

Their Name is Marcel

Salvation Army's Waterston Centre – Regina, Saskatchewan

"When they come to the door, I imagine myself standing there," says Marcel Apetroi¹, Centre Manager for Salvation Army's Waterston Centre in Regina. "Then I ask myself 'how can I help Marcel today?'"

The reason Marcel has this sense of empathy with the people that come to the 82-bed men's dormitory is that he himself once stood in that doorway, addicted to alcohol and homeless.

That was seven years ago. At that time, to use Marcel's own words, the dormitory at the Waterston Centre was "a dive." The building had been constructed in the 1950's and there hadn't been any upgrading since then.

Then the Salvation Army in Regina was able to secure almost \$400,000 in federal funding from the National Homelessness Initiative to renovate the building. Now that the work is completed, the centre has new mattresses, lockers, blankets, shower facilities, and a washer and dryer area. To improve safety, a new fire sprinkler and security systems were installed.

For the client's sense of privacy and security, privacy screens were installed in the general dormitory and a new 4-bed youth unit was added with its own washrooms, shower facilities and lounge.

"It didn't make sense to take a 16 year old who was fleeing an environment where they were abused and scared and place them in the general dormitory where they would continue to be scared," says Marcel. "Now they know they have a safe and clean place to come to."

Marcel knows how important it is to be able to find help when you need it. After spending 11

days in the shelter seven years ago, he was employed as a cleaner. He overcame his addiction and then worked his way up to Centre Manager.

The Salvation Army believes in showing genuine respect for all individuals and placing the needs of others ahead of their own. They could have no better representative of that philosophy than Marcel Apetroi.

His background and openness makes him particularly sensitive to the needs of homeless people. You can hear the commitment in his voice when he speaks of seeing himself in everyone who comes to the centre.

"It's not how much you give, it's how much love you put in while you're giving."

And you certainly get the sense that he's only just getting started. "There is a huge problem with addiction among the homeless. We need to do more to address that problem."

Marcel talks openly about himself and his past whenever he has the opportunity in the hope that he can encourage others to find help and make changes in their lives.

"Look who I was and look who I am," he tells the people who come to the centre. "I think I can help you but you also have to help yourself."

They know he's there for them when he says that.

Because to him they are all Marcel.

¹ No names have been changed. Permission was given by the individual in the story.