

Working together makes a difference

By Amy Nielsen

The tornado of 1975 devastated much of Omaha, leaving hundreds of people homeless and destitute. In times of tragedy, resilience emerges, uniting the community and inspiring teamwork and cooperation.

The aftermath of the tornado brought together leaders of many area congregations that worked to provide food, clothing and shelter. That community cooperative effort evolved to become Together.

Together is a local nonprofit that works to prevent homelessness in the Omaha metro area by providing emergency resources to individuals and families living in extreme poverty.

Rob and Terri were one such family in need. The couple moved to Omaha in 2015 to be close to family, but a series of unfortunate circumstances pushed them to the brink of financial crisis.

After Terri required an emergency caesarean section due to complications from pregnancy, she was unable to work. The couple then had their only vehicle stolen and totaled, leaving Rob without transportation to his two jobs, which he subsequently lost. They reached out to Together for help.

Together matched the family with the appropriate services to find a home and help for financial support. And that's not all. "After hearing about Rob and Terri's struggles," says Krissy Madej, Together development director, "a donor of Together was moved to tears and donated a vehicle to help make sure transportation was no longer an issue for the family."

While Rob and Terri's story maybe unique, the problems they faced are similar to the plight of families across the metro area: ill health, medical bills and loss of employment. Together seeks to help those struggling find the help they need.

"The programs at Together are meant to be a safety net if households living in the Omaha community fall on hard times," Madej says. "We don't want to duplicate any existing services; we want to streamline them."

Programs include:

- **Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF)**
- **Assistance with rent, utilities and deposits**
- **Assistance obtaining state ID's and birth certificates**
- **Transportation**
- **Choice pantry**
- **Kitchen essentials**
- **Furniture**



Metro Area Continuum of Care for the Homeless

Together also assists clients with online applications for state public assistance benefit programs such as Medicaid, WIC and energy assistance.

The mobile pantry is another community service provided by Together. The mobile unit visits the homeless clinic at the Veteran's Administration Hospital and provides food for 100 pantries twice a month.

Together relies on community partnerships to provide services for its clients. One such partnership is with the Metro Area Continuum of Care for the Homeless (MACCH).

"The partnership with MACCH benefits our community by utilizing the resources at hand to work toward ending homelessness in our community," Madej says. "MACCH provides needed materials, education, partnership, relationship building and successes for our community and the people living in it."

Other organizations Together partners with are Common Fund of the Heartland, Homeless Review Team, Zero 2016, Stand Down and Project Homeless Connect.

Together works with many human service outreach agencies as well, including Charles Drew Health Center, The Financial Hope Collaborative, Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging, The Women's Center for Advancement, Youth Emergency Services and Heartland Family Services.

Steve, another client working with Together, was staying at the Open Door Mission before receiving help from the SSVF program. Within a month, the program assisted Steve with finding employment and an apartment. Steve now donates to many local charities with extra money he has at the end of the month.



Case managers work closely with clients to match them with the appropriate services.

"He wanted to do something special for other veterans that are in the program and purchased four brand new microwaves and three vacuum cleaners for current program participants," Madej says. "Paying it forward, indeed."



Client donates household items to the program that helped him get back on his feet.