

'Making good choices' - Our Daily Rest in Seneca set to celebrate 8th anniversary Saturday

Author/Byline: JUSTIN LEE CAMPBELL, THE JOURNAL

SENECA - A fact of life Our Daily Rest executive director Lauren Richardson holds onto is anybody could become homeless.

There's an endless list of reasons why a person or family may be without a home. When working, Richardson reminds herself of the vulnerability to homelessness all people have.

"Some people were living paycheck to paycheck when a family member had a catastrophic illness," Richardson told The Journal. "Somebody gets an injury, the doctor gives them pain meds and they get addicted. The person could be next to you or one pew over at church."

Our Daily Rest, a nonprofit in downtown Seneca, is an emergency homeless shelter with a transitional program for helping people work their way back to independence and self-sufficiency.

"We give people a hand up, not a hand out," Richardson said.

Our Daily Rest will celebrate its eighth anniversary on Saturday. According to Richardson, more than 1,500 people have made their way through the shelter, including 101 people this year.

And 49 people had already graduated by August.

"It's great," Richardson said of the graduations. "It's what we're about."

All kinds of people from different walks of life take refuge in the shelter and participate in its program. Richardson has seen all genders, ages and education levels, including higher education.

"We have adults who have a third-grade education and adults who have doctoral degrees," she said. "They've all gotten here in a different way. Some make poor choices, and sometimes it's health or divorce. You name it."

The purpose of Our Daily Rest, in addition to providing emergency shelter, is helping the homeless get back on their feet. People don't pay money for rent, but they pay in other ways. To stay at Our Daily Rest, residents have to follow rules, do chores and learn life skills.

"My children call it 'adulting,'" Richardson said with a laugh. "We're in the business of helping people learn to 'adult.'"

Residents at Our Daily Rest do household chores such as cleaning, mopping, sweeping and taking out the trash. The shelter teaches manners and how to be polite to staff and volunteers. And residents either have a job and save money or are looking for a job.

"It's just like any household," Richardson told The Journal. "But not everybody's parents taught them how to keep a household clean. We use what constitutes good housekeeping as a teaching tool for life skills. They're expected to keep their living spaces clean and neat."

In addition to chores, people at Our Daily Rest have to follow rules Richardson said also teach them healthy and mature ways of navigating life. Residents have to practice good personal hygiene, stay sober, follow a curfew and avoid fighting and gossiping.

"Again, it's all about making good choices," Richardson said. "We really expect clients to act like adults."

But the ultimate goal of Our Daily Rest is to help people tap into their potential and get back on their feet. Residents who have stabilized their health, dealt with legal issues and saved money to pay off debts and make a deposit on an apartment are the ones who graduate.

"When they're able to practice sustainability and at least live modestly, they go out on their own," Richardson said.

Richardson stressed people aren't just getting something "for free." People who pass through Our Daily Rest have to work, and graduates become productive members of society.

And that benefits everyone.

"It keeps local police a little less busy and the streets safer," Richardson said. "People who are desperate aren't going to be out on the streets now. Beyond that, these folks are out working. If they're working, they're contributing to our tax base."

According to Richardson, graduates have worked in banking, construction and retail management.

"You name it," she said. "They're doing it these days."

And Richardson wants community leaders and local businesses to give graduates a chance, too.

"Graduates are being productive citizens in the community, and they're certainly worth hiring," Richardson said. "I've hired clients myself for my own business. They get what they need, and the community is better off as well." justin@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6685

- Caption: JUSTIN LEE CAMPBELL | THE JOURNAL Our Daily Rest executive director Lauren Richardson said the nonprofit she manages is more than just an emergency homeless shelter - it prepares people for "independence and self-sufficiency."

• Index terms: News

• Record: 1666AEF717F91962

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