

PURE RELIGION

Helping the Homeless in Salt Lake City

It is something few have heard about—how the LDS Church reaches out to those who are homeless, distressed, and discouraged in Salt Lake City.

“People come here every day seeking answers,” says David McQueen, whose job is to coordinate transient services at the LDS Church’s Welfare Square. “Often, they are homeless. Some seek medical, dental, or psychological help. Sometimes they just need a temporary step up so they can get on with their lives.”

They come from all over the world, from every background, race, and religion. What they receive at Welfare Square is much more than a mere handout, however. Often, what they end up with is a new life.

Pam, a 29-year-old woman, came into Welfare Square not long ago seeking help. She was fleeing a relationship where her boyfriend had been abusing her six children.

“I don’t know what to do or where to go,” she said.

Pam and her children were assigned to Linda Miller, one of the several Church-service missionaries at Welfare Square who are called to be mentors to those seeking help. With the aid of the Utah Housing Authority, Linda found a home with subsidized rent where Pam and her children could live. Next, she worked with Pam to find a new career—a clerical job where she could find stability and work toward becoming self-reliant. Today, thanks to the help she

received from those at Welfare Square, the lives of Pam and her children are remarkably improved.

“We help many thousands of people each year,” says Brother McQueen. “Sometimes they come to us needing food or shelter. But most of the time, what they need more than anything else is a job.”

That’s where Employment Resource Services and Homer Cook come in. Homer Cook has served in various executive positions. Now, he and his volunteer staff work one-on-one with those who are unemployed.

“When these people come here,” he says, “they often don’t have confidence that they can compete. There are some who have been turned down so often, they feel it is impossible for them to ever become self-reliant.”

What Brother Cook does is help them understand their true value. He teaches them how to interview, how to create effective resumes, the importance of integrity and hard work. As a result of relationships he has established with executives in many local companies, he can get his clients in the door, and they often get the job they thought was so out of reach.

“We work with people who are often on the last rung of their ladder,” he says. “When you see the change it makes in their lives and how it lifts them emotionally and physically, it makes you feel like you’re doing something significant and important.”



Watching someone go from homeless to self-reliant is something Brother Cook has seen a few times. This year alone, Brother Cook and his volunteer staff will have helped more than 1,000 walk-ins at Welfare Square find employment.

“There are people the Lord expects us to help,” Elder Garry Carlson, a Welfare Square mentor and Church-service missionary explains.

“As we serve them, they feel our love, and that makes a difference. Just as importantly, it makes a difference in us as well.”

Elder Carlson smiles as he talks of his belief that as we serve others, we serve our Heavenly Father, “I tell people that if they want to feel the Spirit of the Lord, there are at least two places in Salt Lake City they should go—Temple Square and Welfare Square.”