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TIPS FOR HELPING THE HOMELESS THIS WINTER
Provide Real Change, Not Spare Change

They can be seen on freeway ramps and street corners – panhandlers with signs reading, “Homeless, please help.” But what kind of help do homeless people really need this holiday season?

“If you give a dollar to a panhandler, often you are really funding the local liquor store or drug dealer,” says Thurman Chambers, Executive Director of Panama City Rescue Mission. “Most people want to help, but they don’t know how to do it effectively or wisely. I wish that people would stop giving handouts to folks on the street corners because it can lead to destructive behaviors. What homeless people really need is long-term help; real change, not spare change.”

One formerly homeless man described panhandling in this way, “People would drive up and give me a ten dollar bill. They were being good hearted in trying to help somebody less fortunate, but I used their gift to buy drugs.”

Chambers says winter can be an especially dangerous time to give cash to individuals on the streets. Someone in a drug-induced stupor might accidentally stumble into a fire built to keep warm. An alcoholic blackout could result in exposure or frostbite, even death.

Chambers offers these tips that will make a real difference in the lives of homeless men, women and children:

- Don’t give cash hand-outs. Instead, purchase food items yourself; refer the person to an agency that can provide food, shelter and other assistance; or give coupons to restaurants or grocery stores that can be turned in for food.

(more)

- Donate food to a local agency that provides meals to people in need, especially items such as juices, meats, soups and canned vegetables.
- Donate warm clothes such as jackets, sweatshirts, new underwear, socks, shoes, hats and gloves for men and women.
- Because the fastest growing segment of the homeless population is women with children, there is a need for disposable diapers, baby food, formula, clothing and blankets.
- Personal items like soap, shampoo, toothpaste, hairbrushes, combs and shaving supplies are always welcome.

“The holiday season prompts many people to give to others in need,” says Chambers. “By supporting groups like Panama City Rescue Mission you become part of the solution to homelessness.”

Panama City Rescue Mission has been helping the homeless and needy in Bay County since 1972. Help begins with food, shelter and clothing and continues with counseling, spiritual guidance, job training, education and most of all hope. Now, more than ever, it places an emphasis on individual recovery programs that help people resolve the issues leading to homelessness with the residential recovery program, “Power to Choose.” For more information on the Mission and its services or to contribute, please write P.O. Box 2359, visit www.pcrmission.org, or call (850) 769-0783.

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