**Combating the stereotype of being homeless - November 2017**

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**Veterans who fought for our country and mothers fending for their children – these are our homeless neighbors.**

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**Homelessness is a problem bigger than many of us may think. On any given night, more than 600,000 Americans experience homelessness, according to Green Doors, a Texas corporation that works to prevent homelessness.**

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**Despite the stereotype, the majority of our homeless population consists of families, victims of domestic abuse and veterans.**

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**Compared to other industrial nations, the U.S. has the highest number of homeless women and children. In fact, families comprise about 35 percent of the total homeless community and more than half include children younger than 18, according to The Department of Housing and Urban Development. Growing up homeless, children have a higher risk of long-term effects on behavior, employability, relationships and brain development.**

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**Trapped between violence and homelessness with nowhere else to turn, more than 50 percent of women report domestic abuse as the immediate cause of their homelessness, according to The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Housing instability and a lack of safe and affordable housing often leads to women staying in abusive relationships to avoid being homeless, only to find themselves isolated from family and friends with little to no money of their own.**

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**Not only are women and children vulnerable to the nightmare of being without a home, men and women who have defended our country enter another battlefield on the unsheltered streets. Roughly 12 percent of homeless Americans are veterans who “served in World War II, the Korean War, Cold War, Vietnam War, Grenada, Panama, Lebanon, Persian Gulf War, Afghanistan and Iraq (OEF/OIF), and the military’s anti-drug cultivation efforts in South America,” according to Green Doors.**

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**To add to the already complex set of factors influencing all homelessness, displaced veterans are at higher risk of the lingering effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse, which intensifies their lack of family and social support networks. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers assistance to eligible veterans in addressing these issues; however, based on military discharge status, not all homeless veterans qualify.**

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**In the Omaha metro alone, more than 1,500 people face the horrors of homelessness each year. Since 2006, the Metro Area Continuum of Care for the Homeless (MACCH) has led a community-wide network of partners, including governmental representatives, corporate members and individual advocates, that work to prevent and end homelessness in Douglas, Sarpy and Pottawattamie Counties.**

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**MACCH’s main objective is to “unite the efforts of shelter, housing, supportive services, and faith-based organizations that serve homeless and near-homeless individuals,” per the MACCH website. Over the course of more than a decade, MACCH has raised nearly $40 million in HUD Continuum of Care funding on behalf of nearly 20 local homeless assistance projects.**

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**Consider what it might feel like to not know when your next meal may be and help MACCH and its partners improve the quality of life for all of our homeless neighbors. Visit endhomelessnesstoday.org for more information on how you can make a difference in the lives of others.**​

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