to meet their energy needs

Regular Income: Most of humanity lives on less than \$10 a day

Education: Nearly 1 billion people cannot read a book or write their names

Health: 2.2 million children die each year because they are not immunized. Annually, there are 300-500 million cases of malaria including 1 million fatalities.

Freedom to Worship God: 100 million Christians face persecution every day across the world. More than 400 Christians die for their faith every day.

Help us make a difference one burrito at a time! Volunteers are always welcome in the kitchen, including children with a parent or guardian present. Street Team volunteers must be able to walk 4-5 miles, be of at least high school age, and attend a Safety Seminar first. For more information, please call Deborah Tyler at 695-7727 or email carpediem318@gmail.com.

Donations are always needed to sustain this mission ministry:

FINANCIAL DONATIONS ARE GREATLY NEEDED AT THIS TIME: Checks can be made out to The Buffalo Burrito Project and placed in the plate at St. Paul or mailed to The Buffalo Burrito Project c/o St. Paul. All financial donations are used to purchase ingredients, food wrap and coffee. Unless specifically indicated, financial donations are not used to purchase clothing, sleeping bags, tents, etc.

INGREDIENTS ARE ALWAYS NEEDED including 10" flour tortillas, canned black or pinto beans, canned chicken stock, tomato paste, mild or medium salsa, shredded Cheddar or Mexican-blend cheese, non-refrigerated pudding cups, packaged cookies or treats, plastic spoons, brown paper bags.

HOTEL-SIZED TOILETRIES are always welcome to make up our hygiene kits. Please remember us when you travel!!!

CLOTHING DONATIONS are welcome but **PLEASE KINDLY LIMIT DONATIONS TO MENS' CLOTHING ONLY** – men's underwear (M, L, XL boxers or briefs); men's athletic white or wool socks; men's t-shirts (white or screened); men's sweatshirts and sweatpants; men's sweaters; men's winter coats; men's winter boots; men's winter gloves or mittens, hats, scarves, blankets, sleeping bags, tents, tarps

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*Love is patient. Love is kind.
It does not envy, it does not boast.
It is not proud. It is not rude
It is not self-seeking.
It is not easily angered.
It keeps no record of wrongs.
Love does not delight in evil,
but rejoices with the truth.
Love always protects, always trusts,
always hopes, always perseveres.
Love bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never ends. Love Never Fails.*

I Corinthians 13:4-8