

ANOTHER VIEW

Faces of homelessness look like you and me

By Kim Jefferies FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS



Staff file photo

About 1,600 people, including more than 300 children, live at Haven for Hope. Each is working to overcome trauma.



Although I was born, raised and have lived in San Antonio for the past 48 years, it wasn't until the last year that I really got to know my city. I've known the rich history, the rich culture and the big, small-town feel all my life, but I had no idea the depth and the breadth of the need of my fellow San Antonians.

Until I walked through the gates of Haven for Hope for the first time a year ago, I lived a sheltered and naïve life. While my childhood family was not rich, and, in fact, likely closer to poverty than I realized, I never knew how many people end up homeless every year. I had no idea more than 8,000 people experience homelessness each year in my city. I am not sure I really looked homelessness square in the face until I walked across this campus as its president and CEO.

I would see a panhandler on the corner and those walking the streets of downtown, and think of those people as the faces of homelessness. I have since learned the true faces of homelessness look like mine. Several times this year, I have learned that but by

the grace of God go I.

Here are some of the true faces of homelessness: the single mother who desperately tries to make ends meet but falls short; the young adult who aged out of foster care at 18; the middle-aged woman fleeing domestic violence and looking for a safe place; the 50-year-old man who suffered abuse as a child and turned to drugs to erase the trauma only to land in prison for things he never dreamed he was capable of doing.

These people, and so many others, walk the campus of Haven for Hope every day. Their faces are just like mine and yours, but with different trauma, different experiences and different support networks. Their faces are ours, just under different circumstances. Homelessness can be a result of trauma in their lives, and they end up homeless because of that unresolved trauma.

The depth of the need in our community can be overwhelming. Today there are 1,600 people, including more than 300 children, living on Haven's campus. That could be depressing if that's all you see. However, I have the privilege of seeing these 1,600 people work to overcome their trauma and regain their lives. The effort, spirituality, gratitude, resilience and determination that they show is inspiring and incredibly motivating.

I have spent the last year getting to know my city, and I can say while I have been schooled and humbled, I am incredibly proud of my city for creating a place like Haven for Hope and giving the 40,000 people who have been served by it a second chance. I'm proud of my fellow San Antonians who support others they have never met, and even more proud of the clients who have taught me so much about humanity and true empathy.

Finally, I am incredibly proud to get to be a part of something that our state, nation and the world look to on how to support those experiencing homelessness and for Bill Greehey, Haven's founder, who saw the need and found a different way, creating this very special place. I love my city even more today for what it's doing for those in need.

Kim Jefferies is president and CEO of Haven for Hope.