

‘Even when you are stagnant, you got to go forward’

Even the times Elmore McBride found himself homeless, he remained a very meticulous man who preferred things neat and orderly.

Still there was something holding him back that wasn't so orderly – his lack of teeth.

“I was afraid to smile,” he said.

But that was about to change. The 62-year-old McBride was in a transitional program at the Lighthouse Church in Westside Costa Mesa when he met Muriel Ullman, Costa Mesa's housing consultant who works to help the city's homeless residents and Stacy Bowler, one of the city's Community Outreach Workers.

He mentioned to Ullman that he wanted new teeth.

“She and Stacy are just two awesome people,” McBride said. “I wanted to get my teeth fixed and I told Muriel. Three days later, Stacy gave me a number to call for SOS and I was home free.”

McBride is very thankful for SOS, which stands for Share Our Selves, a local nonprofit that provides dental services for those who are not insured or have emergency need for care.

He also is most thankful to Pastor Phil Eyskens at the Lighthouse Church, who assisted him when he most needed it and while he was attending school at Orange Coast College.

“The type of person I am I would have succeeded eventually,” McBride said. “But it happened a lot faster because of the Lighthouse.”

Eyskens is a key member of Costa Mesa's Network for Homeless

Solutions, which is made up of representatives from the City Manager, City Attorney, Police, Fire, Planning and Code Enforcement offices, as well as clergy, those from non-profit agencies and community volunteers.

The Network for Homeless Solutions implements a range of strategies, including law enforcement, street outreach, prevention, rehabilitation, housing assistance and volunteer coordination. Since its inception in 2013, the Network for Homeless Solutions housed and/or reconnected 269 people as of December 2016. Of the 269, 70 were reconnected to their community of origin or to a place of their choice to end their homelessness.

After four years of assisting McBride through tough times, Pastor Eyskens said he left the Lighthouse and Costa Mesa for a short time, but recently returned and started attending church services again.

"He came to a church service and he had new teeth looking like a million bucks," Eyskens said. "I'm so proud of him. He is just a real success story. What a perfect example. You got to hope for the best for this guy because you never know what the day is going to bring you."

For McBride, the days have been getting much better. He now works for the County of Orange In-Home Supportive Services and really enjoys his job. The Boston native is also glad to be living in Costa Mesa, a place he has called home for about 11 years.

"I like the laid-back atmosphere here," said McBride who is now living in an apartment in the city. "The people are awesome. The police are like the Beverly Hills police. They are so friendly."

McBride's advice for those who are struggling financially or homeless is pretty simple.

"You can't give up," he said. "You have to keep plugging. The time I was there at the Lighthouse I talked to a lot of homeless people and I always said keep walking forward. Even when you are stagnant, you got to go forward."

For more information about the Network for Homeless Solutions visit the website [here](#) or the Facebook page [here](#) or call the Network for Homeless Solutions hotline at (714) 754-5346.