



LOURDES
HEALTH SYSTEM

*People
First...*

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Project H.O.P.E.



It was a bitter cold winter night in February and Waldow Wright was part of a team of Project H.O.P.E. outreach workers on the streets of Camden searching for homeless people. They were there to bring the homeless clothing and food, with the hope of getting them to a shelter or clinic for medical care. Waldow could take comfort in knowing he had a warm home to return to that night, but it was not that long ago that he didn't.

Waldow had struggled with drug and alcohol addiction since his teens, yet he had somehow managed to hold down a steady job for years. When he moved to Camden from Glassboro he found "the faster lifestyle in the city, and the drugs were like water running down a stream," he said. "It was all too accessible to me." Eventually, everything collapsed from the weight of his addictions, and at the age of 52 he lost his house, his family and his job at a painting company. He became a transient, renting rooms for the night. After four months on the street, Waldow realized his life had to change. He walked into a church and an addiction recovery meeting.

Waldow was fortunate enough to be enrolled in a detoxification and sheltered rehabilitation program that partnered with Project H.O.P.E. (Homeless Outreach Program Enrichment) for medical and case management services. Since 1993, Project H.O.P.E., a homeless outreach program sponsored by Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center, has focused on improving the health and well-being of Camden's homeless by providing medical, social, outreach and advocacy services.

Based on Waldow's success and determination, Project H.O.P.E. eventually hired him to serve as an outreach worker. "In those seven years I worked for the program, I had established myself as *the* outreach worker, not only because of my knowledge of the city and knowing where to go, but knowing the people," Waldow said. The staff believed that Waldow's experience and success was beneficial as a role model to others who were homeless.

Project H.O.P.E.'s 14 full-time staff members provide services by traveling in a mobile health van to locations throughout the city where the homeless congregate and at a clinic at the Bergen Lanning Health Center on West Clinton Street in Camden. Services include routine health screenings, physicals, primary medical care, drug and alcohol counseling, social assistance, free prescription medication and assistance applying for Medicare and Medicaid. Street outreach efforts include providing food, blankets, supplies and social-service information.

Now retired, Waldow said the program definitely helped turn his life around. He now resides with his son, who in August 2004 had a kidney transplant at Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center. "I'm back doing some home refurbishing," he said. "I'm not rich, but I'm not begging, and I'm not interested in living out on the street again."

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

- Project H.O.P.E. is the only provider of medical services to the homeless in Camden County.
- In 2005, the program served 1,038 homeless individuals for a total of 2,992 encounters at Bergen Lanning Health Center. Outreach workers also recorded 2,356 encounters with homeless individuals in areas where homeless congregate and are served through the mobile health van.
- In 2005, Project H.O.P.E. was recognized by Community Planning and Advocacy Council's (CPAC) Camden County Homeless Planning Network Committee, which includes more than 40 homeless programs, as the #1 homeless provider in Camden County.