

Dave Costarella Nomination Essay

Lancaster native Dave Costarella started reaching out to the homeless in 2016 and has not stopped since. He now operates two successful programs that he created, the first being My People on the Street which entails him going out three evenings a week during cold-weather months to deliver food, backpacks, coats, socks, sleeping bags, personal care items, and other essentials to those struggling with homelessness downtown. Dave developed a second project, Hand Up Partners, a 501c3 organization, in 2023, that pays a daily stipend to those who are unsheltered to clean local parks and common areas, including Culliton, Binns, Reservoir, Linear, and Brandon Parks, as well as Veterans Memorial, Penn Square, 3 blocks of Water Street, 200 block of Queen Street, and the Lancaster County Food Hub areas. Dave set up a GoFundMe campaign to raise the needed resources for stipends, food, tools, and garbage bags, budgeted at \$1200/week. Currently there are nine workers, each responsible for daily maintenance of their assigned area. As more money is raised, the number of workers and areas increases. On Wednesdays, all workers team-clean one area and hold a cookout for the neighborhood, providing an opportunity for the workers and the neighbors to interact. Self-employed as a roofer, Dave has the flexibility to be available both on-call and in-person to the workers, especially on Wednesdays, so that he can respond to issues. Dave also works closely with outreach workers at the Food Hub and the Hand Up Partners Board Members to serve unhoused persons. He created a workbook in 2020 to help prepare social workers and volunteers to work with persons who are unsheltered. Local organizations increasingly turn to Dave to guide their responses to improving the lives of those in need. Dave recently wrote a deeply moving song "Just Lay Me Down" for his band, D. C. & Co, which he incorporated into a video produced at Right Coast Studios in Columbia. The purpose is to inform the public about the work of Hand Up Partners in hopes that it can be replicated elsewhere. The impact of Hand Up Partners is very noticeable and highly appreciated, especially by the park users, visitors, and people working downtown. In a recent Live Lancaster newsletter article, "Advocate engages homeless individuals in cleaning local parks" (06/21/2023), Tim Stuhldreher writes, at Culliton Park, "Dave's making a tremendous difference," said Anna Stoltzfus. He's the director of SoWe, the Tenfold-sponsored group that monitors revitalization in the southwest of the city where the park is located. "The park is clean. More people are enjoying it," Stoltzfus said. Miguel Anaya, who works for Lancaster City's Bureau of Parks & Public Property, said the change is clearly visible, especially on weekends. Dave's actions are based on his values of unconditional respect for each other and the environment and the importance of contributing to one's community. His generosity, creativity, hard-work, and extraordinary dedication contributes daily to the well-being of both unsheltered and housed persons in Lancaster and offers an accessible model for all communities.