

Below are Kim Eppehimer's remarks from the annual picnic on July 22nd.

Thank you for being here. The year 2017 was a tremendous year, and we are blessed to have an amazing staff who work tirelessly to ensure all those who come to us are met with grace and receive help.

To our employees, thank you for all you do. I feel fortunate to work amongst these saints.

We are blessed to have a wonderful group of dedicated volunteers who work side by side us, serving our community with dignity. We are so incredibly grateful for each of you.

And, we have an incredible board of directors - they are your neighbors and members of your faith community, who have dedicated many hours to helping us move this mission forward. Thank you for all that you do.

Although we are doing well financially, it feels every dollar we raise takes a little extra fight. The demand for resources continues to grow, and the bucket of resources is shrinking.

It's not just me, or the board or the staff working for those dollars. It's also each of you. Whether you know it or not, you are one of our many voices when it comes to advocating for Friendship House needs. We hear your stories after serving dinner at Andrew's Place, donating your time to the Clothing Bank, or volunteering at our Sunday Breakfast. Stories that tell others how much you love this organization. I see how you share our posts on Facebook and the comments explaining how much you care for our ministry. I am grateful for your support financially, your gift of time, and how you share Friendship House with others.

As you know as well as I do, there are many people experiencing homelessness and displacement who need our help. Friendship House has become an important piece of the puzzle to their success. And as with every puzzle, it's hard to complete if there is a missing piece. We are critical to this community. And you make us possible to exist.

There is much work to be done to ensure that this critical piece of the puzzle remains as stable as it has always been. In the coming years, we will continue to focus on empowerment using our method of ministry which relies on hospitality, the community, and education. We believe we can continue to offer every person we serve a pathway where he or she can be proud of themselves and experience self-sufficient living.

We will focus on our income stream by ensuring we are keeping healthy relationships with our ministry partners, finding ways to collaborate with other organizations, and constantly telling the stories of the men and women we are blessed to meet, who tell us we have changed their lives - but really, we know, it is our lives who have been changed.

We will continue to serve county wide. Every neighborhood that we look at tells a similar story - whether hidden or in plain sight, people are constantly at risk of or facing displacement. If we band together to shed light on these needs, and fight against stereotypes and shame, we have a better chance of reaching those who are in despair. Thursday, I dropped by our Newark Empowerment Center and while Josh, one of our case workers, was on the phone with the utility company I introduced myself to the woman he was serving. She is 84 years old, and the first thing she said is "I am so embarrassed to be here. I have never needed help." After medical trauma this year, her

small pension wasn't enough to cover her needs. That's not even the worse part. The part that hurts the most is she was so proud and scared someone would know she was asking for help she decided to leave without taking any help at all.

It is our job not only to open the door and invite people in, but to ensure they know they are on safe and often sacred ground. And that's a job we can all do.

It is hard to believe it has been a year since I stepped in as Executive Director, and we celebrated Bill Perkin's 30-year tenure at Friendship House. It has been a year full of growth and opportunities. We served almost 5,000 people last year, not including the 5,000 we served through our clothing bank distribution. Volunteers brought 700 meals to our men's and women's housing, meeting residents and learning how close we all come to the edge of despair and at the same time how resilient a human being can be. We saw men and women beat the odds against heroin, get jobs, reunite with their families and children, and come back to us to say we saved their life. We also witnessed men and women losing the battle, as heroin took their bodies and they died. We hosted code purple 23 times last winter, including a cold spell that lasted for 14 days in a row. We served 52 Sunday breakfasts to our Wilmington folks, alongside many of you.

We celebrated our 30th anniversary last year, the Newark Empowerment Centers' 10th anniversary, and next we will celebrate the Clothing Bank's 20th anniversary. 30 years is not a long time in many ways, yet it's amazing to think of all that has been accomplished. We have three empowerment centers and several empowerment ministries partnerships, 12 transitional houses, a clothing bank that receives 200,000 pounds of donated clothing a year. I am truly excited about and remain fiercely dedicated to our future.

Friends, I remain optimistic our work is that of God. It does not mean our work is easy or that the burden will be light. It just means we are where we are supposed to be, and as long as we stay faithful, God will help us with the rest.

Thank you, again, for all that you do for Friendship House. And thank you for your support and faith in our ministry, staff, and clients. You are a true blessing. Thank you.