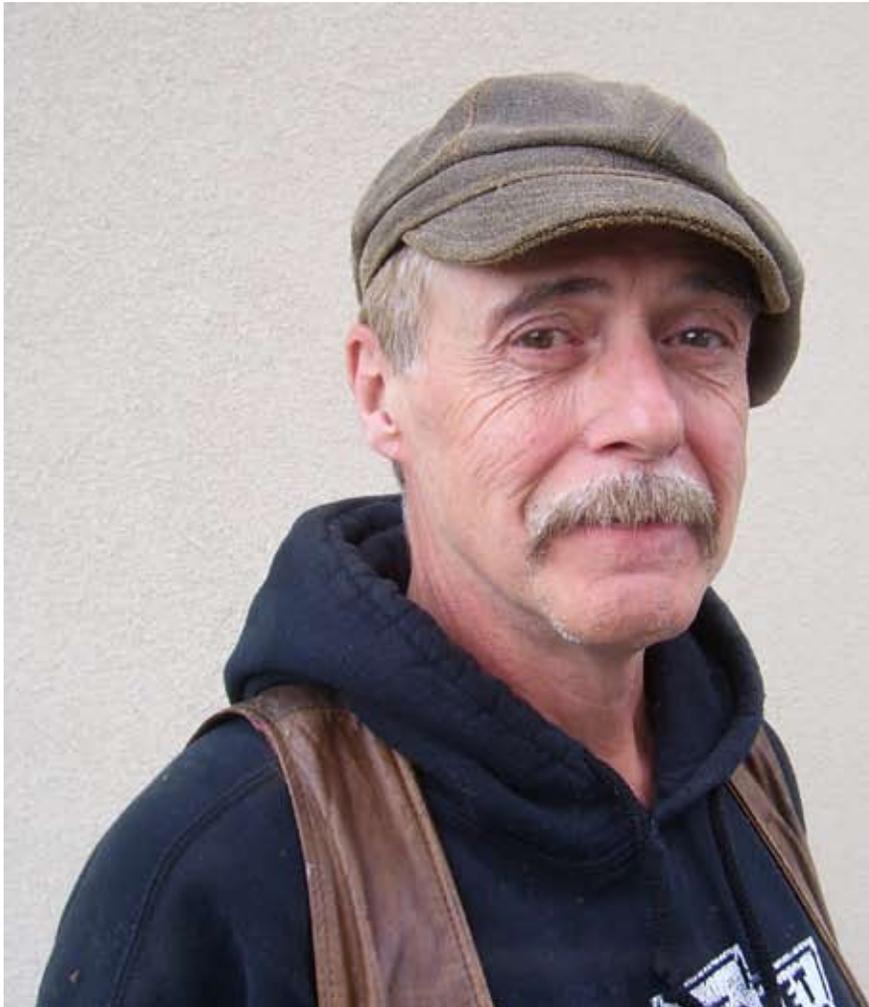


# MISSIONCITYRECORD

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## Outreach workers more mediators than advocates

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Mission City Record Reporter

A new service in Mission aims to help some of the district's more vulnerable citizens find a good place to live, while at the same time, ensuring the landlords are taken care of as well.

A pair of outreach workers employed by Mission Community Services Society are not advocates for the homeless, per se, said Glen Flett, one of the new employees.

"We meet, develop a relationship, find out problems, and help [the homeless] find a place to live, then continue the care," he explained. "We are more mediators than advocates; we help the landlords too."

The outreach program began in mid-November, and the idea was for the pair to create a safe environment for their clients, then help them move forward.

But the workers will be keeping a close eye on their charges.

"We'll be watching [clients] a lot, and we also provide the landlords with a card that has a 24-hour number they can call if there's a problem," said Flett.

They bring a "huge" number of resources with them to aid the clients, including access to CARE, Triangle, the Union Gospel Mission, the Mission Friendship Centre, and Long-Term Inmates Now in the Community.

The homeless problem needs to be addressed by the whole community, Flett maintains. At least half of the people he speaks with are from Mission, and 80 per cent of his clients have a genuine desire to be housed. The remainder are often suffering from a mental illness, and a very few are choosing to stay outside in that lifestyle, he said.

One person Flett knows suffered through a "nasty" divorce, then chose to leave everything to his ex-wife and go live on the streets.

According to MCSS' executive director Joy Cox, the outreach program has two firm goals,

to house the homeless and promote stability by providing support to landlords and tenants.

"I think the outreach workers have been doing really well. The test will be if in six months, many of the clients will still be housed," she said.

In addition to helping with mental illness and substance abuse issues, the workers try to encourage the people to learn how to budget their funds effectively, based on what they receive for social assistance, and their monthly bills.

"The follow-up [with clients] is a major piece too, and I think both our workers' work is very difficult. It's not an easy job," noted Cox.