A Story of Triumph—Victor Nelms

"I've been in and out of rehab nine times. But I've been clean, in recovery for two years now. I'm committed to working the steps vigorously every day. The steps are my survival. I've rebuilt my foundation and I'm re-learning how to live again," said Victor Nelms, a formerly homeless veteran now participating in Green Doors' affordable housing program at Pecan Springs Commons.

At the core of Green Doors' work is the hope that a person who has reached as far down as Victor has, will have a moment of clarity and be able to see the opportunities available to him. Victor saw the light after so many years of darkness. Victor's story is not pretty, but it is the reality for many veterans who have exited homelessness; and, it is a story that Victor hopes will inspire and empower people struggling with addiction. He is 42 years old, but of the past 21 years of his life, it is only during the last two that Victor has had the clarity to visualize the life he wants to live and make it a reality.

Victor has battled with the disease of addiction for the past twenty-one years. "Dope was like a veil. I died spiritually. And without a spirit I was nothing." Even when Victor made the decision to join the US Army, he was running from bad decisions and his transgressions related to the disease of addiction. Although clean for the majority of his tour, he still hustled and preyed on the people around him. When he returned from his two-year tour in Germany, he wasn't ready to take responsibility for the opportunities he missed in his life until that point. Victors' transformation and be a part of his story. I remember when he returned from his job at the Salvation Army, the same place where he once slept on the streets of Austin. Now that he's clean, he hopes to inspire and empower others to rebuild their lives.

Andrea Garcia, Green Doors’ Senior Community Manager, said of Victor, “It is hard to convey all the pain and suffering he went through compared to how well he is doing now. The two worlds are completely different. For me, it has been amazing to see his transformation and be a part of his story. I remember when he started in Green Doors' housing programs, he was struggling. Being housed gave him so much confidence, which empowered him to stay clean. What strikes me most about Victor, he is so proud of his accomplishments and at the same time, so humble about them".

Victor's story is a story of triumph. And he thanks God for it.
The Business of Ending Homelessness – Marrying the Head & Heart

I often get asked the question – How are y'all funded?

Implicit in this question is a more fundamental question – how do you ensure that Green Doors is a sustainable organization over the long term? For me, it starts in how we refer to ourselves. We are not a non-profit organization. Rather, we are a not-for-profit organization. The distinction may appear semantic, but it is significant. Green Doors, like other community organizations serving disadvantaged individuals and families, is structured to pursue its mission of preventing and ending homelessness and poverty housing. This is its primary purpose.

However, that does not mean that Green Doors does not/should not pursue a healthy bottom line – i.e., profit. Indeed, we need to pursue profit if Green Doors is to expand and increase its impact in the community, as well as weather periods of economic downturn and instability. Non-profit organizations are unsustainable because they make no profit – whether they are a business or community organization – and stagnate and die. Sustainable organizations – whether they are organizing primarily to make money or serve a public purpose – have to keep a laser-like focus on their financial bottom line over both the short and longer terms.

Unfortunately, the business side of ending homelessness is tough. When Green Doors builds a new housing development for individuals and families struggling with, or at risk of, homelessness we need to: 1) raise funds to build the housing; 2) raise funds to help subsidize operations because residents can only pay a small portion of the rents necessary to cover operational expenses; and 3) raise funds to ensure that residents have access to the supportive services they need to succeed. This business model is very capital intensive. Meaning that, we have to fundraise from a variety of sources in order to be able to cover our costs and meet mission. As a consequence, Green Doors is run, in many ways, like a for-profit business. We look to diversify our income streams, focus on bringing down marginal costs, budget conservatively etc. And, yes, we strive to make a profit – even though many of our public sector funders require us to diversify our income streams, focus on bringing down marginal costs, budget conservatively etc. As a consequence, Green Doors is run, in many ways, like a for-profit business. We look to diversify our income streams, focus on bringing down marginal costs, budget conservatively etc. And, yes, we strive to make a profit – even though many of our public sector funders require us to diversify our income streams, focus on bringing down marginal costs, budget conservatively etc.

In the past 18 months, Green Doors has been able to achieve tangible positive results at Pecan Springs Commons. They include:

- Pecan Springs Commons is the 2010 National Winner of the MetLife Community-Police Awards for Neighborhood Revitalization and the 2010 Greenlights for Nonprofit Success, Excellence Award in the area of Collaboration. Green Doors received these awards by achieving the following accomplishments:
  1. In 2008, APD reported 828 nine-one-one incidents; in 2009, after Green Doors acquired site control of eight of the properties at Sweeney Circle, there were 349 nine-one-one incidents reported – a 58% decrease in crime. Moreover, only 99 of the 349 nine-one-one incidents reported occurred in the second half of the year when Green Doors had begun in earnest its clean-up efforts.
  2. In 2008, APD reported six drug houses actively involved in drug trade; after Green Doors acquired site control of the properties at Sweeney Circle and successfully removed problematic tenants and visitors, five drug houses were eliminated, and the sixth has since closed.
  3. Of the eight properties (70 apartments) being rehabilitated, six properties, 24 units, are completely rehabilitated and five properties have achieved a 4-star green energy efficiency rating, the second highest rating offered by the City of Austin. Five of the completed properties, 20 units, are already fully occupied and the remaining rehabilitated property, 4 units, will be occupied within weeks. Renovation of Phase II (46 units) is underway. More information on the progress of Phase II to come soon.

In its effort to create a safe, viable, sustainable community in which neighbors of Pecan Springs Commons feel secure, Green Doors has committed to building outdoor areas to enhance neighborhood relationships. The outdoor areas include: the landscape, the picnic areas, the commercial playground, and the cyber-center/community resource center. The landscape includes: new trees, food forests, orchards, walkable pathways lined by native plants, rain gardens, community gardens and removing 10% of impervious ground cover. By incorporating benches, picnic tables, bar-b- q pits, public art, and a commercial playground into the landscape, Green Doors encourages neighbors to meet and build community.

A 100+ volunteer team from the Real Estate Council of Austin (RECA) transformed the landscape of Pecan Springs Commons on October 16, 2010. More information on the progress and photos of the transformation to come in the next newsletter. For continual updates, become a Fan of Green Doors on Facebook.