



Toxic Charity

By: Kelly-Jane Monahan, Phoenix Coordinator

Two months ago, I wrote about grace and how we strive every day to love our friends without an address unconditionally. Today, I want to talk about another **concept that guides our service provision here at the Phoenix: toxic charity.**

Mr. Robert Lupton, a veteran urban activist, wrote a book in 2012 called Toxic Charity. This book describes how modern charity models can actually hurt those they aim to benefit. The message of Lupton's book, boiled down to its core, is that one-way charity creates dependency.

He describes the progression of one-way giving from giver to receiver as:

Give **once** and you elicit **appreciation.**

Give **twice** and you create **anticipation.**

Give **three** times and you create **expectation.**

Give **four** times and it becomes **entitlement.**

Give **five** times and you establish **dependency.**

(Lupton, p.130)

There exists a group of people who are completely dependent on others for their basic needs. Something that I have observed from working here at the Phoenix is that homelessness and poverty are nasty, vicious cycles that are super hard to break. These cycles are perpetuated by a broken system of government programs and charities that were originally put into place to help, but actually do create and sustain dependency. **C-U at Home is focused on helping people with long-term, sustainable solutions to end the cycles of poverty and homelessness in their lives.** This is carried out in different ways: the first of which is making sure that we take

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the time to get to know the people that we work with **by building genuine relationships with them.** Lupton says "There is no simple or immediate way to discern the right response without a relationship" (524). After we understand someone's situation, we can then act as a guide, mentor and friend during their journey to restoration.

We can also determine whether the individual's situation is **a crisis or a chronic need.** Often, we have people come to us in a "crisis" situation and we help them in whatever way we are able. A month later they are in the same situation, and again a couple months after that. When we can determine a pattern of "crisis" situations, **we can help the person identify the root of this chronic problem and try to guide them to make positive steps toward a long term solution.**

For example, we have helped a family in a housing "crisis" by connecting them with community resources that help provide emergency rental assistance to families who are about to be evicted. A few months later, they were in the same housing situation where they were about to be evicted for non-payment of rent. This family's head of household was making a decent salary, however they could never seem to get out from behind this recurring "crisis" situation. **After wrapping around them, we determined the best, most sustainable solution to the issue was not to provide the family with additional funding, but to support them with connection to financial management training.** This allowed them to learn how to budget properly and live within their means. By addressing the root of the chronic money mismanagement issue, we hoped to empower the family to break the "on the verge of being evicted" cycle.

Another way we try to help those with whom we work break the cycle of dependency is by refusing to do for someone what they can do for themselves. Lupton maintains that when we do for those in need what they have the capacity to do for themselves, we disempower them (pg 50). We are able to determine what someone is able to do for themselves by building that relationship with them, and when we know what someone is mentally and physically capable of, **we can support them to take the steps they need to take to get back up on their feet.**

Sometimes over the course of knowing someone, their ability to do things for themselves improves as they are guided, mentored and encouraged. **It is so amazing to see our friends without an address gain confidence as they learn that they are so much more capable and powerful than they believe! We believe in our friends until they are ready to believe in themselves.**

Snapshot of July Services



619

opportunities

43

loads of laundry



152

showers



[THE QUESTION OF WHY]

"Why?" This three letter word carries with it such power and tenacity. All of the other standard words we use to ask questions (i.e. Who? What? When? Where? How?) generally have simple answers that don't require much cognitive energy. What time is dinner? Who will attend? When should we meet to carpool? Where will we park? **However, the question of "why" is much deeper than that.** It causes the recipient to reflect and process to find an appropriate answer. This question of "why" has been imprinted on my heart over the past month as I reflect on one year of leadership with C-U at Home.

Folks will often ask us "why" we do what we do and "why" we continue to work with certain people on the streets even after they have "failed" dozens of times. The answer to those questions stems from our commitment to the "most vulnerable." You see, our friends without an address, rely on us to be there when they need us; when they are at their most vulnerable. Whether that is 2:00am or 2:00pm, our commitment never wanes. I've said before that C-U at Home is not a 9-5 kind of job but a 12:00am-11:59pm kind of calling. **It's deeper than a job; it's an opportunity for us to connect with a group of society that while making steps forward, makes several steps backward in the process.** By practicing a healthy amount of empathy and empowerment, we develop lasting relationships with those on the street. Each person we encounter and each life we are able to touch **is a gift from God** and if you begin viewing daily situations through that lens, you can begin to understand our "why."

As you continue moving forward through 2018, I encourage you to reflect on your own "why." Why are you involved in the things that you are involved in and why does it bring you joy? **Once we better understand our own "why," we can find fulfillment, joy, and be a more positive influence to those around us.** If you're interested in finding out more about our "why" here at C-U at Home, please don't hesitate to contact me at 217-991-0356. I'd love to have a cup of coffee with you and discuss this powerful three letter word.

**In His Service,
Rob Dalhaus III**

Executive Director

CORNER