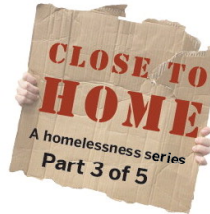


'IT'S A VICIOUS, VICIOUS CYCLE'

Businesses and nonprofits fight to stop the cycle of homelessness

By **Cassandra Bondie** • @hollandsentinel.com • 616-546-4237

An annual homelessness count in Ottawa County in 2017 found that 1,296 men, women and children were homeless during the year. That number is based on the federal definition of homelessness, which includes anyone who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence; anyone who may soon lose their primary nighttime residence; unaccompanied youth; or anyone fleeing, or attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking or other dangerous conditions.



Despite a variety of nonprofits in Ottawa County that target homelessness — including Community Action House, Good Samaritan Ministries and the Holland Rescue Mission — the issue is often described as a cycle.

"We find that quite a few people who come to us experience chronic homelessness," said Rachael Neal, director of development at the Holland Rescue Mission. "A lot of our folks are involved in drug or alcohol addiction and have come from poor education backgrounds."

According to Neal, while the mission offers a variety of helpful programs intended to help homeless men, women and children become independent, the number of people that succeed is surprisingly small.

"There are so few people that come into our emergency shelter, get a job, save their money and transition out," she said. "That seems to be the solution, but by the time people come here, it's rare this is the first time they've been homeless or jobless. We just see this chronic cycle happening."

Neal believes that being homeless is usually a symptom of something else.

"Whether it's mismanagement of their money, drug and alcohol addiction, joblessness or other underlying issues," she said. "We try to

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The idea of homelessness so upset Teddy's Transport President Helen Zeerip that she started her own nonprofit Grant Me Hope. [CASSANDRA BONDIE/SENTINEL STAFF]



The Holland Rescue Mission offers a variety of helpful programs intended to help homeless men, women and children become independent. [SENTINEL FILE]