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## Help comes for Benson's homeless

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Theresa, in Benson, is one of the many people Cochise Harm Reduction has supported and helped. She wants to join the team to help others like they have helped her.

Shar Porier [herald/review](#)

**BENSON** — All it takes is a smile and the simple question, “What do you need today?” to lift the spirits of those who have so little to call their own.

Cochise Harm Reduction has a mission to find those who live in tents, under tarps and in distressed homes to offer help to increase access to health care and social services for unhoused individuals and people who use drugs throughout Cochise County.

Those in need receive free harm reduction supplies, food, education and even legal advocacy aimed at decreasing overdose deaths, halting the spread of infectious diseases and a welcoming smile from staff members who also spent time living under the similar circumstances.

It is not an easy task to gain the trust of those who are denigrated for their drug use, their poverty and way of living. But, once they learn staff managed to turn their lives around and freed them from addiction, it builds a sense of hope and trust.

Samuel Bernard has been a staff member of CHR for two months, but before that was a recipient of the organization’s help and support for several months before he fought the battle with addiction and won.

Lu Funk, the founder of CHR who like those she now serves was an addict, searched for the locations where the homeless set up camps and her example was a model for him to get clean. He is now a full time employee who has a part in the effort to show those like him can get the help they need and be free of drugs.

“It’s a wonderful thing,” he said. “It’s a source of income for myself and a way to occupy my time and give back to the community. Being a participant in the program and now an employee, it’s a very fulfilling job at the end of the day.

“You’re helping people, making a difference. These programs are proven to work. Their outreach actually makes a difference. It does help with harm reduction. I’ve saved three people’s lives by giving them access to Narcan.”

A woman he met on deliveries uses small dosages of fentanyl as a tool to get by. When he found out she did not have naloxone handy, he gave her a packet. Just a week later, her life was saved only because she had it available.

Those served look forward to the regular supply runs which provide them with food from commodities, hot meals and sack lunches from Goar Park Lunches, and a long list of needed supplies like wound care, personal hygiene items, clean needles and containers to safely dispose of those used.



They can get tests strips to check for fentanyl, a deadly drug which has been turning up in in liquids and powders. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is up to 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine, according to the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention. It is a major contributor to fatal and nonfatal overdoses in the U.S. as illegally made fentanyl is added to other drugs now on the streets.

HIV tests, hepatitis C tests, condoms for males and females, naloxone for overdoses and training in how to use it are also supplied.

CHR also has camping supplies like tents, tarps and sleeping bags.

It is a big effort for a small nonprofit organization, yet it provides outreach to all the communities in the 6,200 square miles of Cochise County. It serves the unhoused in Bisbee, Douglas and Sierra Vista and now Benson and the rural communities of Elfrida and McNeal.

The effort in Benson is just taking off and CHR is looking for new people to help.

For one woman, times are very hard as she struggles to make ends meet. She tried to get on disability, and said arthritis and carpal tunnel in her hands makes it difficult to hold on to things or pick them up.

"They want to know how long you can stand, how long can you do this or that," she said. "I can do that, but I can't use my hands. I have the strength to pick up things, but I don't have the grip."

She has diabetes and getting clean needles for her injections are a blessing. The bag of food CHR provides also helps. Her location has become a site where others can come to meet with CHR through word of mouth.

What CHR cannot help her with is the worry she has over her son who has been missing in Phoenix for the past two weeks. Her worry and heartache were expressed in tears she tried to hide.

Theresa came to Benson from Illinois to help her dad before he passed away and now stays with her mom, who also receives assistance. She asks for supplies to help those she knows who are addicted.

"I think this is an amazing thing that they do," Theresa said. "There are a lot of homeless people here who need the help. Before, there was a tent city where everyone stayed. The city moved them out."

She likes the wound care kits, which came in handy when she got into some poison sumac.

"It's been a bad summer," she says. "And the women's supplies they bring are amazing. I have desperately needed those at times. They help out with a lot of stuff. I love what they do. And they go out of their way to find people and help them."

She even wants to be a CHR volunteer.

At another location, a woman who has received services for the past few months provided a number of laundered blankets and a stack of clothing she recovered from dumpsters. She was connected with CHR thanks to a friend who "hooked" her up.

She has been making the best out of a "shitty situation" over the past two years and doing her best to overcome addiction. Though she has found a few places to stay over those two years, she is now one of those without a home or a job. She hopes she will be able to turn things around and get clean.

"It's been empowering because I have learned what I'm made of," she said. "It's really refreshing to know there are people put there that feel the same way I do about the homeless, addiction, recovery."

"They catch a lot of flak, but they have been nothing but kind and very helpful. They seem to show up exactly when I need them. They're great. If they start hiring, I am one who is going to apply. I love the program and love the cause."

As more and more people are served, the word gets out and others show up when the little white van appears, she added.

Funk and her team offer no lectures, no scolding, no judgement. After all, they were once in similar situations. It is one big reason CHR has been so successful.

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**Samuel Bernard, Cochise Harm Reduction employee**

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Bisbee/County Reporter