

'Litter Heroes' sees first participants complete program, gain full-time employment

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Program offers people experiencing homelessness opportunity for work experience, life skills assistance



Alcohol abuse and poor decision-making brought Brent Scott to the point of homelessness a little more than a year ago. But things have turned around, and he's now one of two participants to recently complete a program through the City of Spartanburg that he says has "helped me get my pride back."

Scott is a member of the Litter Hero crew. Along with another homeless community member, he helps to keep Spartanburg clean. He works mostly in the city limits, but at times for the county as well.

As part of the pilot program, Scott worked 25 hours a week and was paid \$12 an hour. Before beginning their work, participants passed a drug test and were required to participate in case management and life skills training throughout their time in the program.

Scott has gotten his driver's license reinstated. The program has helped him build a track record of employment and he is setting goals. "I'm not just going to sit around and wait for things to happen," Scott said.

The Litter Hero program is managed by the City of Spartanburg. It was created by the City in partnership with OneSpartanburg, Inc., Spartanburg County and a host of service providers for the area's homeless population.

Shawn Parker, founder of H.O.P.E. Ministries, provides counseling support for crew members. He relates to the challenges they're working to overcome. "I've been through many of the same things," he said, noting that he works to instill a sense of confidence and self-control.

For Litter Hero participants, "it's a job – but it's more than just a job," said Olivia McIntyre, who serves as Homeless Education and Outreach Coordinator for the City of Spartanburg. McIntyre works closely with Scott and his work partner – who will wrap up their work after 90 days as another team enters the program. She helps coordinate transportation and other logistics. She provides moral support, as well, and enjoys seeing lives change for the better.

"I'm proud of the progress they've made," McIntyre said.

Local leaders recognize that there are no easy fixes to the issue of homelessness. That's why they have stressed partnerships and embraced a spirit of innovation. The Spartanburg Opportunity Center opened in the Northwest Center on Saxon Avenue. The day shelter operates as a place where homeless people can shower and brush teeth, receive mail, and enjoy a light snack. There's a laundry service, and heavy-duty plastic bins are available for storing personal belongings.

The City's Homeless Court, also established in 2019, works with local law enforcement to encourage participants to receive and complete treatment and rehabilitation programs in exchange for the dismissal of the fines associated with a criminal offense and, in some cases, the dismissal of an offense.

In her role, McIntyre provides information to homeless people about community health resources, job opportunities, and relief services. She also works to coordinate and support community groups and volunteers who want to provide meals or clothing for the homeless.

For its part, the Litter Heroes program has been a benefit not only for homeless participants, but for other city and county residents, as well. "This partnership has been wonderful," said Jamie Nelson, environmental enforcement director with Spartanburg County. "Any opportunity to remove roadside litter and blight is a plus."

At a ceremony held to celebrate their completion of the program, it was announced that Scott and fellow Litter Heroes graduate Thomas Chavis will be joined Spartanburg County with full-time positions in their Environmental Enforcement department. "My team has been amazed by their work," Nelson said. Scott said he feels proud knowing that he's doing a job that needs to get done. "You see a lot of things other people probably don't see – there's a lot of litter out there."