SEPT. 12, 2020

Dear MNA judges for the Lynn Smith Community Leadership Award

A series of in-depth articles, columns and editorials on the homeless problem in Mankato not only raised awareness in the community but helped bring about solutions.

A local nonprofit found a new homeless shelter in a willing local church. Dozens of volunteers from area churches have come forward to help manage the shelter. And a partnership developed between two organizations to provide day and night coverage for the homeless in the cold Minnesota winters.

The Free Press has worked with local musicians to produce a Christmas CD that will be sold as a way to raise money for a permanent homeless shelter.

The Free Press staff began the journey by meeting with half a dozen agency leaders and volunteers to map out our project. Establishing those relationships and indicating our willingness to lead on this issue energized the effort and these organizations helped us tell the story.

Pastor Erica Koser worked with The Free Press from the beginning as co-director of the Connections homeless shelter. Here is what she had to say about The Free Press effort:

“The Free Press has been instrumental in helping get the word out about Connections. I think the feature pieces that were run brought a significant amount of awareness in the community about homelessness and also helped us as providers to see where some of the gaps continue to be as well as where we are doing things well.  Anytime Connections has a feature article, we see a bump in FB page interaction as well as a bump in donations.  That awareness is crucial to us, especially right now.”

Another homeless advocate, Jen Theneman, director of Partners for Affordable Housing, told us our effort help bring the issue to the forefront for a community that didn’t think it existed.

We ask you to consider our homeless project and series “Address unknown” for the Lynn Smith Community Leadership Award.