

# The Buffalo Burrito Project

*In 2014, 14% of American households experienced food insecurity, defined as the uncertainty of having or being able to acquire enough food to meet every family's members needs because of insufficient money or other resources.*

*(US Department of Agriculture)*

The Buffalo Burrito Project has been serving the homeless, poor and hungry people on the streets of Buffalo every Tuesday night, year-round (regardless of weather conditions) for the past 8 ½ years. We cannot begin to express enough gratitude for each and every one of you who support us – those who make burritos in the kitchen, those who walk the streets, those who donate finances, ingredients and clothing and those who remember to pray daily for those who are homeless and poor as well as for the safety of our street team. We also thank the organizations who partner with us: St. Paul for housing and supporting our operations, mission and ministry, ElderWood at Hamburg, whose residents make burritos with me every second Tuesday of the month, ElderWood Assisted Living in Williamsville whose residents make cookies for us twice each month to hand out on the streets, North Presbyterian for annually inviting us to speak to their congregation and annually remembering us in their mission donations, North Park Lutheran for yearly remembering us through their mission focus and donations, ElderWood at Williamsville for making the Burrito Project the recipient of their holiday drive, and many other churches and organizations who send donations to help us maintain our ministry and mission. The Burrito Project started out as a humble dream and concept and thanks to each and every one of you – our faithful volunteers, supporters and partnering organizations, the Burrito Project, has grown into a very large operation. Above all, we give thanks to God for His blessings and grace for it ) is only through Him, in Him and by Him that we are now become.

It has been a very challenging winter on the streets of Buffalo. In January, Governor Cuomo passed a new law stating that shelters must be open for all persons to receive “a hot and a cot” (ie, a bed and a hot meal for the night), no questions asked, (ie, no intake process), whenever the temperature falls below 32° Fahrenheit. In Buffalo, this practice, known as Code Blue, has been in effect whenever temperatures are below 15°F. This law had good intentions as it aimed to keep homeless people from freezing to death on the streets (a sad situation that happens every year), but it did result in some unforeseen consequences: while the threshold of 32° made sense and was reasonable in New York City, it put much operational, logistical and financial strain on shelters in Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse as it made nearly every night a “Code Night” in these cities. In

Buffalo, two different codes developed as the law was applied and put into practice: on the traditional Code Blue nights (below 15°), two shelters were open as usual and a van came around and picked up and transported people to those shelters. ON what became known as “Code Cuomo” (temperatures between 15° and 32°), one shelter was always open and the other was sometimes open.

Furthermore, the new law became even more complicated as it declared that anyone choosing not to seek shelter during a Code Night could be forcibly removed from the streets if necessary. In the past, Code Blue teams (which includes the Burrito Street Team) would inform homeless people that it was a Code night and that they could receive a hot and a cot, no questions asked. We strongly encouraged people to seek shelter, but if they chose not to, there was not much that could be done (short of calling an ambulance or the police if someone appeared to be a danger to themselves or others). Since January, it was decided that anyone who did not avail themselves of the opportunity to be sheltered in harsh weather could be deemed to lack capacity (or be incompetent) simply via the fact they refused such shelter during adverse weather conditions. This part of the law generated much controversy among homeless advocates, human rights advocates, lawyers, the press, and in law journals. It was a very interesting debate to follow. Many homeless people throughout New York State came forward and spoke to the press, explaining that they refuse to go into shelters because of dirty/filthy conditions, crime within the shelters, lack of safety, etc. Our own clients and friends on the street regularly express the same concerns and complaints to us. To date, the law stands, but the publication of many sad and even horrific stories resulted in statewide inspections of shelter conditions and safety issues. Sadly, the other unintended consequence of this part of the law that we experienced on the Burrito Street Team is our hard-core homeless friends have been driven further into hiding so that they cannot be found and coerced against their will into shelters.

Suffice it to say, it was an interesting and chaotic winter season on Buffalo's streets. After much coverage of these issues in The Buffalo News and on the news stations, the Matt Urban Hope Center worked diligently to locate affordable rooming houses and apartments for many homeless people. We have been delighted to make several deliveries of household items to our friends who have received apartments, including one of our long-term homeless friends. Many of our friends have successfully managed the transition to housing. However and quite unfortunately, many have already cycled out of housing and are back on the streets and under the bridges. This occurs due to unsafe conditions, crime, drugs and even bedbug infestations in the rooming houses and apartments; our friends have often commented that they are safer on the streets – and have a better chance

of staying sober or clean – on the streets rather in these unhealthy environments. We have also been witnessing the rising opioid crisis on the streets during the past two years. Some of our friends have gone through rehab. Some have been successful and found jobs; others have fallen back into addictions. For every homeless person housed and rehabbed of addictions, another homeless person appears. Although the news reports have cited less than 30 chronically homeless people on the streets of Buffalo, we experience a different reality on Tuesday nights. We rejoice each and every time one of our friends is housed and we can deliver housewares and linens to their house; we are saddened every time we meet a new friend in a parking ramp, on a park bench, under a bridge or in the doorway of a condemned house or business. It underscores for us the absolute truth that Jesus told his disciples, “The poor you will always have with you.” This age-old challenge calls us to live our faith and reach out and serve the poor, homeless, hungry, naked and imprisoned. God cares passionately for the homeless and poor and about justice issues; there are over 2300 verses in the Bible regarding these issues close to His heart. And Jesus Himself told us that the sheep and goats will be judged and separated based on their treatment of the poor, hungry, homeless, naked and imprisoned. He tells us that each time we serve this sector of of the community, we are serving Jesus Himself. The Burrito Project is blessed to have your support, your volunteer hours, your hearts of compassion and concern, your very faith in action, in reaching out and weekly feeding “Homeless Jesus.”

As the shelter rules change, as the laws in New York State change, as new initiatives are started to rehab homeless people and find housing, the Burrito Project would be thrilled if we “worked ourselves out of a job.” But, as we see homeless people cycle in and out of housing and addiction, as we read the statistics of the state of homeless, poverty and food insecurity in our nation and in the world, we realize we have much work to do. And so we continue to canvass the streets, rain or shine, in the heat of summer and the bitter chill of Buffalo's winter, to offer warm burritos, lunch bags, hot coffee, bottled water, blankets, tents, tarps, underwear, socks, coats to our homeless friends, knowing that with each encounter, we are serving Jesus in disguise. We are extremely privileged and honoured to be accepted into this community and to be able to offer help, food, hope and friendship.

***Are you ready to get involved and help?***

**Volunteers are always welcome.** All ages are welcome to help in the kitchen, including children with a parent or guardian present; those over the age of 18 years who are able to walk 4-5 miles are welcome to join the Street Team. Contact Deb Tyler at 695-7727 or [carpediem318@gmail.com](mailto:carpediem318@gmail.com) for more information.

**PLEASE DO NOT FORGET THE BURRITO PROJECT DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS. IT IS OUR BUSIEST SEASON ON THE STREET AS THERE ARE NO CODE BLUES AND MANY PEOPLE ARE LIVING ON THE PARK BENCHES, IN PARKING RAMPS, POCKET PARKS, AND UNDER BRIDGES!**

**We need your help to serve them and meet their needs!**

**Financial donations are always needed and greatly appreciated.** 100% of your donation is used to purchase food, ingredients and coffee to serve the homeless population (unless you request your donation be used to purchase socks, underwear, tents, blankets, etc). Checks can be made out to “St Paul Lutheran Church.” Please write “Buffalo Burrito Project” on the memo line and mail to Buffalo Burrito Project c/o St. Paul Lutheran. Checks can also be placed in a plain envelope marked “Buffalo Burrito Project” and placed in the offering plate.

**Ingredients are always needed and include:** 10” tortilla shells; canned black or pinto beans; mild or medium salsa; instant rice; canned tomato paste; canned chicken stock; shredded Cheddar or Mexican cheese; non-refrigerated pudding cups; packaged cookies or treats.

**The following clothing donations are needed. PLEASE KINDLY LIMIT DONATIONS TO SPECIFIC ITEMS LISTED BELOW. *Only certain items are needed on the street! Other donations are more appropriate for those in shelters or in transitional housing (ie, not the clients we work with). Our clients consistently need and ask for the following:***

- 1. Men's** underwear, **sizes L and XL only** (briefs or boxers)
- 2. Men's** white athletic crew socks
- 3.** Blankets (Help! We are completely out of blankets!)
- 4. Men's** t-shirts (white or screened, new or used and in good/clean condition)
- 5. Men's** jeans
- 6.** Tents
- 7.** Tarps

Thank you for your on-going and tireless support of the Buffalo Burrito Project and your compassion and concern for the homeless, hungry and poor people of Buffalo.

In His Service,  
Deborah K. Greatrix Tyler