



COMMUNITY
FIRST!
VILLAGE

A NEW MOVEMENT

“HOUSING WILL
NEVER SOLVE
HOMELESSNESS,
**BUT COMMUNITY
WILL!**”



Mobile Loaves & Fishes™
Serving Goodness.





“I always thought no one cared.” -Ellis

Sadly, this is the way many of our homeless brothers and sisters view the world. They are alone, hungry and have no place to call home.

This was true for my friend Ellis. Raised by his mother, his father was an alcoholic and absent most of the time. When his father was around, he was abusive to both Ellis and his mother. By the time he was in high school, Ellis was abusing drugs and alcohol as an escape from this violent life. At 16, he was no longer able to withstand the abuse and left home. He found shelter where he could, sleeping on a friend’s couch for a few days at a time before he was asked to move on. He struggled with his addictions, and made choices that landed him in jail. Just months before Ellis was released from jail, his mother died. He was devastated, and now he was all alone.

After being released from jail, Ellis had nowhere to turn and no family to help him re-establish his life. He struggled to survive on the streets. Night after night, he camped out at the labor center hoping to get work for the next day. But most days he didn’t get work, so he hid out in alleyways or in dry creek beds hoping no one would see him, and he would be safe for the night.

Ellis was literally starving on the streets of Austin, when a homeless friend told him about the Mobile Loaves & Fishes food truck. He made the two-hour walk from the labor center to where the truck was serving in downtown.

“When I saw the truck, I ran to it. I was so hungry!” -Ellis

After getting to know Ellis, it became apparent that he not only hungered for food, but he was also starving for community and a way to support himself. It was obvious that he wanted to work, but lacked opportunities to earn a dignified income.

“No one really likes to panhandle. It’s degrading.” -Ellis

Ellis learned about the Mobile Loaves & Fishes Community Works micro-enterprise program that provides dignified income opportunities, and encourages our homeless friends to rediscover their God-given talents.

Before long, Ellis was working as a vendor on our Street Treats mobile vending carts selling ice cream and snacks. He also found work caring for the grounds at a local church, and packaging socks for a local sock company. Ellis ultimately found work that feeds his soul, as well as his belly, in Mobile Loaves & Fishes’ Genesis Gardens program.

“Now I am the fruit tree manager at Genesis Gardens. I grow food, and I get to help people.” -Ellis



Today, Ellis is a resident of Community First! Village, a development of Mobile Loaves & Fishes that provides affordable, permanent housing for chronically homeless individuals. He has a home in a caring, supportive community. He knows and cares about his neighbors and they know and care about him. He has meaningful, purposeful work. He takes care of himself and he contributes to his community.

Ellis has made his way home.



IN THE BEGINNING

Stories like the one about Ellis are the reason Mobile Loaves & Fishes exists today. We began in 1998 as a food truck ministry with a mission to go into the streets of Austin, Texas and feed the men and women stranded on the street corners, alleyways and homeless camps. At that time, we honestly had no idea who our homeless neighbors were, but as we continued to deliver meals, we had conversations and we listened as our friends shared their stories of struggle and loss. We made connections, and relationships were formed. We learned not only who our friends are, but also what they needed most.



Alan Graham,
Founder & CEO,
Mobile Loaves & Fishes

“Everything we do is about relationships. The biggest lesson we have learned over the years is that we are not a food ministry. We merely use food as a conduit to connect human to human and heart to heart.”

Through these connections with our homeless friends over the past two decades, we’ve learned that the single greatest cause of homelessness is a profound, catastrophic loss of family. It’s from this understanding that our vision emerged to build Community First! Village to welcome home individuals who had been labeled as outcasts, who were despised and pushed to the fringe of society to be forgotten.

HOUSE BLESSING

A quilt is given to each new Community First! resident.



COMMUNITY FIRST! VILLAGE - A RELATIONAL APPROACH

Back in 2006, the cutting-edge initiative for successfully addressing the problem of homeless people in the U.S. was called “Housing First!” This initiative recognized that homelessness cannot be successfully treated until the fundamental needs of the individual, which include food, clothing and shelter, are accessible. Once these basic needs are met, an individual is better able to focus on addressing why he or she became homeless.

Through our years of serving alongside our homeless friends however, we have learned that they need much more than four walls and a roof to no longer be homeless – they need to be settled in a safe place with people who care and where they feel they belong. They need more than a house. They need a home in a supportive community. This is where they truly are able to begin transforming their lives.

Taking someone off the streets, putting a roof over his head and a cup of soup in his stomach will not change the status of a

homeless person. To no longer be homeless, a person must think of home as a matter of community; that home is about belonging, connectedness, and shared memory; and that home involves relationships of trust.

“The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it.” Genesis 2:15

At Community First! Village, we desire to provide more than just adequate housing for the homeless – we want to help instill community back into their lives. To do this, a community is needed with revolutionary services and attention to needs at a fraction of the cost of traditional housing initiatives. The emphasis needs to be on dignity, love, respect, abundance and acceptance. It needs to be based on Scripture’s meaning of “shalom,” which describes a human at peace in all relationships – with God, oneself, other people and the natural world.

SETTLE

God desires for all of us to put down roots – to settle – in a safe, stable and secure place in order to grow and flourish. We believe that settling into a home is vital to resolving the causes of homelessness, and begin physical and spiritual healing. But what defines home?

To best understand homelessness, it helps to first gain a better understanding of the meaning of home itself. In the book “Beyond Homelessness,” eight characteristics are used to describe what home is:

A PLACE OF PERMANENCE AND FAMILIARITY
it endures over what is transient

A DWELLING PLACE
it is more than a house

A STORIED PLACE
it is made by the stories that have shaped it

A SAFE RESTING PLACE
we feel secure and at rest because of mutual respect

A PLACE OF HOSPITALITY
where we are at ease without fear

A PLACE OF EMBODIED INHABITATION
it is our habitat

A PLACE OF ORIENTATION
where our world is made meaningful

A PLACE OF AFFILIATION AND BELONGING
where we are loved and cherished



COMMUNITY FIRST! VILLAGE HOUSE BLESSING

“May this place bring you comfort, refuge and rest.
Come settle your soul finding health and happiness.

We pray you feel surrounded by community,
And uplifted by friends.

May this house be more than a safe place to live.

May it be your Sanctuary, and safe haven.

May it be your place to call home.”



Community First! Village is a 27-acre master planned community that provides affordable, permanent housing and a supportive community for the disabled, chronically homeless in Central Texas.



CULTIVATE

God ordained each of us with special gifts, and He desires for us to cultivate and utilize those gifts in order to grow and flourish. A variety of unique opportunities allow our friends at Community First! Village to rediscover their God-given talents and encourage them to share those in the community. Our Mobile Loaves & Fishes volunteers are empowered to serve alongside our formerly homeless friends as they develop new skills and build enduring relationships. This cultivation of the individual helps to promote dignity and restore self-esteem, uplifting the individual and strengthening the community.



“This place brings me joy. It brings me happiness. Every day is an awesome adventure and I can’t wait to continue my adventure here!” – Bonnie

CARE

God directs us to care. We are called to care about the community – everyone and everything that is in it. A community is made up of many essential elements such as the houses, streets, public buildings, parks and gardens. But it is the people in that community who are the most important element of the community itself. It’s the people who are connecting with and lifting our homeless brothers and sisters up off the streets and helping them on their way to a valued, purposeful life.



COMMUNITY

Community First! Village provides the structure for residents to obtain permanent shelter, stability and safety while living in his or her own home. The community fosters friendships through the relationships cultivated with other residents. Through the Village, residents have access to the support they need to rebuild their self-esteem through group activities, classes and other social events that encourage self-confidence, dignity and self-respect. Once basic living needs are met, residents can dream big and know they have the opportunity to fulfill their dreams.

COMMUNITY HOUSING OPTIONS AND AMENITIES

Community First! Village was designed based on KOA campgrounds (Kampgrounds of America). KOA sites provide low-cost lodging for people on the road, and they consist of a mix of RVs, tent sites and cabins. We like to refer to Community First! as a “KOA campground on steroids.” The Village is designed to be a place for 250 people to call home.



RECREATION VEHICLE (RVs)

These RV homes are approximately 275 square feet in size, averaging about 8' wide by 30' in length with slide outs that add to the spaciousness of the living areas. Each unit includes a full-service kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and living area. The lifespan of a properly maintained RV can be several decades.

AMENITIES AT COMMUNITY FIRST! VILLAGE INCLUDE:

- An innovative mix of affordable housing options
- Places for worship, study and fellowship
- Memorial garden, columbarium and prayer labyrinth
- Medical facility for health screenings
- Walking trails
- Community gardens
- Outdoor movie theater
- Community market
- Bed & breakfast for overnight visits
- Capital Metro bus stop
- WiFi

To live in Community First! Village, a resident must have a source of income and be able to pay rent. The source of income may be from disability income, retirement income, work (42% of the homeless population are employed) or subsidies from family, churches or other agencies. It is possible for an individual to survive on the current Supplemental Security Income (SSI) allocation while subsidizing their income with food stamps, soup kitchens, food pantries, etc. We maintain that if an individual's income is elevated to approximately \$850 per month, they are able to sustain themselves with dignity.



MICRO-HOMES

These small, environmentally friendly furnished homes are between 180–200 square feet and have electrical power, but no plumbing. Community kitchens, private restrooms and shower facilities are available for use throughout the Village.



CANVAS COTTAGES

These furnished cottages come with minimal electrical power and are equipped with basic appliances, including mini-fridge, microwave, crock pot and coffee maker. Centralized laundromat, private restrooms and shower facilities – similar to what one might find in an RV community – are located nearby.



AN UNPRECEDENTED COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

One of the core strengths of Mobile Loaves & Fishes is in recruiting, organizing and managing community volunteers. Volunteers from businesses and other community organizations are empowered to share their particular skills and gifts with individuals who live at Community First! Village. In addition to the myriad of services available within the Village, Mobile Loaves & Fishes has collaborated with local social service providers to make their services accessible to Village residents. This collaboration includes underwriting resources for case management, counseling, spiritual direction, training and representative payee services.

We believe the collaboration that has taken place to make Community First! Village a reality is unparalleled in Austin’s history. Mobile Loaves & Fishes has brought to the table a broad cross section of the Austin community to develop a holistic Community First! model, including involvement from:

Service Providers

- Government
- Architects
- Homebuilders
- Commercial Contractors
- Farmers
- Retailers
- Real Estate Leaders

Medical Community

- Churches
- Synagogues
- Mosques
- Temples
- Scouting
- Individual Donors
- Transportation

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Mobile Loaves & Fishes has raised nearly \$15.9 million for Community First! Village, almost all from private donations. Although we value our partnership with local government, virtually no local, state or national government funding was used to develop the Village.



BUILDING COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY WORKS

Recognizing that most, if not all, of our residents are entrepreneurial in nature, we have developed the Community Works program at Community First! Village to empower individuals to re-discover their God-given talents and move those talents into the economy. Community Works provides micro-enterprise opportunities that enable our friends who have experienced homelessness to earn a dignified income. This program empowers Mobile Loaves & Fishes volunteers to serve alongside our friends as they develop new skills, while also building enduring relationships. Micro-enterprise opportunities available through Community Works include gardening, art, blacksmithing, wood-working and concessions.

We recognize that many homeless individuals are not disabled and desire employment, but have a past that might be an obstacle to gainful employment.

Anecdotally, many in the industry of service to the homeless have noticed that most struggle with the typical structure of employment, and perhaps may even be learning-disabled. This leaves a homeless individual struggling to keep a commitment and struggling to stay focused.

"I'm so thankful for the opportunities I have through the Art House. It is a community that really shares and helps each other." -Clifton

The goal with Community Works is to help create an income source that is manageable, flexible and sufficient to live with dignity within Community First! Village. We want to position our friends to earn a dignified income through their micro-enterprise businesses of approximately \$850 per month.



CURRENT COMMUNITY WORKS OPPORTUNITIES EXIST THROUGH:

GENESIS GARDENS – Neighbors from all over Austin come together to roll up their sleeves and engage with Community First! residents, practice hospitality, recall what it means to put down roots, and share the abundance of our yields.

COMMUNITY ART HOUSE – The art program provides a safe and supportive environment that fosters healing and creative expression for our formerly homeless friends. Mobile Loaves & Fishes partners with our Community First! artists to assist with the promotion and sale of their artwork, supporting their efforts to earn a dignified income through the beautiful use of their God-given talents.

COMMUNITY INN – A bed & breakfast like no other, the Community Inn is your gateway to Goodness. Guests can enjoy a variety of retreats and workshops designed for personal discovery, community service, as well as rest and renewal.

COMMUNITY CINEMA – Built by the iconic Alamo Drafthouse, our authentic outdoor movie theater and amphitheater is open to the public for movies, concerts, worship services and other events.

COMMUNITY FORGE & WOODSHOP – Our state-of-the-art, vintage-inspired forge and hand-tool woodshop provides a unique opportunity for our neighbors to create heirloom quality products to be sold to the general public.

COMMUNITY GRILLE & CONCESSIONS – Simply the best hamburger, hotdog and Frito Pie catering business around. Every dollar makes change!

COMMUNITY MARKET – This small, onsite store sells essentials to our neighbors and guests, as well as handcrafted products created by individuals who live at Community First! Village.



BEFRIENDERS - MOBILE LOAVES & FISHES' CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

Each Community First! resident is supported by “Befrienders,” who are a special team of Mobile Loaves & Fishes volunteers. Befrienders spend a few hours each month serving as assistant case managers and supportive friends. They exemplify what it means to “love your neighbor” through visits, shared meals, and assistance with other homemaking tasks. The objective of supportive friendship is to initiate small group connections and integrate residents into community, providing much-needed structure and mentoring. Befrienders are trained by professional case managers and counselors from the New Life Institute.

HOSPITALITY

Mobile Loaves & Fishes intends to radically change the typical mindset of “these people should be grateful for what they’re getting” that oftentimes exists, unfortunately, in homeless ministries based on a scarcity of resources. In Community First! Village, Mobile Loaves & Fishes has instituted a philosophy of giving from our abundance – our best first – not from our leftovers. We lead with and promote this “best first” service model because our homeless brothers and sisters deserve the same treatment that we would want for ourselves. Anyone living in Community First! Village is recognized, respected, loved and honored in all dealings with onsite management, staff and volunteers. These interactions encourage Village neighbors to treat each other in the same manner.

YOU ARE THE GOODNESS.

Mobile Loaves & Fishes' Community First! Village is a new movement that will radically transform the nation's approach to homelessness and make Austin, Texas a model city demonstrating a new way to address the issue of chronic homelessness. We believe that by providing permanent, affordable housing to the chronically homeless in a loving and supportive environment with amenities to improve the quality of life, our homeless brothers and sisters will have the tools they need to begin to heal and transform their lives.

Community First! Village incorporates an understanding of the RV industry's central quality of community, which occurs when people live in close contact with one another in dignified homes. Community First! is a faith-based mission founded on Judeo-Christian teachings, and is open to people of all faiths. At its core is the concept that a homeless person can best focus on addressing the cause of his or her homelessness if his or her basic human needs are being met, including a sense of being settled – a connection, loyalty, affection, identity, ownership, a location, a home – a community.

We know when people have adequate housing and have access to nutritious food that the cost to our community, both economically and emotionally, is reduced – including less need for emergency medical care and diminished use of our criminal justice system. We also know that those suffering from a dependency are more likely to seek treatment when they are part of a caring, stable community.

Lifting our homeless brothers and sisters up off the streets and bringing them home to Community First! Village is a collaborative effort. It takes community to build community. **IT TAKES YOU.**

ARE YOU READY TO JOIN US IN THIS **NEW MOVEMENT?**



YOUR NEXT STEPS

TOUR

Come see Community First! Village for yourself. Please visit mlf.org/events to schedule your tour.

SYMPOSIUM FOR GOODNESS' SAKE

We highly recommend attending the Symposium for Goodness' Sake. This in-depth, multi-day training event is for those people interested in taking the Community First! model to their own communities and cities. For information on upcoming symposiums, visit mlf.org/event/symposium-for-goodness-sake.

Have Questions: info@mlf.org



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