

SUBSCRIBERS ONLY NEWS LOCAL

# The TABLE holds community cookout to support the homeless

The Rochester organization, which aims to help the homeless population in the area, held its first community event at Soldiers Field Park.



Collin Johnson, a member of the TABLE, mixes the large pot of mac and cheese made for the community cookout event. The TABLE members planned to cook 50 boxes of mac and cheese while talking to people who have been or are a part of the homeless community in Rochester. Sara Guymon / Post Bulletin



By **Sara Guymon**

Today at 4:30 PM

Comments

Share

News Reporting

Wtvo



Fishing pier

ROCHESTER — The TABLE, a new organization in Rochester that aims to help the homeless population in the area, held its first community event on Oct. 26, 2024.

The TABLE — the acronym stands for "team of advisors bringing lived experience" — states one of its main goals is to lessen the stigmatization of the homeless population while providing them support conducive to their situation.

“All of us that are a part of the table and have lived experience with being unhoused and are in different space stages of being unhoused,” said Sarah Whitefeather, co-lead of the TABLE. “I have three years of being housed now and of being substance abuse-free. So I’m kind of an OG, you know, and we have people that are still unhoused or newly housed, and we’re just really trying to make people know that we’re people.”

The TABLE was formed in the summer of 2024 and recently held its first community event at Soldiers Field Park. Dozens of people gathered for a cookout of hot dogs and mac and cheese, common foods found at area food shelves.

“Mac and cheese was very huge, because there are so many food donations for the homeless that are mac and cheese,” Whitefeather said. “Now let’s think about how we have to make mac and cheese. So you’re giving a homeless person a box of macaroni and cheese that has no access to water, no access to heat, nothing to cook with, nothing to cook on, no way to keep milk cold, no butter.”

The sentiment is very nice, but Whitefeather recalls feeling hopeless without the means necessary to make the food. Food items that are perishable tend to not be as desired for the homeless community. Items like cans of tuna, granola bars and bread tend to be more helpful to those in need. Without the resource, how would she and many others in that situation be able to make something as simple as a box of mac and cheese?

Collin Johnson found a way. He had a grill that he used pine cones to ignite and had a cooler for milk and butter. It was a lot more effort, but it was a warm meal. After doing this for a while, Johnson had a vision of making a huge pot of mac and cheese to help feed the homeless community. This wasn't exactly his vision, but it's getting there slowly.

The TABLE planned to make 50 boxes of mac and cheese for this event, but Johnson would love to make even more. He envisions a big bonfire and a cauldron of mac and cheese to help feed the homeless population.

The organization is just starting out, but members say they are excited to continue planning events in the future that center around educating the community about homelessness and supporting those who struggle with homelessness.

“We’re bringing the whole community together and building this unified relationship where you have no idea who might have experience being unhoused, who is currently unhoused, who isn't, because we're all just in relationship with one another,” said Courtney Dugstad, the Chief Operating Officer for Three Rivers Community Action. “We’re getting rid of that stigma of what it means to be unhoused by hosting community-centric events like this, where you just come and enjoy each other and humanize the experience.”

The TABLE and many other organizations targeted towards helping the homeless community mainly want to remind people that the members of the homeless community are people too. The TABLE are getting involved in the community with other initiatives and organizations like Any Path Home, a Olmsted County initiative to combat homelessness in the area, but there is still more work to be done.

“There's a lot of people that are afraid of people that are unhoused or judgmental and saying ‘Why don't you get a job? Or why don't

you do this?” Whitefeather said. “It's not that easy. None of it's that easy. So we're just trying really to bring awareness and make it easier for people coming behind us.”

**FIND MORE NEWS IMPORTANT TO YOU** > **(HTTPS://WWW.POSTBULLETIN.COM/)**



**The Nordic Shop is preparing to celebrate 50 years in Rochester**(<https://www.postbulletin.com/business/the-nordic-shop-is-preparing-to-celebrate-50-years-in-rochester>)

(<https://www.postbulletin.com/business/the-nordic-shop-is-preparing-to-celebrate-50-years-in-rochester>)  
4d ago



**October proclaimed Dysautonomia Awareness Month in Rochester**(<https://www.postbulletin.com/news/local/october-proclaimed-dysautonomia-awareness-month-in-rochester>)

(<https://www.postbulletin.com/news/local/october-proclaimed-dysautonomia-awareness-month-in-rochester>)  
6d ago