

What should I do when I encounter someone experiencing homelessness?

1. Acknowledge and Engage:

What if you were treated as if you were invisible? Homelessness can bring a sense of loneliness and isolation that can erode the core of a person's self-worth. Please treat people you encounter with dignity by acknowledging them. Just making eye contact is an important first step. Everyone wants to be treated with kindness. Not sure what to say? Here are a few examples:

- a. "Good Morning!" – A simple greeting can really brighten anyone's day.
- b. "I don't have money, but is there another way I can help you?" – If you feel uncomfortable giving money to someone directly, you can still offer love. Keep a stack of resource cards handy to distribute as well.
- c. "I will keep you in my thoughts/prayers." – If someone shares their situation or story with you, and you aren't sure what to say, you can still acknowledge that you will remember them after that moment.
- d. "I have a few (seasonal resources/food items, would you like one?" – During the summer, bottled water, sun screen, and hats are helpful. In the winter, coats, scarves, and gloves are needed. Socks, bottled water, tooth brushes, granola bars/trail mix (items that are easy to chew) are great items to have any time of year. Get in the habit of carrying one small thing you can offer.
- e. You may also encounter someone who is having a rough time and may not be able to receive your offer of help at that time. Do not take this personally. They may not want or be able to use what you are offering. Or they simply may be having an off day, which happens to us all. You can still smile, say goodbye politely, and keep that individual in your thoughts.
- f. Lastly, our Outreach team is available Monday through Friday to help an individual living on the street connect to resources. Please email us at info@hopeworksnm.org for more information.

2. Donate:

You can help by supporting service providers such as HopeWorks, Albuquerque Health Care for the Homeless, Heading Home, and Barrett House. Unrestricted gifts go towards maintaining established programs that help hundreds of people. When talking with someone experiencing homelessness, you can also offer them information about local services by handing them a resource card.

3. Call for Help:

If you encounter someone in crisis or who seems to be unconscious, call 911 emergency services. They can come and check on the person and provide assistance if needed. If someone appears to be experiencing a mental health crisis, you can mention that to the dispatcher and request a Mobile Crisis Team be dispatched. For more information on this unique collaboration between HopeWorks and the City of Albuquerque/Bernalillo County, please visit hopeworksnm.org.

4. Protect Civil Rights:

If you see police or others asking a person experiencing homelessness to leave a public space (park, median, etc.) you can note details about the interaction and act as a witness. You can also contact the New Mexico ACLU with a report. The NM ACLU app is a reliable way to record interactions with law enforcement. It can be accessed via this link: <https://www.aclu-nm.org/en/news/mobile-justice-new-mexico-app>.