

Food and Shelter maintains soup kitchen and Start programs with United Way partnership

By Mack Burke Transcript Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, September 30, 2015 9:14 pm

Mark Foster is a caretaker for his disabled girlfriend, Denise Wood. The pair frequent Food and Shelter for its soup kitchen and job program. He said without Food and Shelter, their situation would be hopeless.

“Without this place, we wouldn’t survive,” Wood said. “We’re alive because of this place.”

Food and Shelter is one of Norman’s most prominent resources for the homeless and hungry.

The long-standing charity organization will relocate from its current location, 104 W. Comanche St., to a new, larger campus on Reed Street, just south of East Main Place, but its mission to combat homelessness and hunger remains the same. That mission is achieved, in large part, through the United Way.

The United Way helps fund two major Food and Shelter programs: the soup kitchen and the Start program.

“They provide us resources to pay our kitchen staff and buy food and supplies to feed anywhere between 240 and 260 people per day, every day of the week, every day of the year,” Food and Shelter director April Heiple said. “For so many people, without that gift the United Way gives to us and the support we receive from United Way, there are people who would not have a place to eat. So, in some ways, the support United Way gives to Food and Shelter is a life-saving, life-sustaining gift.”

The Start program focuses on things like resume building and includes 14 week-long job programs that teach job skills and financial management, as well as sobriety support groups.

“The Start program is about moving people forward,” Heiple said. “Our food is about sustaining people. The Start program is about investing in people, building skills, giving them resources so that they can have a better future. Start provides skills that people who have lived on the fringes of poverty their entire lives need to propel themselves out of poverty.”

United Way funds about 11 percent of Food and Shelter’s operating budget. But for those specific



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From left, Amanda Duren, Denise Wood and Mark Foster come together at Food and Shelter in Norman.

programs, United Way is the largest funder.

“For our soup kitchen, without United Way, we would not be able to operate that program at all. It’s responsible for about 75 percent of that program’s funding. For the Start program, United Way funds about half of that, too.”

Heiple said Food and Shelter wouldn’t be able to do what it does without United Way’s contributions, and without public donations, United Way couldn’t continue its support.

“We think it’s amazing,” Heiple said. “It gives us the resources to tackle this tough issue.”

Foster said it is tough on the street and lot of people struggle, but without Food and Shelter, it would be impossible.

“There would be no way,” Foster said. “Food and Shelter is such a blessing to Norman. Oklahoma City doesn’t have anything like this. It’s awesome.”

For more information on how to make an impact on Food and Shelter’s United Way partner programs, visit unitedwaynorman.org.

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