

Shelter directors: Collaboration needed to combat homelessness

BY CHRISTIE NETHERTON
MESSENGER-INQUIRER



Michele Johnston



Harry Pedigo

Local homeless shelter directors say collaboration between counties is what is needed to ensure individuals experiencing homelessness in the region are getting the services they need.

Daniel Pitino Shelter executive director Michele Johnston and St. Benedict's Shelter executive director Harry Pedigo said they work to provide shelter to anyone who needs it in the commu-

nity if there is availability, regardless of where they're from.

Of the 136 individuals the Pitino shelter has served since the beginning of the year, pro-

grams director Cheryl Moore said 41 have been from outside of Owensboro-Daviess County.

Pedigo said about 40% of St. Benedict's clients come from outside the county, with shelter having served individuals from about 175 different zip codes in the past year.

He said many times, those individuals come from smaller surrounding counties that may not have a shelter.

"I could understand why there wouldn't be a shelter

there, so for somebody that's homeless and has exhausted all their resources and relationships, they turn to the next closest thing, which is Owensboro," he said. "We're the next thing in surrounding areas to a metropolitan area. We are resource rich. I don't think it's because they don't have the resources, I think it's because we've got a lot of resources, and we're good at what we do."

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McConnell: U.S. withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan an 'embarrassment'

Senator 'perplexed' that it has been challenge to get people vaccinated

BY JAMES MAYSE
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell said during a Monday stop in Owensboro that the United States had been accomplishing its goals in Afghanistan by preventing the country from being a base for terrorists, prior to the Biden Administration's decision to withdraw U.S. troops.



Mitch McConnell

During an interview following his address to the Bluegrass Community Bankers Association at the Owensboro Convention Center, McConnell said pulling American forces out of Afghanistan is an "embarrassment."

"It's important to remember why we went there," he said. "It was to prevent it from being a haven for al-Qaeda and affiliated terrorists groups, so they could not attack the United States again here at home. That's why we went there, and it worked."

McConnell, a Republican who is Kentucky's senior senator and the Senate minority leader, has been an outspoken critic of President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw remaining troops from Afghanistan.

The U.S. invaded Afghanistan in October 2001, less than one month after the Sept. 11 al-Qaida attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The stated goal was to target al-Qaida and uproot the Taliban government giving shelter to the terrorist group and its leader, Osama bin Laden.

U.S. troops have been in Afghanistan ever since, and former President Donald Trump and Biden both supported withdrawing all troops from the country this year. Trump reduced troop levels to 2,500 by the end of his term in office, and Biden announced in July a goal of having all troops out by Aug. 31.

The withdrawal has caused chaos, with people desperate to leave the country as the Taliban has moved quickly to reclaim power as American forces exit.

McConnell said he argued against withdrawing from Afghanistan with President Barack Obama, Trump and Biden.

"We haven't lost a single military personnel there in a year and a half, (and) if you're looking at cost, it's 1% of the Pentagon's budget," McConnell said. The U.S. mission in the country "wasn't broken, and it didn't need fixing," he said.

The decision to pull troops out of Afghanistan was "a disastrous

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Nelson, a therapy dog, and his owner, Kerrie Peck, who volunteers with 4 Rivers Love on a Leash, visit nursing staff on Thursday at Mercy Health-Lourdes Hospital.

HANNAH SAAD | The Sun

Local canines provide needed support

BY HANNAH SAAD
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It's fitting the national day to celebrate man's best friend comes at the end of summer. National Dog Day, held annually on Aug. 26, was founded in 2004 by animal welfare advocate Colleen Paige, according to the National Dog Day website. In honor of "Fido's" special day, The Sun highlighted some of the canines in the community; those who want to lend a helping paw and those who could use the support of the community or a potential new family.

THERAPY DOG VISITS MERCY HEALTH-LOURDES HOSPITAL

Nelson, a golden retriever therapy dog, celebrated National Dog Day by visiting nursing staff at Mercy Health-Lourdes Hospital with his owner, Kerrie Peck. Nelson has visited with other staff members at Mercy Health-Lourdes Hospital before and will start visiting staff working on the night shift, according to a news release from Mercy Health-Lourdes Hospital.

Nelson is one of seven dogs that

work with 4 Rivers Love on a Leash, a local chapter of a national, nonprofit pet therapy group. The local chapter serves McCracken and Marshall counties, according to the nonprofit's website. Melanie Watson, chapter leader who founded the local chapter in 2012, said the therapy dogs, and one therapy cat, have worked at hospitals, schools, hospice care centers and libraries, noting the therapy dogs will go anywhere they are invited.

"Our biggest mission is just to bring smiles to people," Watson said.

Unlike service animals, who are trained to work and do tasks for a person with a disability and should not be petted by strangers, Watson said the therapy dogs are meant to have interactions and be petted by other people. That being said, the therapy dogs must go where they are invited and do not have the same legal protections that service animals have.

Watson said volunteers and their dogs go through a one-year training period where the dogs are evaluated on how they interact with the public and have supervised visits. She said older

dogs tend to do better with the volunteer program, but the Love on a Leash local chapter would start training dogs that are at least 1-year-old.

MCCRACKEN COUNTY HUMANE SOCIETY SEARCHES FOR POTENTIAL ADOPTERS

As of Thursday, executive director Traci Phelps said the shelter was "completely full," and 92 dogs were currently at the shelter. The shelter has 81 dogs ready for adoption. Dogs and puppies available at the shelter are spayed and neutered if the dog is old enough and healthy enough for the procedure; microchipped (placing a device under the dog's skin that allows owners to find the dog if it gets lost); heartworm tested; dewormed; started on heartworm, flea and tick preventative treatments; and fully vaccinated as appropriate for their age.

Phelps said the biggest need for the shelter was getting animals adopted while also balancing the needs of the animals.

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A year later, struggle remains to find missing teen

BY GINA CLEAR
THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE

It's been a year since Rosalyn Velazquez, 16, disappeared and since that day it's been a struggle for those involved in the case.

The North Hardin High School student was reported to leave at 1 a.m. Aug. 24 from her apartment in Azalea Park near the high school, where she lived with her mother, Sabrina Boozel.

"I am struggling," Boozel said, adding she was feeling the stress of the anniversary of her daughter's disappearance. "I didn't want to relive it. It's like opening a wound all over again, but I have to step outside of my feelings to keep her face out there and to let her know that I'm not giving up."

Radcliff police also are struggling with receiving new leads, said Detective Joe Gonzalez, one of two detectives assigned to the case.

"We've had no new developments per se, meaning we haven't had any concrete sightings or anything we can definitely say, 'Yeah that's her,'" he said. "Obviously, we've had several Crime Stoppers tips called in, tips from the general public, since the day she went missing."

But none have panned out, including a report about a month ago that she may be in northern Hardin County, Gonzalez said.

After receiving the report, officers knocked on doors at local hotels and residences and stopped in businesses to follow

the lead, leaving flyers where they went, he said.

The team also is working in conjunction with the Kentucky Attorney General's task force for missing children and the case has been featured by a handful of national television series and magazines to help spread the word.

Gonzalez said he and his partner also are combing through Velazquez's known social media accounts looking for clues, without any luck so far. He said her phone and social media accounts haven't been used since her disappearance.

"I can only imagine how frustrating it is for her loved ones, her mom," he said. "For me personally, being a father and hav-

ing daughters, it's an ultimate nightmare for a parent. That's why when we get a case like this, we put every effort into it that we possibly can to try to determine where she went, if she's with somebody, anything."

While leaving home to go on walks late at night wasn't uncharacteristic of Velazquez as it was a coping mechanism for her anxiety, not returning home was, Boozel said.

"It's not her character to be away from home," she said. "It was a struggle to get her to go to appointments because she developed a phobia towards people. She was bullied in seventh grade and became introverted."

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Submitted photo

A case into the disappearance of Rosalyn Velazquez, 16, who went missing in the early hours of Aug. 24, 2020, is a year old with few new leads. The Radcliff teen left her apartment near North Hardin High School and police said she hasn't used her phone or social media accounts since.



NEWS

THE DUNLAP

Officials hold groundbreaking for the redevelopment project at former Walter C. Jetton Junior High School. **Page A6**



SPORTS

GIRL POWER

Mary Bell joins Elizabethtown football as kicker this season. **Page A12**

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