

## Municipal Association of Pasco Remarks – 08/03/17

Good evening...my name is Daniel McDonald. I'm here tonight to talk about homelessness, and why it's important, and why it's important *right now*.

### **About me:**

- I'm originally from England
- I was awarded an MPA degree from USF in 2010
- I'm a 25-year law enforcement veteran
- I can juggle
- I know Morse code

I solve homelessness for a living. I work full-time as a homeless liaison officer for TPD. I also advise local governments how to develop or improve an effective homelessness strategy. I use the best, evidence-based practices

In 2012, I was tasked with what I consider to be the ultimate public administration challenge: solving the city of Tampa's homeless problem, by myself, with a budget of zero.

I was given the job title, "homeless liaison", which I always thought sounds like something Henry Kissinger would do in Geneva.

And my job is to solve problems – no matter how big or small. I focus on solutions and outcomes, not inputs or effort. I strive for quality over quantity.

My position was created because the current methods of solving homelessness did not work (and I'll go into why we should solve homelessness shortly).

I needed to figure out what does work (as the police, arresting away the problem does not work; cite Billy Kelley and 176 arrests)

### **I am often asked what services do I provide and how can I solve their problem?**

- This approach is backwards; I ask what is your problem *then* I find a solution for it
- I take clients from the streets or encampments, directly into housing
  - I often skip the shelters and transitional housing
    - They are the airport holding patterns of homelessness (at some point you must bring the plane in for a landing)
- I have arranged a wedding
- I helped "John" get an ID, then discovered he had about \$43,000 in the bank
- I assisted "Fred" collect a \$500,00 inheritance

### What about other communities? I found three common responses to homelessness:

1. Maintain the status quo (in other words, do nothing and ignore the problem)
  - How many of you have done this: Some say that if you don't make eye contact with a homeless person, they are not really there
2. Attempt to manage homelessness
  - Out of sight, out of mind. Letting the homeless live on the streets or in the woods)
  - Ineffective shelters and programs (in case I got you worried, the navigation center is an effective, housing-focused strategy)
  - The city of Lawrence, MA has the police stationed outside a homeless camp, enforcing "rules". Why not solve the problem?
3. Solve the problem. *Housing is the only known cure for homelessness*

### Why have communities have failed?

- It's not about *more* resources, it's about *more effective* use of resources (performance measurement)

They have attempted (and failed) to *program* their way out of homelessness with programs, usually named with a complicated acronym)

There are programs for:

- Single men
- Single women
- Pregnant women
- Families
- Ex-offenders
- The mentally ill
- Those with addictions
- Those with disabilities
- Those with mental illness *and* addictions
- Those with mental illness, addictions and disabilities (tri-morbidity)
- Veterans
  - In Tampa the program depends upon your last name (A-L, M-Z). The programs are about 3 miles apart
- The system is inefficient. It's not user friendly. How does a consumer navigate this? I can't.

- It can take years exit homelessness via the traditional route: shelter system for up to 90 days, then transitional housing for up two years, then finally permanent housing (you can earn a master's degree in less time)

You also must meet program requirements such as:

- Sobriety (who's had a drink within 30-days?)
- Classes
- Get an ID (you need a birth certificate)
- Get a birth certificate (you need an ID)
- Get vaccinations
- Don't be late

You must complete classes. These are actual classes at Pinellas Safe Harbor (source: TBN Weekly, 06/21/11)

- Errors in Thinking (not the best name)
- Skills for Successful Transition
- Breaking the Chain
- Living in Balance support group
- Problem Solving for Daily Life
- Coping Skills, and Self-Defeating Behaviors.

**I have one question...Where's the beef? Show me your housing!**

**The homeless recovery system is like going into a restaurant**, and you don't get a menu because someone else knows what's best for you. AND you must bring your own ingredients before they cook the meal that has been chosen for you

**Are you beginning to see a pattern?** How about asking the client what *they* want? How about a place to live? Why not cut out the programming and spend it on housing with wrap-around services? Many programs are like cotton candy – lots of fluff but no substance

**Why should we solve homelessness?**

- Public policy - we joined this profession to serve our communities, especially those in need
- Economic benefits
  - Chronic homelessness is expensive; it costs communities about \$30,000 per year in public resources yet only \$12,000 for permanent housing
  - It reduces police calls for service for quality of life complaints such as trespassing or panhandling

- It reduces blight, and makes your community for attractive for economic development

**Why should we solve homelessness *right now?* (*without losing the next election*). *I think we are at a tipping point:***

- We know how to
  - Housing end homelessness. Housing first works; it has an 85% success rate
  - Come as you are or jail diversion shelters have very low success rate
  - In 2013, Pinellas Safe Harbor served 5,029 clients. 2 went into permanent housing (less than one thousandth of one percent. Source: Sarasota Herald-Tribune, 5/5/14)
  - Which is a better return on your investment?
    - Mention Volusia County commissioner – “Your program will only serve 100 people”
- We are getting a commitment to change from more and more governmental and elected officials
  - Pasco County is opening the Navigation Center which is housing-focused
    - Four out of five county commissioners supported the Navigation Center on 6/20/17
  - I advise the city of Zephyrhills
    - You don’t have to be a large, urban metropolis to have an effective policy
  - They could have done nothing but *chose* to do the right thing
  - I am one of the pioneers in police homeless outreach
    - It works (the police and the homeless, once adversaries, are now allies)
    - This is perhaps the ultimate problem oriented policing problem
  - My program is popular with the community. What better way of enhancing community relations?

I will close with a thought from Iain DeJong, a well-regarded homelessness expert:

- “If not now, when?”

Thank you – do you have any questions?

See more at [www.homelessinnovations.com](http://www.homelessinnovations.com)

