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Human Interest Piece

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**Faces of the Real World**

Not every one person is the same, diversity floods us all. White, Asian, Hispanic, and others black, nobody is the similar. The faces of people have shown where they have been, where they come from, and where they are going. But the faces you see right in the moment might not be the same faces they wear later. Homelessness has many different faces, including the recovering drug attic, the abused, neglected, and the ill; they run the streets of Frederick City every day. They all come together for the Homeless Advocates meeting to share their pain, suffering, and grief, in spite of all they have going on in their lives.

The Homeless Advocates Meeting takes place in Downtown Frederick, Maryland once a week, where anyone who is involved in the program can come to listen, watch, and support each other in times of trouble. They talk about where they are, how to make a better week, what to focus on, and how to stay on the right path.

The moment that everyone walks in the room, they’re greeted with food, beverages, and items that are needed. Gloves, scarves, and mittens line the table for everyone to pick from and baskets full of goodies line the floor for everyone to grab as they leave. The baskets are full of hygienic products such as shampoo, chap-stick, some make-up for the women, deodorant, shaving cream for the men, and some chocolate; things to help people get by for a few days.

With degrees in social work and psychology, Connolly Stewart and Julie Muenzfeld run the support group. Each has been with Frederick County for about a year, Connolly a little bit longer. They try and make everyone feel at home and comfortable with each individual in the room as the group meetings start. They have a 5 Point Focus board for everyone to remind themselves of where they are and what they’re trying to accomplish. It reads, “Heritage, Leadership, Connection, Mission, and Future.”

Everyone is quiet and keeps to themselves as they sit at the oval table to begin the session. There is only one guy in the group, the rest women. Not a face in the room with a smile upon it, just blank stares and sad faces, each having a story to tell.

Lucille, who asked that her last name not be given, said she has come a long way since starting the group. “I was doing drugs, living on the streets, homeless,” she explains. After that she was silent, and then said, “I want to be better, be a better parent, have a better life.” Lucille explains that her family has been really supportive of her working towards being a better person. “My family is very loving and supportive; I love life now, and I am even hope to get my GED someday.” She now works at Goodwill and says her children are happy to have their mom back. Lucille hopes to someday get married and own her own business and own a home.

Money spending problems and savings seem to be a wide spread issue amongst the group. “Some of the people here have no idea how to save the money they’re given. They have serious life skill and nutrition problems. The money they’re given for food stamps is just thrown away on junk food and sodas,” explains Julie Muenzfeld.

Julie makes home visits on a frequent basis to see the people she works with and to help out at home if it’s needed. “I one time had to go in an help remove 10 skunks, help with plumbing issues, and help them get back on their feet to find a job,” says Muenzfeld. She explains that it’s a lot of stress, anxiety, and that at the end of the day, when she goes home, she has to just drop everything from that day and relax. “Once you’ve been working with these people long enough, or just in this type of situation, you notice the material things start to become less and less. They don’t have what we have, and they don’t want to see you wearing expensive jewelry and nice clothes. Plus it all seems irrelevant at that point.” Julie wears a pearl on her neck that her husband gave her, that’s all the jewelry she now wears these days.

Drugs, alcohol abuse, neglect, abandonment, and even death; these people have seen it all, they have been there, done it, and some even continue to hide their addictions to this very day. Recovery and the people they work with in group is all they have to rely on now to get better and get through life. Be kind, for everyone is fighting their own battles.