

Beyond the Dais Podcast: Episode 3 – An Interview with Springs Rescue Mission

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Scott Anderson: This is Scott Anderson, I am the Communications and Public Relations Manager for El Paso County, and today I am sitting here with Travis Williams, who is the Chief Development Officer for Springs Rescue Mission. Travis, great to be here with you today.

Travis Williams: Hey, thanks, Scott. It's good to share with you today as well.

Scott: Great. So, I wanted to start things off, asking if you could share a little bit of background about Springs Rescue Mission. How long have you guys been in El Paso County and what is Springs Rescue Mission's main mission?

Travis: Yeah, so Springs Rescue Mission is one of the primary organizations in the community helping people fight homelessness, poverty, and addiction. We've been in El Paso County for over 25 years now, which is a relatively short amount of time for rescue missions. Many rescue missions across the country have been around for a hundred, 125 years. So, for Colorado Springs, we have been doing a lot of work in a short amount of time to try and make sure that we're meeting the needs of individuals who are struggling with homelessness, poverty, and addiction. And really our hope and our goal is to see lives transformed and filled with hope. That's what we're looking for, is to see folks who may be in a rough situation, but how can we help them move toward better – whatever better might be for them. And we often look at that in terms of better health, housing, and employment opportunities.

Scott: So how many of those people do you serve and what communities do you serve?

Travis: Yeah. So, on any given year, we're going to have about 3,000 unique individuals come through the doors of SRM seeking some level of service. Some of those may be coming in just because they are hungry. They haven't eaten for a long time. Some are going to be needing shelter. Maybe some of it's temporary. Some of it might even be long term, but we'll have that many folks, about 3,000, stay with us. On any given day we're going to have anywhere between 300 to 450 stay the night at SRM, wake up and then get a meal. We serve three meals a day. But not only that, they're going to engage in life-changing programming that is going to help move them forward in their effort to find agency that will help them produce better housing, health and

employment outcomes.

Scott: That's wonderful. So, you submitted your grant request to El Paso County. Springs Rescue Mission, was awarded \$230,000 of that ARPA grant funding. Can you talk a little bit about what the money has gone to fund, what programs there are and how that's helping those people in the community?

Travis: Yeah, so the funding for us. When we're looking at that life transformation, one of the challenges that many folks who are struggling with homelessness, not all but many, are struggling with addiction. How can we help folks fight their addictions to be able to move on toward the better life that they ultimately desire? And so, these funds helped us to push forward an intensive outpatient program designed for homeless individuals that are finding relief and rescue on our campus. So, folks can come in, they're going to get a meal, they're going to get showers, all of the things that most might picture at a great homeless shelter. But then this takes it up a notch with relationship. As we start to build relationships with folks, we start to understand that they're struggling with an addiction. We can now provide a program, 120-day intensive program on our campus, to help them move past their addictions, which give them now the ability to find better housing, to find the health that they need to be able to hold down a job. So, it's been a critical, critical piece in helping individuals in this community move forward.

Scott: That's great. And I want to get back to the programs in a little bit. Can you talk about how important it is to Springs Rescue Mission to be a pillar within the Colorado Springs community?

Travis: It's kind to be even considered a pillar in the community. It was a short few short years ago where Colorado Springs did not have the shelter resources that it does today. Many in this community were scrambling for ideas, and we raised our hands to say we don't know exactly what it's going to look like to help, but we're willing to help. And then our team started to put together plans. And what's fantastic today is that so many people are getting help at Springs Rescue Mission. And it's not just us, we create a space for so many other service providers to help individuals. In fact, on any given day we're going to see 25 different organizations come on the Springs Rescue Mission's campus and provide care, mental health services, physical health services, veteran services. The list can go on and on, but not only on our campus, but there's also another 25 or so off of the campus helping provide services. So, we provide a good platform for folks to find their basic needs and then some really powerful programming that we provide. But it gives access to so many other levels of programming that can be found in this community.

Scott: So, getting back to those programs we were talking - you were talking about earlier, the intensive outpatient program specifically. Is there any personal story from

someone who has benefited from that program, maybe some other programs that you provide that you can share with us?

Travis: Yeah, I mean what I love about my job is that every day there is an underdog story of somebody who, the community, many discarded, and that person is now moving forward. It's a Rocky story every day at Springs Rescue Mission. The underdog fighting against the odds to come out on top. And one of those guys is a guy by the name of Thomas. But a few short years ago he didn't go by Thomas. In fact, the first time I saw Thomas was on channel- on one of the news stations, I won't mention the news station. On one of the local news stations, he was in a camp and the city was saying, hey, you can't camp here. And a media outlet came to interview some folks on what it was like to not be able to stay in the camp. And they asked, well, why don't you go to a shelter? And he looked in the camera and said, I will never go to a shelter, the shelters are dirty, there's no place for my stuff. And it was the last place he wanted to be. Fast forward to today, Thomas is now sober. He stayed at the shelters. He went through addiction recovery programs on the campus. He took a step back. He took a step forward, took a step back, took a step forward, took a step back. And today is actually working for Springs Rescue Mission, helping to lead others and show that there are pathways out of addiction, out of homelessness, and back into relationship within the community.

Scott: That's incredible. And I think it focuses on a really important point. Something that we had discussed a little bit earlier before we started talking is about how this is a come as you are shelter. Can you talk a little bit about that and how important that is?

Travis: Oh man, that is so, so important. At Springs Rescue Mission, people can come into our shelter as they are. We're considered, in the industry terms, a low-barrier shelter. That just basically means we've removed every reason that somebody might not come to a shelter. We will take people if they have a substance in their system, for example. If they have a pet, we actually have a pet kennel on campus for individuals with pets. If somebody has something on their record that they're not proud of, they can come on to campus. And so, we're going to meet people exactly where they're at, regardless of their addiction, regardless of their circumstance, and do everything we can to wrap around them in a loving way and point them and give them access to life-changing resources, that again, will help them move forward to better health, better housing, and better employment.

Scott: That's wonderful. So, for people who want to get involved, but they may not know where to start, whether they are people who are in need of services or who want to volunteer and dedicate time to help the cause – where can they go to look and how can they best help?

Travis: Yeah, that is one of the most common questions we get is so many in this community actually are super compassionate, but they're not sure what is the best way to help. One of the easiest things that people can do is go to our website at

SpringsRescueMission.org. From there, they can find out a lot about our programs and a lot of ways that they can get involved, volunteering for example. One of the best ways we found that people can help us actually to be part of the action here at Springs Rescue Mission. This is a community-funded charity, and a lot of people don't realize that because many organizations are funded, primarily funded through government entities, so we're thankful for ARPA, but a lot of our funding comes from this community, and so folks can be in the action by becoming what we call a Good Samaritan sponsor. And they're actually jumping into the game saying I care about you. Like the story that I told, I care about you, Thomas, and I'm going to, as a community member, I have a place to sleep tonight, but I can provide somebody else's place to sleep tonight. And when they do that, when they become a Good Samaritan sponsor, it's as little as \$25.00 a month, they are able to promote somebody's health and employment and housing opportunities, and it really just starts, it can be as simple as that. Because not everybody can work on our campus, but you can play a vital role and when you do, you're also given a bed number. So, every night you know somebody's staying in the bed that you're helping to sponsor, and you can say a prayer, give some thoughts to that person, and even write a note of encouragement to folks. So, that's an easy step relationally that people can get involved. And again, if folks want to volunteer, there's plenty of opportunities on our website. But that, really, we've found has been a powerful, powerful way for folks to engage.

Scott: Wonderful. That's great. Is there anything else that you'd like to share about Springs Rescue Mission or its programs that you think would be important to share with the community?

Travis: Yeah, you know what? I think that whole aspect that you shared is just community. We often see ourselves, we're working together, seeing lives restored. So many of us working together to take a moment out of our busy days to recognize that there are some who are struggling. Struggling with addiction, struggling with mental health, struggling with homelessness. And perhaps there's something that each of us can do. And I truly believe that if we do what we can to help at least one, we can start to help everyone.

Scott: Well, thank you Travis for your time. I really appreciate the opportunity I had to come here and speak with you today. It's really great to see the differences made through organizations in the community like Springs Rescue Mission. So, thank you for the time.

Travis: Thanks Scott, this has been fun.