



CASE STUDY

Journey Home: Another Way to Connect

“Text messaging is just another reminder to people that we're out here doing the work that we do.”

-Andrea Yeskey
Development Associate

What They Do:

Work to end homelessness in the Greater Hartford region of Connecticut.

Founded:

2007

Learn more:

JourneyHomeCT.org

ABOUT:

Journey Home leads the effort to end homelessness in the Greater Hartford region of Connecticut. They believe everyone deserves to feel the comfort and safety of home. But navigating the web of homeless services is overwhelming, so they bring together resources and partners, helping people get the support they need.

And it's working:

- 90% reduction in chronic homelessness.
- 55% reduction in overall homelessness.
- Effectively ended homelessness for veterans, people living with HIV/AIDs, and families with disabilities.

“We act as the hub of a network of other organizations and providers who are all working together to end homelessness,” said Yeskey.

CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

Like every nonprofit, Journey Home faces challenges. Executive Director Matt Morgan compares it to an earthquake: “Our work sometimes feels like we are on an earthquake fault line that is constantly surprising us with new rumbles, while we are simultaneously trying to clean up the aftermath of the previous quakes and also implementing strategies to prevent the harm from future earthquakes.”

Morgan is hopeful about progress in five different areas:

Being better prepared: Recent years have taught the importance of being prepared to handle whatever calamity comes next that pushes more people into homelessness.

Building political will: Cooperation is happening like never before and it's bringing government resources to bear on the problem.

Encampments: Homeless encampments have been a challenge around the country, but Journey Home has seen success in finding homes for people in tent camps.

Interagency Council: Connecticut has established an Interagency Council on homelessness, helping to bridge bureaucratic divides.

Culturally responsive strategies: Black individuals are nine times more likely to experience homelessness than whites and Latinx individuals are six times more likely, underscoring the importance of acknowledging and addressing disparities.



HOW IT'S GOING

"We've been trying a lot of new things with donor engagement and donor stewardship," Yeskey said.

It's working: Year-end fundraising was up 15% compared to the previous year. They're seeing grants and individual donations going up as well.

Not all roses: A big fundraising gala is coming up, but ticket sales are slow and sponsorships are down.

HOW THEY USE RALLY

"We wanted another way of reaching our constituents other than emails and snail mail," said Yeskey. "We just feel like it's a good way to diversify how we're messaging people."

What they text: Upcoming events, highlight needs, showcase success, ask for volunteers, and more.

Variety: “We're trying to vary the message so we're not just like, ‘Hey, donate money, donate money,’ every time,” Yeskey said.

Frequency: “Since it's new to us, we didn't want to bombard people. So we feel like two texts a month has been working for us right now,” Yeskey said.

Not just donations: “Text-to-give wasn't our primary goal,” Yeskey said, though they have sent donation text messages. But it's more about sharing their story. “Hopefully that puts Journey Home in a good light, so that eventually they will donate.”



TEXT VS. EMAIL

"I feel like it's brought us into a new way of reaching people that gives us that direct contact right to them because people get so many emails now," Yeskey said. "But everybody's on their phone 24/7. So as long as they are interested in what we're doing, we hope it's just a little reminder that we're here and we're looking for their support."

CONVERSATIONAL TEXT MESSAGING

Texting is a two-way medium, and Journey Home does get replies and interacts with their supporters.

Questions: Mostly it's questions, often about their furniture donation program.

Encouragement: But they also get positive feedback, people saying 'great work' or responding positively to the fact that they started texting.

Reaction: "It's just a nice way to be able to communicate," Yeskey said. "Even people 'hearting' a message is nice to see."



RALLY EXPERIENCE

Customer experience: “The customer service has been tremendous,” said Yeskey. “Whenever I have an issue, somebody gets back to me so quickly, if not immediately.”

Setup support: “The onboarding was just seamless,” Yeskey said. “Uploading contacts, and figuring out how to send our first message — having them walk us through that whole process was really helpful.”

Ongoing help: “Now I’m pretty comfortable doing it on my own, but if there were something that came up, they’re very quick to respond,” Yeskey said.

Upgrades: “Rally has also been improving just since we started using it,” Yeskey said. “They seem to be constantly evolving and making improvements, which is great.”

Yeskey sums up the nonprofit world: “You’ve got 8 million other things going on, so it’s just helpful to have somebody guide you through it.”

WHY RALLY?

“The first month I was here they said we need to look into texting. OK, I’ll add that to the growing list,” Yeskey said with a laugh. She came across a presentation from Rally founder James Martin and was really impressed that he understood nonprofit messaging. Having a text messaging platform designed for nonprofits made a big difference.

“We were looking for something reasonable that fit into our budget and the price seemed competitive,” Yeskey said. “And ease of use. For me, as the one spearheading it, I wanted that customer service support.”



FAVORITE TIP

“I always like being able to test,” Yeskey said. “The last one I did, I probably sent seven tests to myself before I perfected it.” She kept tweaking language and trying to get the spacing right.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU?

"I just like knowing that what I'm doing for the majority of my day is helping other people have a better life," Yeskey said. "It's gratifying to hear the client success stories and hear from people—especially now that I have a family and children—who were sleeping on air mattresses or didn't have beds, now they have a home to go to, and their kids have a real bed for the first time."

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