

ICH Public Hearing – 4.23.19

Good afternoon, my name is Katie Millford and I am a case manager for EveryMind's Homeless Outreach Services. We applaud the outcomes of the Inside, Not Outside campaign. Its success demonstrates what can be accomplished when public and private entities come together to address a significant community issue.

However, one unforeseen outcome of the campaign was the spotlight it cast on our most vulnerable community members who remain unhoused even now. As someone who works with those living unsheltered, I want to emphasize how important it is to remember there are still individuals living on the street who were not served by the Inside, Not Outside campaign. These are the most reluctant, and therefore, most difficult to engage individuals. The very nature of their challenges prohibits them from benefitting from an initiative intended to help them.

Imagine the time it would take to build trust and rapport with someone who has no home, no place to go for safety and thus is under constant stress and fear of harm. They face the potential for violence committed against them daily and are traumatized and re-traumatized regularly. Not surprisingly, they actively avoid any outreach from a stranger offering help.

Consider the amount of courage and strength it would take for someone in this situation to finally accept the extended hand of an outreach worker like me. I try to assure them that everything will be okay if they just trust me and the system trying to help them. They are understandably overwhelmed by the mountain they must climb to leave street homelessness behind them. But this is not a problem that developed over the course of days, months or even a year; nor will it be solved in that amount of time. There will be, successes and failures, highs and lows. But case managers like myself will always be there to support them no matter how long it takes.

It will take a special team of dedicated, compassionate, persistent, and above all, patient, staff to go out, day after day, night after night, no matter the weather, no matter the area, to go where they are most definitely not wanted and try to engage those who do not trust them at all. But these staff go anyway and try to provide those living unsheltered the hope and opportunities they didn't allow themselves to believe existed any longer.

We can help those who have lost their sense of dignity, belonging and community regain all of this and more if we are patient and willing to do the difficult work to help them rebuild trust and hope.

Though we have accomplished much, we aren't done yet. There are still people living in dangerous, lonely, and intolerable conditions simply because they don't know what else to do. We hope Montgomery County will continue to prioritize funding street outreach teams to reach these most vulnerable members of our community.

Continued, intensive work to develop rapport is the only way to set our unsheltered neighbors on a path toward a better future. Thank you for your time and attention.