



Michael's Heart, A Homeless Man's Story

Michael is a big teddy bear with a heart of gold. His demeanor speaks for itself as he gently sits down with some of his friends in the dining room of A New Leaf's East Valley Men's Center (EVMC) where they live.

For 16 years, this gentle giant has lived on the streets with his mental challenges and drug addiction. He moved in with friends when the opportunity arose but was very conscientious of being the "extra wheel" and would soon be on his way. His last home was a public restroom in a local, abandoned gas station. After years of street life and hunger, Michael grew weary of his lifestyle and made the unrelenting commitment to stop using drugs.

Michael had not had a relationship with his mother in eight years, nor spoken with her in the last two. But when she said "Come to my house, get clean and get into this homeless program at EVMC," Michael was up for the challenge.

"I was nervous moving into EVMC with 94 other men. There is a fear of the unknown and what was going to happen to me," he says.

After Michael's initial intake, he began working with his case manager on his mental health challenges and life skills. Soon he was working with staff on a regular basis delivering donations to [A New Leaf](#) programs. Gratefully, Michael started benefitting from all those volunteer cooked evening meals at EVMC and started putting on some weight and making friends.

"Some of us worry about being homeless, worry about where our next meal is coming from. I just want to be able to not want for anything. I want to be able to buy a gallon of milk if I need a gallon of milk, go to the movies if I want to go to the movies," he continues.

"I'm clean and sober today because of EVMC. Anyone who is involved with EVMC gets blessings returned to them. It really saved my life. When I leave EVMC, I want to be a productive part of society," says Michael.

With excitement in his voice, Michael relays the story of meeting a young mother and her two small children on the bus the day before. Her young family was homeless and she was very nervous to be preparing to move into a family homeless shelter, A New Leaf's La Mesita Family Homeless Shelter. Excitedly Michael shared his story, that he also lived in an A New Leaf Shelter and she had nothing to be afraid of. She would get all the help she and her children needed while she got back on her feet. Between stops, a quick conversation ensued, followed by hugs of encouragement and relief. Michael never dreamed he'd be in a position to comfort the homeless, especially with his past circumstances. However, today he is taking steps to be a productive part of society and we are blessed.

Arizona Foothills Magazine and Azfoothills.com have partnered with the comprehensive, non-profit, and human service agency, [A New Leaf](#), for an incredibly special series; one that is very near and dear to our organization's heart. "**Telling Untold Stories**" will illustrate multi-dimensional and raw stories of real men, women, and families within our communities who have been dealt a tricky hand of cards. These stories are ones of despair - ones of defeat - and, ones of fear. However, these stories become ones of faith - ones of determination - and, ones of hope.

When someone is in an abusive relationship or homeless, they often find themselves struggling to find help, not aware of the community resources available to them. [A New Leaf](#) is one of those critical resources. The agency has been a beacon of hope, supporting women and men who experience domestic violence and homelessness.

The mission of [A New Leaf](#) is Helping Families . . . Changing Lives. A New Leaf inspires and supports individuals and families in their journey to lifelong independence. The agency operates Autumn House, a domestic violence facility in the East Valley, as well as Faith House, a domestic violence shelter and transitional housing resource in the West Valley as well as a number of homeless shelters for those in crisis.

Last year, [A New Leaf](#) served nearly 21,943 individuals with resources, from immediate shelter, transitional housing, basic needs, job assistance, counseling and after school programs. Victims of domestic violence are able to start a new life due to the care and support of A New Leaf's staff and volunteers. Founded in 1971, A New Leaf is dedicated to making lives better and fighting against domestic violence and homelessness in our state.