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Mesilla Valley Community of Hope

2018

Hope Stories

Interview 9

Jack Turney Transcript Index & Excerpt

Camp Hope Democratic Governance

Interviewed by David Lee del Norte

20 July 2018

La Paz Room at Jardin de Los Niños on the Hope Campus

Sponsored by Doña Ana County Historical Society

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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 a small lunch service which later became El Caldito Soup Kitchen. As need for food and healthcare clinical service increased, the Las Cruces community supported the Saint Andrew's congregation 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 shape collaborative alliances with operations at 999 West Amador nearby to downtown Las Cruces. In 2011, following a particularly harsh "Deep Freeze" winter that caused health concerns and exposure deaths for the homeless, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope staff banded together with Hope Campus clients, appealed to the City of Las Cruces for sanctioned overnight camping status, and soon founded Camp Hope transitional living program.

In 2018, the Hope Stories project collected fifteen oral history interviews to learn about the legacy of organizational homeless services at Mesilla Valley Community of Hope. The term "Corridor of Care" refers to a healthcare industry perspective known as the Consolidated Services Model that helps people to access health and human service related programs quickly, reliably, and within centrally located "Hub" or "Node" areas of potentially consistent preventative care.

This public history graduate project asked participating narrators questions about how the Las Cruces community first began to advance, reinforce, and collaborate with 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 consolidated services “Campus” concepts.

The project ended without narrators to represent the community’s food pantry. Founded in 1979, Casa de Peregrinos relocated to the Hope Campus as an alliance member during the 1991 opening, and today continues to serve Doña Ana County with increased food delivery and expanded satellite locations. Two additional perspectives from outside the Hope Campus: the 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 this fifteenth interview with Kit Elliott and Meg Long occurred at Aggie Cupboard on the 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 organizations 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 assistance and resources offered by the City of Las Cruces, the New Mexico Department of Health, and the New Mexico Department of Human Services. For an updated and comprehensive list of regional community services, insightful for anyone experiencing homelessness, inquire City of Las Cruces or MVCH with search term “Las Cruces Community Resource Guide.”

Narrator Summary

Jack Turney grew up in Lexington, Kentucky and La Habra Heights, California. In addition to food delivery with Meals on Wheels, Turney volunteered alongside family members during community Thanksgiving events, cooked with Saint Joseph's kitchen to provide "Dinner in the Park" to the homeless, and participated in Tijuana Spring Breakthrough (TJSB) "Intentional Accompaniment" relationship building visits to Mexico with University of San Diego.

Involved with University Ministry, and ordained as a Eucharistic Minister, Turney later traveled to Alameda, California for the Mulvaney Immersion Communities for Action and Humility (MICAH) Summer Fellowship, an eight week program to inspire "Adaptive Leadership" with values of simplicity, community, social justice, and spirituality.

In August of 2017, through Border Servant Corps, Turney became Camp Hope Outreach Coordinator, responsible for direct contact with residents to promote Mesilla Valley Community of Hope resources and transitional housing opportunities. Like other faith-based organizations of Turney's volunteer experience, Border Servant Corps hosts "Accompaniment-style immersions" in the Ciudad Juarez, Mexico; El Paso, Texas; and Las Cruces, New Mexico borderland regions.

As Camp Hope Outreach Coordinator, Turney helped facilitate The Great Conversation alongside Randy Harris, organized weekly writing groups, meditations, and confidence building activities with the original principles of Camp Hope "Self-Governance."

To increase the likelihood for trusting relationships between residents, clients, and staff, Turney suggested that the “Rules” form signed by all residents be reconstituted and renamed as Camp Hope “Agreements.”

In 2019, with advisement from Yoli Silva, Turney enrolled in the Master of Social Work program at New Mexico State University. In collaboration with university departments and Las Cruces community organizations, increased awareness for year-round volunteer engagement alongside Hope Campus professional staff continues to be one of many responsibilities for the outreach coordinator.

Index of first hour

00:07 - Interview introduction

01:21 - Family biography

04:24 - Meals on Wheels volunteerism

06:16 - Early education, sports, ambition to become a teacher

08:50 - High school Key Club, Student Government, Peer Assistance Leadership anti-drug advocacy

10:54 - Recognizing difficult social issues, playing Lacrosse, Saint Joseph's kitchen "Dinner in the Park" for the homeless

13:43 - Servite Catholic leadership and identity, inspiration for college

15:04 - University of San Diego peer mentorship, University Ministry, "Tijuana Spring Break-Through" (TJSB) accompaniment

18:20 - Study abroad, "There's no 'Right' way to live," Semester at Sea

21:48 - TJSB "Accompaniment" in Mexico, just "Being with people," Maquiladora worker-activists of Ollin Calli

24:42 - Sisters of Charity, "Abandonados," and helping feed the sick

29:30 - TJSB "Immersion facilitator," stigmas of HIV and AIDS, "Intentional accompaniment" with HIV positive people in Mexico

33:16 - Making connections through accompaniment, peer mentoring engagement, and helping others process Borderlands culture

37:40 - Mulvaney Immersion Communities for Action and Humility (MICAH) summer fellowship and "Intentional Community"

38:50 - Right of First Refusal (ROFR) for closed military bases, transitional housing program with Alameda Point Collaborative (APC)

Index of first hour (cont.)

40:50 - Facilitator “Case consultations” and “Adaptive leadership” strategies versus “Technical challenges”

42:44 - MICAH internship, “Closing the sports gap” with non-profit organizations, San Francisco’s Saint Anthony’s soup kitchen

46:04 - New Orleans MICAH Reconnect leadership weekend

48:27 - Border Servant Corps (BSC) mission, Lutheran Volunteer Corps (LVC), Urban Servant Corps, Las Cruces Borderlands orientation

51:18 - Interview to become Camp Hope Outreach Coordinator

54:30 - First experience recognizing California homelessness at the Santa Ana riverbed, Interstate 5 underpasses, Los Angeles Skid Row

56:45 - First visit to Mesilla Valley Community of Hope (MVCH)

58:10 - MVCH “Housing First” goals “To get people housed” regardless personal circumstances or stigmas of homelessness

Index of second hour

01:00:24 - MVCH programs, services, and resources for homeless or near-homeless individuals and families

01:02:24 - Client intake, case management plans, referrals to Las Cruces organizations or Hope Campus partners like Saint Luke's

01:05:18 - Introduction to The Great Conversation at Camp Hope, getting along with people, and deescalation through dialogue

01:09:37 - Camp Hope resident agreements, self-governance, Egalitarianism, and volunteer hours

01:12:00 - Community garden, Safety Shack Officer, and Camp Manager positions

01:14:27 - Democratic self-governance, choosing resident leadership

01:15:40 - Resident personalities, skills, and resiliency; MVCH on-site staff presence Monday-Friday

01:17:40 - Compassion, clear boundaries, and the purpose of resident agreements

01:19:30 - Homeless laws, ordinances, and architecture to prevent sleeping on public property

01:22:04 - Unsanctioned camps, decriminalization of homelessness, and the City of Las Cruces sanctioned status of Camp Hope

01:24:42 - Volunteerism, emotional support, and dignity restoration with engaged Las Cruces community churches

01:27:21 - "Holistic sense of care," Pastor Dan's "Street Church," reconnecting clients and residents to community resources

01:31:11 - Las Cruces mental health programs, access to medications, counseling, and outpatient treatment; court-ordered Assertive Community Treatment (ACT)

Index of second hour (cont.)

01:33:11 - Destigmatization of cultural approaches to mental health treatment, Med-management programs, and provider limitations

01:34:30 - Potential for Doña Ana County Mental Health Crises Treatment Center to serve local patients

01:36:50 - New Mexico Colonias health equity programs with Doña Ana Communities United

01:37:56 - Las Cruces affordable housing needs, “More focused” Permanent Supportive Housing with Camp Hope transitional programs

01:39:20 - Camp Hope “Waiting room,” dealing with client housing backlogs, and Outreach Coordinator difficulty of saying “No”

01:41:04 - Mentorship from MVCH colleagues; inspirational quotes and metaphors

01:42:30 - Growing experiences; personal self-care as MVCH staff; a love of reading, exercising, and socializing

01:47:10 - The four tenants of Border Servant Corps; friendships with housemates

01:48:20 - The self-care process, spending quality time, and awareness of MVCH coworker support needs

01:49:44 - Exploring New Mexico with family, “Getting out of the routine,” and new recipe cooking

01:52:47 - Client Coordinated Assessment to inquire level of personal self-care, and responding by creating access to healthy habits

01:54:30 - Las Cruces need for more affordable housing; more quality physical and mental healthcare (e.g. Doña Ana Communities United programs); and more rental assistance and eviction prevention programs

Index of second hour (cont.)

01:57:54 - Future of Camp Hope; Functional Zero for everyone in addition to homeless military veterans; addressing “Adaptive Issues” with programs like Camp Hope’s Community Garden

02:00:00 - Increased client and resident connection to Las Cruces community resources; anti-drug and anti-violence programs; the next Border Servant Corps advocates; Financial literacy, writing, meditation, yoga, Tai Chi, and nutrition classes

02:01:20 - Revitalized MVCH programs, mitigated day-to-day workload for staff and volunteers, “Soul-Collaging” art therapy classes

02:03:00 - Conclusion reflection on Border Servant Corps fellowship, Peace Lutheran Church, and MVCH coworkers

Interview 9 Excerpt — Jack Turney:

So, I'll start with the democratic self-governance. There's not staff on hand 24-7. It's not your typical "Night" or "Emergency" shelter. People are out here on their own as a group, and they have to figure out how they're going to make Camp work for them. And so, it's a constant discussion about, "Okay. How is this going to work?" Because there's new people. There's people that have been in for a couple months, or pushing up against a year. There's also people that have been in for one night.

So, what are the power structures there? The social power structures? How do we not privilege someone that's been in Camp for a long time, and say— "Oh." Sometimes this is an attitude that comes up. It's like, "Oh. I've been here for awhile" "So, I don't have to do anything."

"I pay my dues." "You do everything."

Nope. It's not how it is. We want there to be a certain sense of Egalitarianism. We all have to do it together. I read this proverb. It was— It said African proverb. I don't know specifically what region, but it was like: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." And I think that kind of attitude is something that we try to instill and engender in Camp, is that we have to do it together.

Jack Turney:

And so, the democratic self-governance piece relates to that because one: “Everyone has to work together.” We don’t want it to be lopsided in the sense of “Oh. Someone’s doing,” you know— We ask the people to do six hours a week minimum. We don’t want somebody to do nothing, or [only] three-four-five-six hours, and call it good. And then, have someone else over here that’s doing sixty-seventy [Volunteer agreement hours] a week.

del Norte: Just quickly. Can you describe the expectations of those six hours. Like what’s possible to fulfill that time.

Turney: Yeah. Pretty much anything on Hope Campus. You can volunteer at the soup kitchen. You can volunteer at Casa de Peregrinos. You can volunteer inside. You can be a monitor for the resource room when it gets super hot or super cold. You can help run the laundry room, or the the bathrooms that we offer, which are some of the other services that we provide. Some of those typical day time services, day-shelter services. And then, there’s stuff in Camp that needs to happen. Like, we’ve got a garden that needs to be taken care of. We’ve got the Safety Shack which is part of the self-governance piece.

del Norte: Please, tell me all about the Safety Shack.

Jack Turney:

Yeah. So, back when we started there was a lot of discussion between the City [of Las Cruces], Fire department, Police department, and Community of Hope about what this whole thing was gonna look like. And, I think, for the Fire department, it's like: "Okay. You got to be up to fire code."

Gotta be up to code, right? And then, for the police, it was like, "Okay. How are we gonna keep everybody safe?" And so, the solution was to have a 24-hour 7-days a week Safety Officer model. So, we have people that work six hour shifts. And someone's always on duty to prevent anyone from coming in without signing-in. To prevent anyone from just going back to the tents because we don't want to assume that everyone is bad. We're not trying to be suspicious, or paranoid, but we do want to be safe. We do want to be vigilant. We want to take care of our residents.

Safety in Camp Hope is the most important thing. Physical, emotional, mental, psychological. We want to make it as safe a place as we possibly can. And the self-governing Safety Office does that. I don't get people to fill those spots. That's up to the Camp Manager, and the Assistant Camp Manager. People volunteer for that. So, it's making rounds during the day inside Camp. "Are any of the fences cut? Or the lights working?" Like, "We still got the fire extinguishers there?" You know, looking for those kinds of things. "No one's back here that shouldn't be back here."

"Is anyone going into anyone else's tent?"

Jack Turney:

Really trying to keep an eye out for stealing because people steal. And that's a generalization, but I think it rings true, or it holds true, in a lot of different circumstances. And we want to prevent that as well. And then at night, doing rounds on Hope Campus, and of the perimeter. Making sure that, again— Safety is a priority. And so, that self-governing piece. Well. The Safety Shack ties into that self-governing piece because it's the responsibility of the Safety Officer who is on duty. But, also everyone else — Not just the Camp Manager and the Safety Officer — to keep people safe.

And so, I guess next thing that would be pertinent is the structure that we have for that democratic self-governing community. And so, we have a Camp Manager who is chosen. I will recommend people, I will ask people if they're interested, and then that comes before the group on our Tuesday morning Great Conversations. And there's discussion, and we talk about it, and then it's kind of official after that point. Once people are like, "Yeah. You know what? I like this person. I trust them. I think they'll do a good job." So, it's not like we appoint someone.

del Norte: It's not an election either. It's more of a consensus at The Great Conversation.

Jack Turney:

I think so. Yeah, that seems to be how it works out. I won't always ask for people by a show of hands, and then make it official on the count, and do votes. But, sometimes a show of hands will come up. A lot of it is discussion.

You can get a feel from the room about "Who." "Who wants who" kind of thing. "Who will do a good job." And people know. You know, like, "Okay. This person's here a lot." "They're dependable. They're reliable." "They've got a good," you know, "personality that works well with others." And there's, I mean Gosh, our residents have so many skills. So many skills. Such great personalities.

del Norte: Yes. That is such a wonderful thing to say. And so true.

Turney: Yeah. Very, very competent. Very able. Yeah. It's incredible how they can make those relationship dynamics work. Because it's tough, even in a structured organization or professional job type setting. It can be difficult to navigate some of those potholes, and land mines— And residents have to do it, just like everybody else. And it's possible. They do "Do it." And there's little stuff that pops up here and there. But, overall, I mean there's wonderful spirit in Camp.

Jack Turney:

And part of that is facilitated by the fact that it's democratic, and it's self-governing. People have to be accountable because we don't have staff [Overnight]. There isn't anyone else. There's no one else.

del Norte: Do you imagine a day in the future that there might be weekend staff to help?

Turney: Staff? I can't image that there would be. We contract with the security company in case anything immediate arises. I would hope not.

del Norte: You'd like it to remain Monday through Fridays?

Turney: I'd like it to remain— Yeah. And there's issues that come along with that. Nothing's perfect. And I'm not trying to hide those in any sense. Sometimes the attitude is: "Oh. Mom and Dad are gone, so 'Whatever!'" And that's another issue that has to be addressed by Camp Hope because not everybody feels that way. Not everybody's— Everyone is trying in some way, shape, or form, to get back on their feet.

del Norte: Absolutely.

Jack Turney:

Some people, I think— Or it seems like they are. Maybe there's some exceptions to that, I don't know. But, some people are just not all on the same page. And it is important to address that. It's important to talk about it. And if it comes up against the [Resident] agreements, we can— I'm sure Randy Harris has told you this: "Compassion. Compassion. Compassion."

And then: "Very Clear Boundaries."

And the agreements are the very clear boundaries that we set. And we put them up front. And then, intentionally, I switched it from "Rules" to "Agreements" because I think it's just a little verbal wordplay to get people to "Buy-in." I'm not forcing anyone to come-in off the streets. We're not actively trying to go out there and bring people into Camp Hope. It's there if people want it. And if they want it, that's fine.

"This is the path. Here you go. We'll help you."

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Transcripts and Recordings

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