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Mesilla Valley Community of Hope

2018

Hope Stories

Interview 4

Las Vegas, Nevada CARE Complex with Glenn Trowbridge

Interviewed by David Lee del Norte

19 April 2018

at CARE Complex, 200 Foremaster Lane in Las Vegas, Nevada

Sponsored by Doña Ana County Historical Society

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Recommended Citation

Trowbridge, Glenn, interviewed by David Lee del Norte, 18 April 2018.
Hope Stories oral history project, New Mexico State University
Library Archives and Special Collections.

Recording Information

Hope Stories 004 — 1h 36m duration. Recorded 19 April 2018 at the
CARE Complex, 200 Foremaster Lane in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Acknowledgement

With guidance from public historian Dr. Jon Hunner, and support from Dr. Elizabeth Horodowich and Dr. Peter Kopp, in early 2018 Doña Ana County Historical Society awarded the Hope Stories project generous transcription funding through the Mary and J. Paul Taylor NMSU Student Scholarship.

Archivist and oral historian at New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum, Donna Wojcik transcribed eight interviews of the project, provided invaluable knowledge about transcription craft, and kindly orchestrated narrator appreciation artwork from Ray Ortiz. Donna's interpretive insight and professional workflow support is unmatched.

Kara Andrea Lory's *The Cultural Geography of the Homeless in Las Cruces, New Mexico* remains must-read research. Available at NMSU Library Archives and Special Collections, Lory's 2003 thesis is an excellent historical source on the consolidated services model at Mesilla Valley Community of Hope, an important first step to learning more about Doña Ana County poverty and Las Cruces homelessness.

I am especially thankful to each of the sixteen Hope Stories narrators whose invaluable time, insight, and personal engagement with the homeless community cannot be highlighted enough. Seen together collectively with project oral history transcription and audio recordings, it is my wish as researcher that New Mexico citizens recognize each narrator's contribution alongside the many unnamed individuals who work to end homelessness and hunger in Las Cruces.

Project History

The Mesilla Valley Community of Hope (MVCH) is a homeless services corridor in Las Cruces, New Mexico. In the 1970s, Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church began Soup Kitchen service which later became El Caldito. As need for food and healthcare clinical service increased throughout the 1980s, the Las Cruces community supported Saint Andrew's congregation members with the opening of Saint Luke's Health Clinic. With a long history of compassionate services for visitors, the City of Las Cruces recognized the importance of limiting distance and travel-time between public health and human service organizations located throughout different parts of the city.

Incorporated as a non-profit in 1991, additional support continued to form what became known as a collaborative alliance with operations at 999 Amador Avenue nearby to downtown Las Cruces. In 2011, following a particularly harsh Las Cruces "Deep Freeze" winter that caused health concerns for the housed, and deaths for the homeless due to exposure, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope staff banded together with clients to appeal to the City of Las Cruces for sanctioned overnight camping status to found the Camp Hope transitional living program.

In 2018, the Hope Stories project collected fifteen oral history interviews to learn about the development of the consolidated services model at Mesilla Valley Community of Hope. The term "Corridor of Care" refers to a perspective in the healthcare industry known as the consolidated services model that helps people access health and human service related programs in centrally located "Hub" or "Node" areas.

This public history graduate project asked participating narrators questions about how the Las Cruces community first began to advance, reinforce, and collaborate through the actions necessary to become the Hope Campus at Mesilla Valley Community of Hope. Rather than conduct interviews with those who experienced homelessness, the project features staff and volunteer narrators who shared community engagement stories about the consolidated services corridor concept.

Two additional perspectives from outside the Hope Campus, this fourth interview with Glenn Trowbridge took place at CARE Complex in Las Vegas, Nevada, an out-of-state counter-balance to the history of homeless consolidated services in the United States; while the fifteenth interview with Kit Elliot and Meg Long occurred at Aggie Cupboard on NMSU campus, a satellite food pantry inspired by Casa de Peregrinos.

Today's work to help the homeless in Las Cruces is the result of a compassionate, multi-organizational approach by non-profit service providers. In 2018, these five core non-profit homeless services include Mesilla Valley Community of Hope; Casa de Peregrinos food pantry; El Caldito soup kitchen; Jardin de Los Niños educational program; and Amador Health Center (formally Saint Luke's Health Clinic).

With Hope Campus the geographic center of non-profit homeless service providers in Las Cruces, it is important to note resources offered by City of Las Cruces, State of New Mexico Health and Human Services, and many other local organizations not located at 999 Amador Avenue. For a comprehensive listing of community service organizations, including for those experiencing homelessness, use online search term "Las Cruces Community Resource Guide," or ask for an updated copy.

Narrator Summary

Glenn Trowbridge was born in St. Albans, West Virginia, and lived in Las Vegas, Nevada for over forty years. With service in the United States Air Force, study in psychology at San Diego State University and business administration at National University, Trowbridge became director of human resources in Clark County, Nevada from 1979 to 2001. Trowbridge worked for a domestic violence non-profit organization called Safe Nest, served as Republican member of the Nevada Assembly from 2014 to 2016, and later became volunteer executive director of the north Las Vegas CARE Complex.

Originally an unsanctioned “Street feeder” program — today discouraged and considered an unwelcome distinction of well-intentioned “Do-gooders” — a group of advocates evolved their agenda, raised funds to purchase an abandoned drug house, and renovated the building into the Crisis Assistance Relief Effort or CARE Complex. Resources for those experiencing homelessness include a clothing closet, internet access computers, lockers to store belongings, a city bus-pass program, and services to re-establish important birth certificate and driver’s license identification documents.

In 2017, the City of Las Vegas approved the “Corridor of Hope” project on Foremaster Lane and North Las Vegas Boulevard, located within immediate area of CARE Complex and other homeless services.

With an intentional consolidated service area similar to Mesilla Valley Community of Hope, and modeled after San Antonio, Texas’ “Haven for Hope,” the “Courtyard” outreach approach seeks to create greater access to temporary housing, medical care, counseling, legal aid, and employment resources in conjunction with CARE Complex services.

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Interview 4 of Hope Stories — April 19th, 2018

David Lee del Norte: This is the fourth oral history of the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope Stories Project at New Mexico State University, brought to us by the Doña Ana County Historical Society. Today's narrator is Glenn Trowbridge [sic]—

Glenn Trowbridge: Trowbridge.

del Norte: Trowbridge?

Trowbridge: Yeah, no "A" in there.

del Norte: —and today I'm at the CARE [Critical Assistance Relief Effort] Complex in Las Vegas, Nevada. It's the 19th of April, 2008 [sic]. The file is 18 HOPE_0202wav. Glenn could you tell me your full name, just to clarify it again so—

Trowbridge: My name is Glenn Trowbridge.

del Norte: And your hometown?

Trowbridge: My hometown?

del Norte: Your hometown.

Trowbridge: My hometown. I was down the dirt road from St. Albans, West Virginia. That, I'm sure you can spot that on the map—

del Norte: (Simultaneously) How about—

Trowbridge: —but I've lived here in Las Vegas for over forty years, so I'm pretty much a native at this point.

del Norte: Can you tell me your current role here at the CARE Complex.

Trowbridge: I am the Executive Director, and I serve in a volunteer capacity.

del Norte: Glenn, what is your perspective on holding good employment here in Las Vegas?

Trowbridge: What do you mean by holding? What do you mean by good employment?

del Norte: By sustainable employment—

Trowbridge: Oh.

del Norte: —that provides income, and that might prevent folks from becoming homeless or having to—

Trowbridge: I don't think that the Las Vegas community is any different than any other. If a person has marketable skills they can find work. It's marketable skills plus the energy to pursue it. Las Vegas is a little unique in that we have a lot of visitors that will— I used to be a Human Resources director, and we would have people come in that wanted to give you a résumé that day, and they don't have a local address. They've got: "I'm staying at the Hilton Hotel in room 26, and I'm looking for work."

You know that those people are just wasting their time, and cluttering up the pipeline for those that are serious job seekers. Yeah. But the key to having good employment is the one that's gonna get you above the property [sic]— poverty line to where they can afford a home. The number of houses in the Las Vegas area, there for lower income people, which are what you can normally get as your first job in Las Vegas, like anyplace else, but it's tough to afford an apartment on what's paid on the lower end of the scale. For people making \$8.25 an hour, you can't afford to rent a house.

del Norte: Is \$8.25 the minimum wage in Nevada, or in Las Vegas?

Trowbridge: Yes.

del Norte: Oh.

Trowbridge: \$8.25 if you don't get health insurance. If you do get health insurance it's \$7.25.

del Norte: I won't go through that door, but that's an interesting aspect of Las Vegas. Can you tell me some of the lower rent prices?

Trowbridge: There's no such thing as lower rent. If you can find a place for less than six hundred dollars a month, and then on top of that you have utility costs, but if you're dealing with a six hundred dollar a month apartment you're talking about a pretty low end unit that's probably not going to be very well maintained. And it's certainly not going to be in the best of neighborhoods, and in all likelihood it's gonna be further complicated because those units are away from the transportation, the public transportation. So—

del Norte: So, many don't have any transportation to work or home.

Trowbridge: Yeah. So, if you, if you, right. And if they're gonna ride the public bus they might have to spend as much as an hour and a half travel time getting to work, and an hour and a half getting back from work. And so if you're doing that, and you're living in a low end apartment in a bad neighborhood, it's really difficult to maintain your enthusiasm for getting up in the morning and going to work.

Trowbridge: It's you can live on the streets because there's food, and there's places where you can sleep, and you can get, always have all those services if you want them, but it's not going to help someone move from homelessness to the more desired lifestyle being self-employed and paying your own way.

del Norte: Is Las Vegas considering what is commonly called a tent city?

Trowbridge: No. No. We, that— "Tent City" has a pretty negative term here in Las Vegas because when we first incorporated the city in 1912 or something, we were literally a tent city. It was right before the building boom took off in conjunction with the development of Hoover Dam. A lot of people came to the area, and they literally lived in tents. Uh, don't do it now. We're, we are— I'm not trying to nitpick, but we are not pursuing tent cities, but we are trying to develop affordable living, and be a step above tents. We're talking about utilizing these mini houses, minimum houses as well as—

del Norte: Like the tiny houses?

Trowbridge: —the two hundred square footers. Yes.

del Norte: Ah. Okay.

Trowbridge: Yeah. There's the big steel shipping containers you've seen on cargo ships. Those can be converted quite nicely, but you've gotta spend money on the insulation and air conditioning because they'll get as hot as an oven in there, but they're durable.

del Norte: That's in the works now to make a neighborhood with those structures?

Trowbridge: We're trying to. In the works means it might be at step one of twenty steps, and I'd say that we're at the front end of the process because you've gotta— Even if you do something like that, might be building very affordable housing that's quick and cheap to build, but you've still got the standard requirements. You've gotta establish utilities to the parcel, and you've gotta have security. You've gotta have lights, and those pretty much cost the same whether you're going to be putting up a four unit apartment complex or you're gonna put in four mini houses. Yeah. The utility connections are the same.

del Norte: Will this provide individuals and families housing?

Trowbridge: Yes. The intent is to provide them for individuals and families. Yeah. One of the most difficult groups to service are those with families because they, if a relatively unskilled person gets a job at \$7.25, they've still got to get their Medicaid so they have health coverage. And they've got children involved, often it's a single woman with a couple of kids, and so they can't all just be crammed into a one bedroom apartment.

Trowbridge: They need to get the two bedrooms, and those are getting to be much more expensive. Goes from the six hundred dollars up to eight hundred dollars real quick.

del Norte: With that extra person.

Trowbridge: With the extra bedroom.

del Norte: Bedroom.

Trowbridge: Yeah. A one bedroom, nine hundred square foot apartment is six hundred bucks, but if you want a two bedroom it's gonna go up to eleven hundred square feet, and start costing about eight hundred dollars a month.

del Norte: How has CARE Complex worked to provide resources to the homelessness since its origins? Like a beginning story about the CARE Complex.

Trowbridge: Well. Our origin is what's negatively called being a "Street Feeder," where you make your sandwiches, and fill up your trunk with boxes full of sandwiches, and you pull up on the street, and you just pass them out.

Trowbridge: So, we started out as a street feeding organization, and soon found out that the real need, because there's three fairly large charities here that do provide free meals that they provide them at ten (am), two (pm), and six (pm), and so if you're working, you've got no meals.

del Norte: Oh. I see that. Right in the mid-day.

Trowbridge: Yeah. If you're working the day shift, where are you gonna eat? If you're making \$7.50 an hour, \$7.25 an hour, if you're lucky you're working in a restaurant you can get a meal, but if you're working day labor, let's say, you're gonna be [coughs] in pretty bad shape unless you've got a way to get something to eat.

del Norte: I just want to remind you, we can take a break anytime.

Trowbridge: No, I'm just— I've got a lung problem that just causes me to sound real hoarse. It has nothing to do with fatigue.

del Norte: Okay. Just let me know. So, the street feeder program. What— When was that in the beginning time?

Trowbridge: We did that, started that about twelve years ago, and it grew to where we realized that there's other ways to do it.

Trowbridge: This building we're in now was a crack [cocaine] house at one time, and was going through foreclosure, and we have a benefactor that said, "Hey. We can help you out here." So, they bought it at a foreclosure price, and we were able to go out [to] the Young Contractors Forum, that's a group of craftsman, plumbers, electricians, that stuff. They actually did four hundred thousand dollars worth of improvement to the building here to make it serviceable, and so we were closed for almost six months while they were doing that work, and as soon as they finished we opened back up and changed, totally changed the level of services we provide, and how we provide them.

del Norte: So, that's a before-and-after of this building.

Trowbridge: Yeah. We grew quite a bit. Yeah.

del Norte: And that's beginning with the "Street feeder" program.

Trowbridge: Yes.

del Norte: It got so big that the community decided to invest in this building?

Trowbridge: No. We took the initiative, and went out and convinced some contractors to help us out here.

del Norte: Gotcha.

Trowbridge: And so they jumped in, and that was a community effort with all labor and materials being donated, so it was a—

del Norte: Is that something that happens outside of the CARE Complex in Las Vegas? Is it only condensed to this area, and I'm asking as an outsider that's never been here, but is this the hub? So, to speak.

Trowbridge: This street is. Right here is.

del Norte: Right here.

Trowbridge: Foremaster [Lane] is the heart of the homeless corridor. So, that's what— That's who we are.

del Norte: Just a couple of peripheral questions. What makes this area the hub in Vegas. Is there any particular reason it's north Vegas?

Trowbridge: N-, as, not, not because of north Las Vegas. It's because of the proximity of the largest social service providers are right here. Right across the street from us is Catholic Charities. One hundred and fifty yards away is the home for women. Women and families. We've also got a Salvation Army facility that provides lots of services, too.

del Norte: Just out of curiosity. How many people do you think are involved in this hub? Volunteers, paid workers, in general, that are staff— Not necessarily homeless. Is it a hundred people? Is it fifty?

Trowbridge: It would be much larger depending on how many hours you would want a person to volunteer before they count as a volunteer. Here, we've got one paid staff worker, and the rest of us are volunteers. These guys [at the front desk, and using computers] are homeless, and are putting quite a bit of time helping us out. This one over here gives us like forty hours a week.

del Norte: So, you're providing resources that folks can access services across the street or wherever they might need to be. Is that—

Trowbridge: No. We're filling in the gaps actually.

del Norte: Can you explain that a little bit?

Trowbridge: Catholic Charities is the largest one. It gets millions of dollars a year in donations, and they have bunks, and they have feeding. We don't do that.

del Norte: Yeah. Fill in the gaps.

Trowbridge: But the way they operate the facility is that people can spend the night there, but they have to be out of the bunks at six in the morning. They chase them all out at six in the morning, and there's no place to go. They have to take all their worldly possessions, and themselves, and get out. The explanation is that they need that time to clean the bunk areas and the shower areas. But then they don't feed until ten o'clock, and so between ten and six: Where are you gonna go?

You've got all your worldly goods with you, perhaps in a back pack, perhaps in a shopping cart, but they've got all their worldly goods with them. And we've found that that is absolutely a counterproductive way to offer services because at six o'clock in the morning with all your worldly goods with you: Where are you gonna go? You make it out as far as Foremaster Street [Lane], and you stop and park it, and that's what you see out here. You saw the police cars parked out there.

del Norte: Um hmm. [Yes]

Trowbridge: They're trying to move them along.

del Norte: Is that a daily occurrence then?

Trowbridge: Unfortunately, yes.

del Norte: And I'm diverting a little bit from the question that I've written, but is the police presence here part of how the CARE Complex has to operate to fill in the gaps from the services? Like, get to know the police or—

Trowbridge: No. We do work with the police quite well, and they're quite willing to help us, but there's conflicting goals here. Police don't wanna pick these people up, and take them to jail, because the jail can't afford it, and they're full anyway. It cost I forget how much. It's something like eighty dollars a day to have somebody in jail. And for that we could, if— Instead of giving it to the police department to run a jail to imprison somebody for a day, give me that eighty bucks. I'll put them up in a hotel room.

del Norte: That's a good solution or a way to look at it because I'm sure that—

Trowbridge: It's a little different.

del Norte: —would be something we imagine could happen, but it doesn't always.

Trowbridge: Yeah. See, some of the other things that I kind of strayed away from, Catholic Charities, and how we're filling in the gaps. Catholic Charities is one of the more popular first stops for homeless people, and they don't do much in the way of helping people re-establish their identity.

Trowbridge: As a matter of fact, they'll even send them over here to us to help them get ID. And if you don't have proper ID you're not gonna have a chance in the world of getting a job. Yeah.

del Norte: Is there services here at the CARE Complex that works to get folks jobs—

Trowbridge: Yes. And we've got—

del Norte: —to get from the process?

Trowbridge: From where?

del Norte: Well. Just in this process.

Trowbridge: Yes. We have computers that people can come in so they can get on line, and look up job opportunities, and prepare résumés, and things like that, and communicate with potential employers. We also offer mail service which is another big deal, where when you put in your application for work, don't put down the hotel at "Such-and-such" or "I'm sleeping on the street at Such-and-such."

You've gotta have an address where a potential employer can send you communication, and so we provide an address, and we accept mail, and that's a big plus.

Trowbridge: In addition, another one of the things that's a gap that we fill is, I'll have to take you on a tour and show you, but we've got lockers, like high school gym lockers that we'll let people park their goods in, and leave them there for up to thirty days. And so that's a real bonus to where somebody, they get kicked out at six o'clock [in the morning] they can come over here and put their goods, store them secure, because the theft that goes on in the homeless shelter is sky high. They were—

del Norte: Here? In this immediate area?

Trowbridge: Any place. You get people that, you know, they come with a variety of backgrounds. Some of them are coming right out of prison where they would just as soon stick a knife in you as look at you again. And if you've got your SSI [Social Security Income] check they're gonna take it from you. And during certain periods of the month when the checks do come out, the person that's the check recipient better be street wise or they're gonna get ripped off.

del Norte: So, that's something that's vastly different from the HOPE Campus in Las Cruces. It feels like it would be a dangerous community, and it is in many ways, but there's not a population there. It's kind of a small community of care, and not—

Trowbridge: Right here, within about a one mile radius of this building, there's like two thousand five hundred homeless people.

del Norte: And that's just a count that you've done, or is it—

Trowbridge: No. That's a count that the county did. They count the homeless people throughout the entire county, and it's a number that is approaching seven thousand, and then they do it—

del Norte: In the county?

Trowbridge: —in the overall county area, and now they— And then they break it down further by doing it by zip codes. So, within our zip code is where we get the two thousand five hundred. We're probably the most densely populated by homeless than any area in the valley.

del Norte: Well. With the one mile radius in mind, where do the homeless go when they're not at the CARE Complex, outside?

Trowbridge: They're right out there on the street.

del Norte: So, it's that.. Well. I mean, there— If there's seven thousand across the county, are there other services besides what's here in this area?

Trowbridge: Oh. Yeah. There's lots of other services, but where the people are physically located just varies.

Trowbridge: These encampments just pop up based upon opportunity, and whether they're gonna be able to actually stay there for a couple of days. The police, if they see— If the police see a first encampment start up they'll often go over and tell them they gotta be trespassed. They can't stay here. Out of sight, out of mind, type of thing.

del Norte: So, there's ordinances or laws against any trespassing or camping and—

Trowbridge: Yeah, we have—

del Norte: —creating—

Trowbridge: Yes. You've gotta have an authorized place to camp.

del Norte: So, at Catholic Charities, that's the shelter. And outside of this area you might be cited for trespassing. Is there criminalization of those instances, and people are fined, and you know—

Trowbridge: They could be, but the police know that if you're dealing with somebody that's sleeping on a street, to give them a fine is like a waste of paper.

del Norte: So, it's not that—

Trowbridge: No.

del Norte: –criminalized, like it is in other places?

Trowbridge: No. That’s— Well. I guess if you wanted to use the criminalization of homelessness it probably exists, but I think it’s being overly critical of the term. It’s a mostly— Most law enforcement, you know, it’s like mental health issues. You know the whole issue of, and there’s a— In the United States mental health is just at a crisis level, and that started back when Reagan closed all the mental health hospitals in California, and that’s been how long: Thirty years? But all of a sudden from people being put in mental health facilities they threw them in jail.

And now the police, and the jails, can’t handle them either. And they don’t want them. You can’t differentiate. If some ungodly percent, like fifty percent of the people in the United States, are about a “Five hundred dollar car repair” or “Hospital visit” away from not being able to make their rent payment, and if that were to happen to you: You’re gonna go be living on the street.

Is it gonna do society any good to arrest you and throw you in jail for a few days? They’ve realized that’s a wasted effort, not the way to do it, because any of us, I mean, we may think that we’re beyond that. You’re getting your master’s degree. You’re gonna get a job. If you plan on going into social work, you’re getting ready to get into the lowest paid profession out there, and you bounce from grant to grant.

Trowbridge: And then so, you might be working for the “A-B-C charity,” and they don’t get their grant refunded for next year, and you get two weeks notice that “You’re out of here.” “We can’t afford you anymore.” “We didn’t get our grant.” And so, the social workers are potential victims, just like anybody else.

del Norte: That opens up the question of: Can you be more specific how city, state, or federal funding programs play a role in your work?

Trowbridge: In our work? No. It doesn’t because we don’t receive any federal or, you don’t receive any tax dollars, and there are several reasons for it. Most of the time receipt of grants is a competitive basis. And it’s for a specific purpose. And oftentimes the specific purpose identifies a goal. And it also goes a step further, and says, “Not only is this the goal that you’re to be working, this is how you’re to do the work.”

del Norte: As in you have to make sure that you’re meeting certain requirements.

Trowbridge: (Simultaneously) Doing it the way— Do it the way the federal government says you have to do it.

del Norte: Um hmm. Do you want to take a break?

Trowbridge: No.

del Norte: You're good? Okay.

Trowbridge: And then you have all the insurance requirements, and licensing requirements, and hours of operation, and days of operation, and the accounting for every single thing that you do. And then you've got, it's just— It makes receipt of the money more difficult than just receiving a pocket full of change to go do whatever you want to do.

del Norte: So, has there been instances that you've perhaps received funding under these requirements, and then you couldn't meet the requirements, and they took the funding or—

Trowbridge: Not us. We never even got into that game to start with.

del Norte: Gotcha.

Trowbridge: My board of directors says we're better off. Now we were able to get the Young Contractors [Forum] to donate materials and labor because we don't take public money. They found us to be an attractive charity, and we are not what they consider to be enablers.

del Norte: Enablers?

Trowbridge: Enablers. That's a very dirty word.

del Norte: How so?

Trowbridge: Well. Because you're not doing anything to correct the problem. All you're doing is enable them. You give you a sandwich today, you'll be back in four hours and want another sandwich. So, all you're doing is enabling the perpetuation of the homelessness rather than correcting it. We talked about ourselves as being an agency that's dedicated to the transition. We're taking them off the streets and putting them in a job, and in their own apartments. That's our goal.

del Norte: So, aside from the affordable housing that you're trying to create in the future, what other transitional programs are there? Not just housing, but maybe it's health. Maybe it's, as you say, identification.

Trowbridge: Yeah. We've got, yeah— It's all the services that a person needs. It's health. We've got access to a doctor that comes in every Monday and provides free health services. And we've got counselors for every problem you can think of: drug, alcohol, financial management. The only thing that I haven't been able to talk anybody into is what every person that comes in through, comes through the door here, is their loss of self-respect and self-dignity, and that is a big thing. It's not an American Psychological Association identified mental health problem, but believe me: it is.

Trowbridge: Now, you can talk to ten people that you pick out of a crowd down on the Strip or something, and I would guarantee you that after you've talked to ten of them you could pick out the five that were homeless. Just because they won't look you in the eye. You say, "How did you get in this predicament?" "What kind of work do you do?"

"I'll do anything."

And you say, "That wasn't my question." "What kind of— what can you do?" "Can you paint? Can you work a hammer? What's your story?" And they just don't understand what you're asking.

del Norte: Just on a side note, that's a good idea, maybe go down to the Strip area. I've been along there, but to maybe do something like that. Actually speak to folks.

Trowbridge: I wouldn't recommend it.

del Norte: No? You don't recommend it. I understand.

Trowbridge: People are here on vacation. They're not wanting to be interviewed about something as ugly as homelessness.

del Norte: I've run into that.

Trowbridge: And they don't know anything about it.

del Norte: Yeah.

Trowbridge: And they're from back in Ogallala, Nebraska, or some goofy place like New Mexico. They come here to party.

del Norte: I noticed. It's, yeah— Can you discuss some of the challenges here in Las Vegas of maintaining health when you're experiencing homelessness? Just to give a little context between different areas.

Trowbridge: Las Vegas probably has every germ on earth because we have so many tourists coming in from all over the place. Whether it's deep in the heart of Africa or Europe or Asia. There's diseases they bring in, germs that they bring in. We're having a— Here on the west coast, they've an outbreak of Hepatitis C. We've had seven people die in San Diego with Hepatitis, and we've got another two hundred that they put in the county hospital over in San Diego. In San Francisco they're having an outbreak of Tuberculosis.

del Norte: The climate mixed with— Yeah.

Trowbridge: Well. I'll say it. The TB [Tuberculosis] came from the illegals coming across the border.

del Norte: So, there's a lot of undocumented homeless folks here in Las Vegas, and you're—

Trowbridge: Sure.

del Norte: —you mentioned San Francisco specifically.

Trowbridge: Yeah, um hmm.

del Norte: Is that an issue here in Las Vegas? Is there racial biases that—

Trowbridge: The health issue? No, no.

del Norte: Well. What I mean is, do people that are undocumented come here for help? As we-, you know in, in a—

Trowbridge: Frankly. No.

del Norte: They don't.

Trowbridge: Yeah. The number of people that come through here that would be identified, typically, as illegal aliens, they don't come here at all. This is gonna get you on a whole different tangent, but I'm gonna tell you.

Trowbridge: It's not Hispanics that come in looking for social services at all. I have a hundred people come through the door. I might have one that's Hispanic.

del Norte: So, it's predominantly white folks that are looking for jobs?

Trowbridge: White and black. White and black.

del Norte: White and black. Okay. Do you— Can you speak to why that may be, here in Las Vegas? And I think I have an inclination from Las Cruces' perspective, just in the aspect of why it would only be that one, or those two groups. Is it that the— Is it too many, too much tension between the groups, or something?

Trowbridge: No. No. That's not it. No, the Hispanics have a— They want to work, and they'll go out and do day labor, and things like that. And then for living arrangements it's not uncommon to have six or eight single men of Hispanic origin living in one house, and so they make their own living arrangements. They're— It's— Mexico has almost nonexistent social service, welfare, type of system, and the people that have grown up in Mexico don't think about going to a public agency for help. It just doesn't— It's not there, and so when they move across the border they are still much more self-reliant. And so they'll go out and find a day job, where a lot of people out here that won't.

del Norte: You mentioned that a doctor comes in, and that's obviously outside of this area. A doctor visits to give care to the homeless?

Trowbridge: Um hmm. [Yes]

del Norte: Which clinical services and health care help the homeless access medical attention? Both preventative and emergency, outside [of CARE Complex], besides that instance.

Trowbridge: (Simultaneously) You— Besides that? The way that whole program works is that the individuals, Dr. Shin, is, he will provide emergency hands-on. If someone has a big sore, or a cut, he'll patch them up. But if it's something that's a little more complicated or different, the far majority of the people here are covered by Medicaid, and so he can refer them to an appropriate clinic, and even call and make appointments for them. They can send him out.

del Norte: Like a referral system. Since he sees them that's the first step. And then they get more care?

Trowbridge: (Simultaneously) Yeah. Here's— You need to go see a pulmonary physician, or you need to see a— You've got diabetes, you need to go see somebody that works with that, or whatever their problem is they— He can steer them to the right places. And here in Nevada when people come in for public assistance, food stamps, whatever it's called, they just concurrently are signed up for Medicaid.

And so, the doctor doesn't want to take, he doesn't want to get involved between a patient that walks in here that had a previous relationship with another doctor.

Trowbridge: He will send them back to their own doctor. Call him and say, “Hey, I’m gonna refer Joe Blow over to you, and would you help him? It looks like he’s having a— His blood pressure’s out of control.” Help steer him in the right direction.

del Norte: Is there services that might give them transportation to the next doctor or anything like that?

Trowbridge: There’s a couple that do. It’s fairly easy for veterans. They got a van that’ll come by to pick people up and take them to the doctor. But we— I was just reading in the Review Journal, our local paper, this morning, that the 911 emergency services— The article was short on the period of time, but it said they had five hundred 911 calls, emergency, life-threatening situations that had been submitted to them on behalf of fifteen people.

del Norte: Um hmm. Definitely a cycle.

Trowbridge: Yeah.

del Norte: That’s one of the pluses of Community of Hope. When they actually allowed people to stay there the 911 calls dropped, and that’s why we’re on our way to what they’re calling “Sanctioned.”

Trowbridge: Sure. It’s a big deal.

del Norte: Yeah. Can you talk a little bit about services for veterans in more detail?

Trowbridge: Veterans probably have the best services that are out there, in terms of everything from health care to getting their discharges upgraded from whatever they, you know, if they got an undesirable discharge, there's services where they can help them get it upgraded to an honorable. There's several facilities that help veterans with apartments that they can get. Just out and out, "Yeah, here you go." "We have a room for you." The issue becomes a matter of educating the veterans.

del Norte: Yes.

Trowbridge: Vegas gets a lot of people who just come in, and the first stop is over at Catholic Charities. The second stop, in the next morning, is over here. Some of the veterans, they have to establish their identity. "Are you a vet?" "Do you have your DD214?" And they'll look at you like, "What the hell's a DD214?" But if you don't have that as a documentation for your military service you can't gain access until you go through a whole other process of giving a duplicate copy of your DD214, and the Veterans Administration will help you get that, but you're in kind of a limbo until you get that document in your hands.

del Norte: So, the process might be expedited for veterans, but there's still an issue of getting all the Ps and Qs.

Trowbridge: You've gotta be able. You've gotta have your discharge papers and that kind of thing. And lots of times when people leave their home, particularly women— When they leave their home they're not bringing all the things with them that they should. They don't bring their birth certificates, and their high school GED [General Equivalent Diploma] or their diploma. They don't bring a résumé that has all the names and addresses of former employers, and contact information for them, so it's tough to get references.

It's even difficult to fill out a résumé. If you don't know the name of your— the address of your last employer, and it's been six months, and you've been drunk the whole six months, or stoned, you know, you're not gonna be able to remember your own last name sometimes.

del Norte: Mentioning alcohol, and drug abuse, and so forth, aside from mental illness which is, you know, correlated, of course, in many cases, are there any programs for alcoholism and drug abuse nearby?

Trowbridge: Yeah, we have the— Yes. There's programs and counseling services for every mental health issue or addiction you can think of. There's a lot of them. They just have— the issue is getting the people to come in and level with you. Nobody wants to admit that, "Hey. I can't get a job because I was, when I was a teenager I got arrested and convicted of rape." You know, they just—

del Norte: Right.

Trowbridge: –the doors get slammed in their face. But you’ve got to get the people to tell you what their issue is. Very, very few of them have just one issue.

del Norte: Snowball effect.

Trowbridge: Yep. You get, you know, when you’re a— if you’re an alcoholic, and you’ve also probably got a bad credit record. You might have a police record. You have other types of things that creep into making getting a job very difficult.

del Norte: Along the lines of services, whether it’s alcoholism or drug abuse or behavioral issues, is there any other services, before I move on from what’s here, that we haven’t discussed already today?

Trowbridge: We help them prepare résumés. We help them get— If they’ve got a job interview we’ll get them in a set of clothes that makes them look much more presentable. We can give them bus passes to get where they need to go for an interview, if they can validate that they do in fact have an interview. We get a discounted price on bus passes, but even at that it still costs us two dollars and fifty cents for a one day bus pass, but that’s—

del Norte: The Center’s pri-, or cost?

Trowbridge: Yes. That’s what it costs us. Yeah.

del Norte: So, you're paying for the bus pass to give them a little break.

Trowbridge: (Simultaneously) To help the person to get to where they need to go to get a job, or an interview, or visit a counselor, or whatever. See, part of the problem with the whole concept of helping the homeless is that you've got all these charities that pop up, often in conjunction with a church, and they're spread out all over the valley.

All very well and good, but if the homeless person can't get to them to take advantage of the service they're offering, [then] it's not there. One of the big benefits that we have here at the CARE Complex is that we're right here where people can walk to us. But if you're offering the best counseling program in the world, but you're two miles away—

del Norte: Mobility. Big time.

Trowbridge: Transportation is an issue. You don't want to give somebody the reason not to f-, not to do their part. If you need to go fifteen miles away to get counseling for your drug addiction, then you have to get a bus pass. And if you can't get a bus pass you gotta walk or hitchhike. And no one's gonna pick you up if you're hitchhiking, so you wind up walking. And then you walk by fifteen drug dealers on your way to go to your drug counseling. It just doesn't— doesn't work.

del Norte: Yeah. There's an issue where drug dealers and so forth prey upon those that are in this area?

Trowbridge: Clearly. They know where the good customers are.

del Norte: Right. What is your knowledge of poverty and hunger in rural areas in Nevada? And does that play a role in providing services here? Do you get folks coming in?

Trowbridge: Here with us? Not from the rural areas. No. Those are true rural areas where there's a lot of farming, and cattle, and things like that, and homeless people don't wind-up out there. The people that live out there that are homeless generally grew up in that community, and they have a networking system that can help them out. They can couch surf. They can get day labor fairly easy. But there are programs out in the rural areas that are available just for people in those areas. Most notably is— The Department of Housing and Urban Affairs has a pretty good program on providing houses in the rural areas, and it's the same types of issues.

The people have to have first and month's last rent. They've gotta have a cleaning deposit. They've gotta have utility deposits. They've gotta have some other things that maybe they wouldn't ask you about. Like, "What is your criminal history?" "Do you have a checking account?" "What is your credit score?" Because they're interested in making sure they're gonna get paid for every month's rent. They don't want a homeless person to come in, trash the place, and not pay rent. And then they'd have to go through the eviction process which can take a long time.

Trowbridge: So, it makes the owners of the facilities, or the apartments, or whatever, very hesitant to get involved in renting to a homeless person, or previously homeless person even.

del Norte: So, breaking the stigma is definitely something that we'd wanna do in cases like this. So that, even though they might have a past history, they can break through, and also get housing without disparage—

Trowbridge: They can't make them. It takes a lot of hand holding to help that happen.

del Norte: Hand holding?

Trowbridge: Yeah. If you've got, you know, one of these gentlemen wants to get an apartment, they won't be able to get through the front door with the manager, but if I go over and say, "Hey, this is a good guy. I'd—I'm vouching for him." That's what it takes.

del Norte: So, are there people that can do that, besides yourself? Or is that—I know there are—

Trowbridge: Anybody. Anybody that knows the people can do it.

del Norte: Right. Right.

Trowbridge: It's getting someone that's willing to come in and volunteer, and do something like that. It's not the easiest thing in the world.

del Norte: How about soup kitchens? Are soup kitchens vital to the Las Vegas community? Does that play a role here?

Trowbridge: I think soup kitchens are way old. It's an old, old term. Soup kitchens were from the Depression era. We don't have kitchens anymore. We have community feeding facilities like, Catholic Charities offers full-on, sit down meals. So does Shade Tree, and so does a couple of other places around here.

del Norte: Shade Tree?

Trowbridge: Shade Tree is the one for the women that are victims of homelessness.

del Norte: Thinking in terms of historical homelessness here in Las Vegas, can you speak to some of the processes that brought Las Vegas to this point? When you mentioned soup kitchens, I'm totally aware that that's an old Depression era word. What are some of the historical perspectives, perhaps, that have led to the CARE Complex. And I'm just thinking in terms of— You mentioned the Hoover Dam, and the tent cities—

Trowbridge: Well.

del Norte: –were part of how it began, but now no one would think about–

Trowbridge: No.

del Norte: –having a tent city–

Trowbridge: No.

del Norte: –but maybe we need one.

Trowbridge: Las Vegas was a boom town here when all the constr-, when the economy was really strong in early 2006, 2005, 2004. The area was booming. We had, our number one industry is gaming and tourism. Number two is construction. Number three is mining, in Nevada. The price of gold went down, and construction stopped because we had over-built.

And so, all the people that were working in mining, and in construction, who previously were used to making good money, you know, I'm talking electricians making, this is— I used to represent the teacher, the electrician's union, and they were making fifty-three bucks an hour. That's pretty good.

del Norte: Yeah. So, they lost opportunities. They might have been trained in that at—

Trowbridge: They were big construction electricians, and couldn't find work, and so they— You give up your big four-wheel drive. You give up your RV [recreation vehicle]. You give up your boat. And you give up your house eventually. And that's what happened. That's where some of these people came from. That's why their pride is a big thing to deal with. If you were an electrician, and you were making, you know, seventy-five thousand dollars a year, and all the overtime you wanted, and you had a nice lifestyle, and now you've lost all that, it's really tough to come in and say, "Hey. I'm homeless. I'm broke. I have no money."

del Norte: My understanding is that's a term— A new term is "The new homeless" in folks that are finding themselves without housing—

Trowbridge: Yeah.

del Norte: —since the 2008 downturn, and it's folks that had careers. Might be older.

Trowbridge: Um hmm.

del Norte: Do you see that from 2008? What they call the, I think it's "The Great Recession."

Trowbridge: Yeah.

del Norte: Instead of the Depression, it's the Recession.

Trowbridge: It's the Recession. Yeah. Yes.

del Norte: How about older folks. They come here, and they have that sense of pride?

Trowbridge: (Simultaneously) They probably— I probably, I probably— Average age is probably close to fifty-five. A lot of, a lot of more mature people that find it's— Older people have a lot tough time finding jobs to start with, and put them on the street for a few months, those are hard months. And you can tell by the complexion of the people, and the clothes they're wearing. They need a haircut and, you know, their teeth haven't been cleaned in what seems like years. And you just, "Yuck." Likelihood of getting a job becomes more and more difficult. Very challenging.

del Norte: Are there any services on the other end of the spectrum, perhaps for children of those experiencing homelessness?

Trowbridge: Not that we offer. We will have people come in, families that have got children. Our clothes closet does have clothes for children. There's others that are [accessing] the "Shade Tree" that I mentioned.

Trowbridge: They have not only a place to sleep and meals for women, they've also got training programs that they can offer. They're a little more oriented towards women.

del Norte: Would you say that it's kind of a separated community with those that are at Shade Tree and the CARE Complex because of providing services to women? Or is it— Do you see some of the fathers come here? Or is it, you know, does it divide families? I'm just wondering if women have to go there—

Trowbridge: (Simultaneously) It can't. They can't. It can't—

del Norte: Yeah.

Trowbridge: It's a rare occasion that, you know, most of the time the women that are on the street with their children are escaping domestic violence, and so the likelihood of them hooking up with their ex: It's real. It could happen. I think I'm still waiting for it, but it could happen.

del Norte: Yeah.

Trowbridge: Yeah.

del Norte: We've been speaking for about fifty minutes. Is it alright if we just go for about another twenty or thirty minutes?

Trowbridge: Sure, whatever. I'll give you all the answers I can provide you with.

del Norte: Just wanna make sure, and actually I think I just have a page, so we can wrap up here pretty quick.

Trowbridge: Fire away.

del Norte: Okay. You got it. In your own daily and weekly routine what methods of self-care do you incorporate for yourself? And also instances that you know of in people that are volunteering: Are there self-care routines? Community gatherings?

Trowbridge: Nothing, nothing more than just, I use a lot of these damn things that I can't find right now [Glenn looks through the desk area]. That's the other thing about working in a place like this. You can't set anything down.

del Norte: Yeah.

Trowbridge: It will magically disappear, but the antiseptic [anxiety stress relief hand exercise toy] things. That's about all I do. But that— It's not much. Like I say, I'm a volunteer here, so I set my own schedule pretty much. But there's only so much that I can take.

Trowbridge: I'm a human being, and I've got a soft— But, that soft spot, while it causes me to come down, and try to help, it also makes me very vulnerable because I don't get enough success stories to compensate for the ones that are just hopeless.

You don't want to call them a— They're still a human being, but some of them are just hopeless. They're never gonna get a job. They're interested in leading the easy life on the street.

There's something else that you might wanna— You could cover in your master's thesis, is while living on the street is a horrible experience, and no one should have to suffer it, you know, it's not a difficult life. People that— You've heard of people that have done time in prison become institutionalized? And that's— Part of that is every decision is made for them. All you have to do is follow the rules, and you'll get your three square meals and a bunk while you're in prison, and people get to the point where that's enough to satisfy them.

People on the street develop the same type of a syndrome. And if they can get their— If they can get three meals a day, and a place to stretch out, you know, they know if they've got something really wrong they can get free medical care. And if their clothes get too filthy they can come in here and get clean clothes. There's, you know, we give free haircuts. We have a big eighteen wheeler that's outfitted with four shower stalls, and so people can come in and take a shower. And, you know, it's once you learn where to go for what, and when to be there, it becomes fairly easy. And to say, you know, "Don't do that anymore. Go get a job."

Trowbridge: “Go get up at, get up and be at work at midnight washing dishes at the casino,” you know, that’s a tough sell for some people.

They’re gonna say, “Man, all I need is two bucks a day to buy me a pint of whiskey.”

del Norte: What you’re describing, I believe, is folks are calling it the “Professional homeless.” They know the different opportunities—

Trowbridge: Yep.

del Norte: —exist, and they either prefer or they decide not to follow the potentials.

Trowbridge: They’re treatment resistant. They— We offer, you know, we try to get people jobs. They need their ID, and all that, and we pay the money to get their ID for them, and then they don’t bother to come back and pick it up. And so we’ve just blown seventy-five bucks. It depends on where the person’s from. And they took an hour of the social worker’s time to do it, and it’s just, you know, they don’t really wanna get a job.

del Norte: I’m interested to learn, are there any programs that offer any kind of discounts so these fees don’t cost the CARE Complex seventy-five bucks?

Trowbridge: Well.

del Norte: I mean can't— Are there programs that might waive things like that?

Trowbridge: No.

del Norte: No.

Trowbridge: In Nevada there's no charge if you were born in Nevada. California. If you were born in California they don't charge, but if you're from New York it's like fifty bucks.

del Norte: Oh.

Trowbridge: And, you know, it just depends on where you're from, and how complicated. It's like mine. I told you that I was born over the, down the dirt road from St. Albans, West Virginia. I was born at home on the farm, and my birth certificate is not a birth certificate. It's an entry on the Bible. My mother's bible.

del Norte: Yeah. Okay.

Trowbridge: And so for me to get a birth certificate out of the state of West Virginia's record—

del Norte: Sure.

Trowbridge: —was a major problem. I finished college, and joined the Air Force, and they had fun with me because they thought I had applied for a commission from the United States under false pretenses, and that was because the entry on the Bible had my name spelled wrong.

del Norte: They didn't like that, huh?

Trowbridge: They didn't like that. They were just—

del Norte: Uh, teasing kids.

Trowbridge: Just teasing me.

del Norte: Yeah. Yeah.

Trowbridge: Yeah. You're a brand new butterball second lieutenant, you know, they give you crap just for the fun of it.

del Norte: Sure.

Trowbridge: But some of them, like we have people that come in that might have an unusual spelling of their mother's name. If your mother's name is an African name, and you don't know how to spell your mother's name, it makes it extremely difficult for us to get a birth certificate for you. How did she spell it Latwanja [phonetic]? L-A-T-W-A-N-Z-Z-A, or Z-I-A, or L-A-T-Y-A-N-Z-A? They don't know, but each time you— Anytime you file for a birth certificate it's another fifty bucks, and so you just don't guess at how the name is spelled.

del Norte: Sure.

[A client asks Glenn a question followed by brief discussion]

del Norte: Glenn, can you talk just a little bit about, and you know—

Trowbridge: I wanna tell you about, let me tell you about that guy.

del Norte: Sure.

Trowbridge: He's a former alcoholic. He was an alcoholic for fourteen years. Hasn't had a drink in ten years. Probably the smartest guy you've ever met, and he's unemployed.

del Norte: Is it because he chooses to stay here, and help here rather than...

Trowbridge: He wants a particular job. He's a chef by training. And he wants to be an executive chef some place, and he, his standards are: "I wanna be an executive chef that makes professional wages. I don't wanna start off at McDonalds." That kind of stuff.

del Norte: Ah. Shooting for the stars. Yeah.

Trowbridge: A little over his head, but he's learning.

del Norte: Well, good. I think it's kind of interesting that there's that— It's kind of an imbalance, but at least it's productive here for the time being.

Trowbridge: There's a lot of one-on-one that's necessary to get to people.

del Norte: Yes.

Trowbridge: And it's—

del Norte: And as you were saying, there's not very many folks to fill that role.

Trowbridge: That are willing to do it because it's hard. You've gotta learn where to refer people, and how to refer them, and, you know, how to judge. "Is this one you're gonna risk your reputation on?"

Because you don't go to the same housing complex, you know, three times in a row bringing in losers. "Hey. The last guy you brought me the first thing he did was throw a crack [cocaine] party."

"We had to have the police here four times to get him out, and when he did, he had punched holes in the walls."

And, you know, you just don't wanna risk your reputation unless you're fairly comfortable that the person you're asking, someone else that you know, to help, they're gonna come through, and the recipient of the generosity is gonna appreciate it, and hold up their side of the bargain.

del Norte: What was that last part?

Trowbridge: That if you're referring somebody, then to help them get housing, you know, you'd think that they would have to hold up their end of the bargain.

del Norte: Right.

Trowbridge: You don't throw the crack party the first night in the house.

del Norte: Yeah.

Trowbridge: You don't punch holes in the walls. You don't bring your big pit bull with you, and sit on the front stoop. That kind of crap.

del Norte: Be thankful and—

Trowbridge: Yes.

del Norte: —give back to your community—

Trowbridge: Be appreciative.

del Norte: —neighbors and—

Trowbridge: Do what you're supposed to do.

[End of interview first hour]

Interview 4 second hour — April 19th, 2018

David Lee del Norte: I wanted to— Well, you know what, I'll carry on with the questions here, and then get to what I'm thinking. Are there programs that you're aware of that help alleviate the stresses we were talking about: burnout. Just that—

Glenn Trowbridge: Of the volunteers?

del Norte: Of yourself, and other volunteers?

Trowbridge: No. Not that I've heard of.

del Norte: How about trainings? Do people from the state or city come in to train volunteers like yourself and others to do these forms? To do these types of necessities? Or is it—

Trowbridge: No. We have— You figure it out yourself.

del Norte: Yeah.

Trowbridge: It's a hit-and-miss. Yeah.

Trowbridge: You call and say, “Hey. What do we need to do here. I’ve got a guy that’s from New Mexico, and he doesn’t have a driver’s license. He doesn’t have any form of ID.”

And, you know, you call New Mexico. get on the phone. And if you catch the right person on the right day they’ll explain the process to you. You get the wrong person on the wrong day they’ll say, “I’m not doing your job. Bye.”

del Norte: Yeah. Yeah.

Trowbridge: “Thanks a lot, bitch.” But that’s what you’re stuck with.

del Norte: Are there collaborations, and connections at all, between the folks here in Las Vegas?

Trowbridge: The service providers?

del Norte: Yes.

Trowbridge: Yes. We have several social-, several professional groups that do help and share information. Like the Nevada Homeless Alliance is a big one. They do an excellent job of trying to coordinate services.

del Norte: I think I know the answer to this next question, but I'm gonna ask it anyway. Are there employer, city, or state systems that support your health care as a volunteer?

Trowbridge: No.

del Norte: So, no one is gonna get health care from coming here to volunteer their time.

Trowbridge: Not at all. No. There's no benefits whatsoever. We've got one that we treat, one that's paid, but we treat her like an independent contractor, and so, she's responsible for her own social security, and she's responsible for her own insurance.

If she wants to start a 501c3, or wants to start an IRA or something, she can do that on her own. But we don't do anything but pay a thousand dollars a month. It's more of a stipend than it is a salary. But for somebody like me, my health care's covered by—I'm retired, and I have it provided by a former employer.

del Norte: Can you tell me a little bit, and I apologize for doing this a little bit backwards. I should have started with a little life history, but can you tell me a little bit about what brought you to this field after retirement? And if it's personal, it doesn't—

Trowbridge: No. No.

del Norte: Yeah.

Trowbridge: I'm a soft heart. I feel sorry for all these people. I see them, and they— I worked in government long enough to where I've seen government dollars just get wasted, and it really bothers me. And so, I figure if I don't like the way they're doing it, "What can I do?"

I can sit on the sidelines and complain, or I can get involved, and try to correct it. That's what I'm trying to do. I spend most of my energies outside of the office dealing with the government entities, and other non-profits, and trying to get them to understand that, "Hey. We're stepping on each other's toes, and we're competing for the same grants, and it would be much better off if you don't apply for a grant to provide bus passes. I'll apply for them. And I'll provide all the bus passes, and send the people to me, and I'll see that they're taken care of."

But there's a lot of this: "Well. No. We wanna continue to do that because we've got a relationship with this granting agency," or perhaps it's this church, or this benevolent group. So, it's tough to correct the status quo. It's a big ship, and to turn it around is hard.

del Norte: You mentioned some of the government agencies, and the non-profits that you specifically work with. Just to make a context of who you work with the most, maybe [name examples of] successes?

Trowbridge: The Veteran's Village is probably the one that I think does the best job. Of course, to be involved in that one you have to be a veteran. But you've got United Way that is a big helper.

del Norte: Minimum wage? I'm sorry.

Trowbridge: United Way.

del Norte: United Way. Sorry.

Trowbridge: United Way.

del Norte: And that would be a non-profit.

Trowbridge: Yes, United Way's a major non-profit, and they do a lot of disbursement of funds that they receive from HUD [Housing and Urban Development].

del Norte: So, they're competing—

Trowbridge: So, HUD goes into United Way. United Way accepts applications for— Here's three of them [on desk paperwork] that are United Way applications that— You go in, and you apply for a grant.

Trowbridge: The first thing they ask you is: “What previous grants have you received? Who filed them? And how did it go?”

And if you say, “We have never accepted money, tax dollar money,” they look at you like, “Well. Why not?” It’s because, you know, and you tell them, “We don’t like your strings.” They pretty much put you on the bottom of the list.

del Norte: So, you’re in a rock and a hard place with getting funding from these sources because you don’t want to fulfill, or you’re not able to fulfill, the requirements that they want? And yet you are appealing to them—

Trowbridge: (Simultaneously) Yeah.

del Norte: —to do something.

Trowbridge: I’m the grant lawyer. I’m the house. I’m the grant writer. I’m the house lawyer. I’m the health CEO. I’m the public relations guy. There’s only so much I can do. I’m not gonna sit around, and write, fill out a forty page grant application that I don’t feel I’ve got a legitimate chance at.

del Norte: Yeah. Time wasting.

Trowbridge: Yep. I've got other things that are more productive.

del Norte: Absolutely. You mentioned public relations. Does the Las Vegas community come here, or the media come here, to do stories, and—

Trowbridge: Yes, they do.

del Norte: —make the message of what— provided to a wider audience?

Trowbridge: Yeah. They help us quite a bit, and we've got a website, and—

del Norte: Um hmm. Yeah.

Trowbridge: —all that kind of stuff. Social media. And the Las Vegas community is extremely generous. Yeah. If you remember when we had that October 1st [2017] shooting down at the T-Mobile arena that killed all those people, they started off with a goal of a half-million dollars to help bury the victims. Well. Come to find out, by the time it was all said and done, they had over thirteen million. This community donates. They really do.

del Norte: Is there a way that you can create more funding opportunities from things like that? Not necessarily that instance? If it's a community that donates, do you appeal to this community for funding?

Trowbridge: Yes. We do. We gotta have a, it's almost like you got, there— This is a fairly sophisticated town when it comes to that type of thing.

del Norte: Sure.

Trowbridge: You've gotta have somebody that has a full color brochure that tells all the successes and, you know, you have a public relations campaign, and you can spend a lot of money putting together a professional image. But in this town, because we— It's— A lot of people live here, and it's a fairly small community. There's other people that are involved in the Rotary Clubs, and the church groups, all that kind of— You keep running into the same five hundred people, and those are the ones that you have to develop a relationship and a reputation with because they're the ones that'll open their pocket books and their check books.

del Norte: So, this is something that you're making me think of from just this morning. I was in a panel, and they were talking about funding from the hundred thousand dollar source versus the one hundred dollar source. [Are] there drives like that, that doesn't ask for those large amounts? It's just asking, you know, asking the community to chip in small amounts, and hopefully there'll be a large amount, or—

Trowbridge: You get a thousand hundred dollar—

del Norte: (Simultaneously) Yeah, exactly.

Trowbridge: —contributions rather than one for a hundred thousand?

del Norte: Sure.

Trowbridge: My experience [is] that it's been— It's just as difficult to get the hundred dollars as it is to get the ten thousand.

del Norte: Gotcha.

Trowbridge: It's a matter of reputation, and having the opportunity. Taking the— Invite them in to come down and tour the facility. “Let's go to lunch and talk about it.”

“What do you want to see happen with your money?” “What kind of reporting requirements do you want?” “What kind of [public recognition] credit do you want?”

That kind of stuff goes to persuading a hundred thousand donor.

Trowbridge: A hundred dollar donor, you can't do it, but you almost have to go through the same steps. You have to identify them, and invite them in, and show them around. Convince them that their money's being used right.

del Norte: Are there future programs that show promise? That are in the works? For instance, the affordable housing that you're working on. Are there other projects?

Trowbridge: Yeah. There's a whole big plan that the mayor has. It's called the Corridor of Hope. Huge! That's the acreage he's trying to assimilate, and will get all the services that are needed by the homeless in one place, where they don't have the transportation issue, and they can provide security, where people— These people sleeping out here on the street, they're just asking to get busted in the head. And you know, that's something we've gotta protect for. We got the (unintelligible).

del Norte: Is this a mayor that's been working on this since they got into office, or is this a mayor, and a community, that's supporting this movement?

Trowbridge: It's the mayor and the community. Yeah. It's really coming together pretty good. And I'm lookin' forward to it working out, but who can tell? Any time you're dealing with government entities, you got a turnover in council members. The one that was the council, the city council member that represented this area, just left office, and had a new person elected to replace him.

Trowbridge: And so I've gotta work with that person to sensitize him, so that he'll punch the green button to allocate money. But I know the guy, and so I'm working him.

del Norte: Yeah. Just a couple questions on—

Trowbridge: Go.

del Norte: So, this is a, it's kind of vast because it's a three part-er, but only three examples, perhaps. Can you name three of the most valuable contributions, or levels of support, that are not present today that would help the homeless immediately? Like something, you know, a cure all.

Trowbridge: Immediately?

del Norte: Immediately. Like if there was something that could, aside, you know, money of course, but, as well, what types of services would, overnight, help out the Las Vegas community?

Trowbridge: Transportation. More free housing.

del Norte: Free public housing?

Trowbridge: Yeah. Or just crash pads like over at the Catholic Charities. Just, you know—

del Norte: And that's in the works? With the, with the—

Trowbridge: Yeah.

del Norte: I'm sorry. What are they? Not train cars.

Trowbridge: The shipping containers.

del Norte: Shipping containers. So, that was a process with the city council? They actually had to come up with a proposal, and say how they were gonna do it.

Trowbridge: Yeah. They're receiving proposals from several different groups that build those kind of things and produce them because there's some conversion that's involved in making it not a storage container but making it a studio apartment.

del Norte: Umm, right.

Trowbridge: There's a little— You've gotta have the components to put inside them. Like you see in a trailer, a mobile home, you know, where they've gotta, "Here's a bathroom component, here's a bunk bed component, here's a kitchen component, a sink, and a small refrigerator."

You need to have those types of things, but probably the most immediate thing that can make a difference, not only in Las Vegas but all the larger cities that have a homeless issue, is that they need to, all these grants that are granted, they've got to have, the last page of that particular grant application needs to say, "What are you going to do? What are your measures for success?"

And then, somebody has to follow up to make sure that the objective has been achieved before they get a second year grant.

del Norte: So, follow up with the funding source, or—

Trowbridge: The funding source needs to follow up with the people that are getting paid to provide a service.

del Norte: So, repeat that process. So that it's—

Trowbridge: Yeah. If I'm paying you a thousand dollars a month to provide people with free haircuts, I wanna know how many haircuts you're gonna be able to provide on a monthly basis, and who's getting them, and how many actually showed up to get their hair cut. And then, when those numbers come in, the next grant year I'm gonna ask you, "How did you do on your performance objectives with last year's money?"

They need to do the follow-up, and that's not just Las Vegas. That's any place. Some of the bigger ones that you see — San Diego, San Francisco, L.A. [Los Angeles] — so much money falls through the cracks.

If you've got five different charities, each of them is, five of— Five directors. Five secretaries. Five board of directors. Five offices that you're outfitting. You've just lost your first, each one of them are spending a hundred thousand dollars on overhead that really, if these two were combined, we'd get the job done. So, you've just got to need it. Look at where the money's going.

del Norte: Would you say that there's a— Well, perhaps, a new movement in social work, and the new homeless, and the tent city camps? Are you seeing a change since, what you referred to in the Reagan years when they turned out everybody from the mental health hospitals, and whatnot?

Trowbridge: And threw them on the street, and now they're street people? Yeah.

del Norte: And certainly some of them are still street people, or— And so on.

Trowbridge: Of course!

del Norte: Are you seeing any changes in the last five years, ten years, anything like that? You just—

Trowbridge: I see a growing frustration level—

del Norte: Growing. Yeah.

Trowbridge: We've been spending "X-million dollars" a year on curing the homeless. Every time you see the word "Cure" the homeless, tell them they're full of crap. They're not curing it. There's too, you know, because we've been spending billions of dollars nationwide on curing the homeless. The number of people that are homeless keeps growing, so what is that millions of dollars a year getting used for? It's the five— All the executive directors, and all f- . . . Have you ever heard their story about how much money the head of Red Cross makes a year?

del Norte: I have not.

Trowbridge: I think he drives a Rolls Royce and has a private jet, and then has compensation about three hundred thou[sand] a year, and that's been several years since I've read that. But some of these charities, they say they're non-profits, it doesn't mean that they're not there to make money and provide a good life for themselves because they're there.

del Norte: Do you think that there's predatory? You're saying that there is at least one predatory type of organization or non-profit. Do you think that that covers the United States? These instances where they're gonna— The facade.

Trowbridge: Predatory is not a word that I would use.

del Norte: Okay.

Trowbridge: I would say wasteful. I'd say, yes, there's lots of waste.

del Norte: So, maybe they have good intentions, but they're wasting the money—

Trowbridge: Yeah.

del Norte: —with their own vision, or so to speak.

Trowbridge: Right. Well. You see the most common word is what we call the “Street feeders.” I tried to explain that we started off as a street feeding organization. These are, essentially or normally, a church group that will get the, “Okay. Let’s do something for the homeless.”

So, they’ll say, “Let’s make lunches, and we’ll put them all in bags, and we’ll take them down and distribute them in the morning.”

Well intended. God bless them. Keep it up. But at the same time if they knew, you know— They just cleaned the street this morning, and chased all the people off, and swept the streets, and made it look as nice as possible. And I bet you if you’d come by in the morning you couldn’t tell that they’d ever picked up a piece of trash. Where that trash comes from is from these homeless feeders that, they give them a bag, first thing they do is take the sandwich out of the bag, drop the bag on the ground, unwrap the bologna sandwich, take one bite, and say, “God damn. I don’t like that,” and they throw it on the floor.

So, what these people that are street feeders are doing, they’re enabling the people to stay dependent on someone else’s generosity, but they’re also spending a lot of money feeding the rats and pigeons, and creating a litter problem that costs the tax payers thousands of dollars a week to have the street sweeping crews come by and clean up after the homeless people.

del Norte: It sounds well intended—

Trowbridge: Clearly.

del Norte: –but actually it’s–

Trowbridge: It’s negative.

del Norte: Right.

Trowbridge: It’s the net impact is not what they wanted.

del Norte: Are there any ways to prevent that? I mean, can you stop charities from doing that?

Trowbridge: (Simultaneously) We had— No. A couple of three weeks ago we did have a gathering of all the charities, and everybody got up and gave a little two or three minute speech, and it was on TV and everything about how the consequences of the street feeders. They’re not doing what they think they’re doing. If they have five hundred dollars that they wanna get in the hands of the homeless people, don’t buy and make bologna sandwiches. Give the five hundred bucks to somebody that can prepare a proper meal, and set them down because we don’t know if that, you know, a bologna sandwich might survive.

Trowbridge: But what about the egg salad sandwich? Now you just made everybody eat one of your egg salad sandwiches after it has been sitting in your trunk for two hours. You made them deathly ill, and people don't think about that kind of stuff.

del Norte: It's such a subtlety that makes, you know, ripple effects.

Trowbridge: Yeah.

del Norte: It's interesting. What do you envision for the next generation of folks that are gonna come work at the CARE Complex? How do you envision the future of CARE Complex? And in light of the housing structures, and the Corridor of Care and so forth, what is your vision?

Trowbridge: I see it continuing to exist in not only in the efforts of the people that work here, and volunteer here, but also the [services] need is going to continue.

I see it becoming a little more coordinated service delivery now with all the different organizations that have their own little boat they're trying to row down the river. It's expensive, and not as effective, and too many things fall through the cracks. And so, as long as we can get the different service providers talking to one another, and accepting that, "Hey. Let's don't step on each other's toes. There's plenty of work to go around."

Trowbridge: “Let’s just figure out which one [solution] you’re gonna work on, and which one I’m gonna work on.” And I see that as being the biggest improvement you’re gonna see on all the social service stuff.

del Norte: It’s interesting you bring up—

Trowbridge: Who’s reading your stuff? Social workers, primarily?

del Norte: Public historians, historians and, as well it’ll be the folks at the Community of Hope. I hope to turn it around into the people like yourselves that are working at the Community of Hope. They’ll be able to be in the spotlight for just a little while rather than in the background, and that might create more resources in the future. So, it’s a community spotlight type of thing, but as well it’s written into the thesis, and all of the oral histories are going into the archive transcribed. There’ll be a highlight clip for each person, so it’s kind of giving back to the community of providers [and] volunteers.

It’s also looking into the community advocates, and the city planners, and all the folks that began talking to each other, and asking how we got to sanctioned status. It’s been a long run. It’s— It was the area of the Community of Hope, it was just a mud pit. That’s what they say about it.

Trowbridge: Oh. One of the things, you got me thinking about something else, and I would hope that it doesn't come across negative, but I think one of the first things that's gonna have to happen is in the social services, the social work thinking, in curriculum — At some point in time they have to have an accounting class. They have to have a grant writing class, and they've gotta have some definition of "What cost-per-unit of service delivery means."

They just simply are not business people. They're social workers that think that every human being deserves care, and to be looked out for, and the fact of the matter is that there is not enough money. Maybe they could fire up the federal printing presses, and write some more, but there's not enough money to address everybody's problem.

They need to, and this is against the grain of social workers, to identify which of those hundred people out there you're gonna be able to have an impact on. And don't say, "Well. I'm gonna give them all a bus pass" because they wanna go someplace.

Or "I'm gonna get them all a new birth certificate" or "I'm gonna give them all a nice looking set of clothes..." Or— You know. "No." You've gotta pick out who you can really help. "What is the benefit of what you're doing?" And if you're saying, "Everybody is the same." "Help them all." Yeah, [I'd] love to be able to say that with a straight face, but between you and me, anybody that uses that approach has never had to account for a dollar.

Trowbridge: And the social workers, these MSLs and the PhDs that run the School of Social Welfare, they've never worked at a job. They've gone from one granting agency to the other. And so the tax dollars go, typically come in to support them, and the tax dollars, they never have to justify what, "What difference have you made?" "Did you actually— Do you actually cure the homeless problem?" You've had fifty years to work on it, "Mr. Social Worker," and you haven't done a damn thing about it.

del Norte: That's interesting you bring up that there's nothing that they have to provide as proof of their work in order that they can be assessed, in order that they—

Trowbridge: They don't do it.

del Norte: —know the goals that need to be attended to, and that type of thing.

Trowbridge: Yeah. They need to. They need to do that. "What have you actually done to correct the problem that we paid you for?"

del Norte: Thinking back, what you mentioned about the community starting to talk to each other, and not step on toes, I just thought I'd mention what's happening at the campus, or the HOPE Campus is— it's called the Great Conversation. And they're facilitating dialogue among homeless folks and the community.

del Norte: Every Tuesday there's a Great Conversation held at the camp, and it's primarily informational for new campers, new folks coming to receive services, but it's an on-going dialogue that's happening. And I think that's key. I don't know many instances where they were stepping on toes in the past in Las Cruces, but I can assure you that it probably happened along— in the process.

Trowbridge: Oh. When it— If you've got two agencies that are both applying for the same grant, whoever gets it prevailed, and the other one got their toes stepped on.

del Norte: Right. I think we see that a lot in Las Cruces with the change of governors, and stuff like that. The funding will get shut down, and then it'll come back. And, you know, people are not gonna stick around to wait for their funding or their jobs and—

Trowbridge: Yeah. And so the person leaves, goes to another place that did get the grant—

del Norte: Wow.

Trowbridge: —and now this one that didn't get the grant, it flails. And the progress that that group has made slides back down. Next year they get a grant, and they're back up on top. This one here says, "I gotta get back there because I didn't get the grant this year." And then you've gotta spend the next year building it up.

Trowbridge: All these wonderful programs take time to get implemented, have an impact, and an evaluation of that impact. And then you take it the next step and say, “What can we do better next time?” That’s the part where it just takes time to do it. And most, or a lot of people let’s say, just aren’t willing to invest that kind of time.

del Norte: Glenn, I certainly could keep asking questions.

Trowbridge: We could talk–

del Norte: Yeah.

Trowbridge: –but I–

del Norte: Yeah.

Trowbridge: –you’re having the conversations over in Las Cruces. I would bet I could go over there, and say the same things I’ve been saying to you, and they would all, at the right time, agree with me. All together they’d say, “That guy just doesn’t like social workers.” And that would be their first reaction. And those guys got their PhDs, so they can write-up and give you all kinds of case studies to where: “No.” “The social worker’s approach to give it to everybody is the way to go,” and they just won’t accept me saying: “Bullshit.”

del Norte: Right. So, a rock and a hard place. We need social workers, but at the same time their work isn't exactly helping your work.

Trowbridge: Their work is— Cost effectiveness doesn't enter into their thinking.

del Norte: It— Just again, on the conversation that's here, do you think that's gonna strengthen? Do you think the community's gonna open up even more dialogue that's happening?

Trowbridge: If we're successful. If they can see what they want. We've got, and I'm telling you more, and it probably won't apply to Las Cruces, but we have— Las Vegas Boulevard is the one right here [intersection with Foremaster Lane], and it's the entranceway, the northern entrance to the city, and with all the homeless people and their encampments, it looks like the Dickens.

And we've got the cash. We've got the baseball field down here. And also a half-million square feet of convention space that's literally being unused because the people coming through, they don't wanna throw their convention, or their wedding, or whatever they've got going on, that they might otherwise be renting some space [in the area] down there. They don't wanna do it because of all the homeless people.

del Norte: So, they kind of built north [Las Vegas], but now they don't— Nobody wants to use what [is] now the built environment.

Trowbridge: There wasn't— It wasn't built for that purpose.

del Norte: Right.

Trowbridge: It was, it was built with the dream that we'd get a major league baseball team here, but [the sports stadium's] been sitting over there for twenty years with no major league baseball team. We have a piss-poor Triple-A [team], but they're, you know, it's not working.

del Norte: Interesting. Is there anything else that you'd like to add to wrap up the conversation we've had? Just final thoughts, and of course you have as long as you'd like to—

Trowbridge: (Simultaneously) It's extremely— It's— The whole issue of homeless is extremely complicated. It's multi-faceted with lots of problems, with each one of them, and if you just grab one out there, and just talk to him and say, "How come you're on the street?"

"Oh. I don't know."

We've got people come in, and talk to me in the in-processing, and they say well, they left home because they had, the chief of police was looking for them because they had a whole arm full of parking tickets that they didn't pay. And so they're away from the law is what they think.

Trowbridge: They think the sheriff is gonna come arrest them, and take them back to Ogallala, Nebraska or wherever the hell they're from. And it's not the case at all. There's no warrant out for them. And they're not gonna do it for parking tickets anyway, but they don't know.

We have others that say the courts, you know, "I make ten bucks an hour as a fry cook at McDonalds, and the court — I work forty hours a week so I've got four hundred dollars a week coming in, and the court has ordered me to pay three hundred and seventy-five dollars to my wife for the three children."

And you say, "How in the hell am I?" You know. "I can't do it. I'm running away. I'm going to Las Vegas."

Unrealistic expectations of what you can do with your money. If the rule of thumb is you're supposed to spend no more than thirty percent of your gross income on housing, and if you're only making ten bucks an hour, and you figure thirty percent of four hundred bucks a month, it's not enough to rent much of a place unless you get three or four roommates.

del Norte: Rock and a hard place.

Trowbridge: Tough to do.

del Norte: Glenn, I can keep asking questions, but I won't. We'll wrap up here. Would you call the CARE Complex the informational core of folks that are disillusioned by their situation? I mean, are there legibility campaigns to help folks in Las Vegas understand the resources? I mean, is this the only—

Trowbridge: Yeah.

del Norte: —spot that is putting out information to try to help?

Trowbridge: Most of the others can help them. They have referrals, other things, but—

del Norte: Referrals.

Trowbridge: —but now here's— Here's what the deal is. It's just, you just don't say... [Glenn looks over desk at in-process paperwork] Here, if you want to, what is this one for?

If you need help with any one of these things, medical and mental health resources, or food pantries, or pregnancy services, all these kinds of things you can dial “This” phone number.

Trowbridge: Now, if you're a homeless person, and you've had the door slammed in your face a hundred times during the past two weeks, and I say call this number, and go visit the people over at "X-Y-Z Charity," and they don't get service, they get the door slammed in their face again, that just might be the incident that is the hair that breaks the camel's back.

del Norte: Yeah.

Trowbridge: You don't wanna just send them over. "Hey. Go over to Catholic Charities. They can help you out." You wanna call ahead of time to Catholic Charities, and know who you're talking to, and say, "I've got someone here that really needs your help. Their name is such-and-such. Can I send them over now? If you can't see them now, when can I send them over?" And you set up appointments for them. You do a lot of hand holding. That's the expression I used before.

del Norte: So, very case-by-case as you were saying. You need volunteers to case-by-case help folks.

Trowbridge: And all these [Resource papers on the desk], this list of phone numbers you can call, and services are offered by different non-profits, they come and go. Hours of operation come and go. The qualified staff member that you had a good relationship with quits. Now you don't know who to send them to over there. Or they didn't get money this time. Or the last person I sent them left them with a sour taste in their mouth, and they don't wanna deal with anybody I send them anymore. It's not easy.

del Norte: Glenn, thank you for your time today–

Trowbridge: Okay.

del Norte: –and for doing this recording.

Trowbridge: Okay. No problem. Hopefully you can hear me with my soft voice.

del Norte: Oh. I'll do a sound edit, and boost [volume] it if I need to.

Trowbridge: Sounds good. It's a nice little [recording device] toy you have there.

del Norte: (Chuckles)

[End of recorded interview]