

October 24, 2109

Norman Human Rights Commission
City of Norman, Oklahoma

Dear Norman Human Rights Commission,

It is my great honor and privilege to nominate Ms. April Heiple for the 2019 City of Norman Human Rights Award. April is the executive director of Food and Shelter (formally, Food and Shelter for Friends) in Norman since 2011. Not only is Food and Shelter's service to Norman's homeless community impressive by the number of clients served and empowered, but also because of its incredible respect for every child, woman and man as a fellow human being, a friend, and a "beautiful soul". These attributes are the clear and direct result of April's compassion, intelligence, fortitude, and spirit.

Food and Shelter started in 1983 as a once-per-week lunch for people who were homeless and now serves over 250 meals a day (breakfast and lunch), seven days a week to anyone who is hungry. The belief that "food is a necessity, not a privilege" is strongly embodied in Food and Shelter's actions. In 2018, Food and Shelter served over 157,000 meals, distributed over 2,000 food boxes, and fed over 1,500 women, children and men through their food pantry (1).

Food and Shelter, however, does much more than serve meals to the hungry; they help folks in immediate need to find shelter, support and guidance. Food and Shelter provides multi-faceted housing support. They provide short term, long term and supportive housing for individuals and families who are homeless. Their day shelter/warming shelter program is used by 222 homeless men and women per year (1) and provides laundry services, showers for those living on the streets, and life skills education and counseling (3). Although Food and Shelter does not have facilities for emergency shelter, they provide families who are homeless with emergency placement through motel stays (2). In 2018, nearly 1000 nights of motel stays were provided to hundreds of women, children and men experiencing homelessness (1). Additionally, 39 adults and four children were housed within a long-term housing program supported by Food and Shelter in 2018 (1).

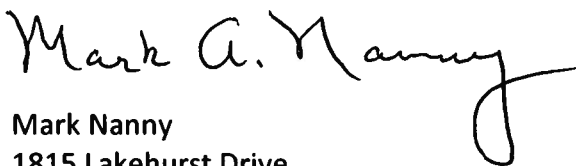
While these results are laudatory, April's vision goes far beyond merely meeting the immediate needs of the hungry and homeless. She strongly advocates, and rightly so, that to help folks with extreme life challenges, they need to first have a home before they can solve their problems and move forward with their lives (3). April's vision became reality in 2016 when she worked with Gene McKown, a Norman homebuilder, to raise \$2 million within six months from businesses, faith groups and individuals in Norman to begin the planning and development of

McKown Village. McKown Village is innovative and inspirational in its approach to empowering folks to regain their lives and dignity. McKown Village opened in 2017 and consists of 32 mini houses, each with their own unique address, and arranged in a neighborhood type setting (3). Each house is fully furnished, no rent is requested, and families can stay for up to two years as they work to improve their situation and become independent (4). In 2018, 52 adults and 50 children were housed at McKown Village (1). In describing McKown Village, April says that it is “a vibrant community of people helping people; from the volunteers who come in service to the residents who care for their neighbors in need” (1). The truly inspiring part of McKown Village is that it believes in the strength and capability of every one of its residents. It respects them as valuable and worthwhile people by giving them the foundation to reestablish themselves as citizens of Norman. It empowers them to help themselves, and in turn, be ready to help others, that is, to regain their rightful role as full human beings and productive community members. This is the wonderful and unique aspect of both Food and Shelter and McKown Village, and it is all because of April’s vision and dedication.

All these facts and figures regarding Food and Shelter only briefly describe the positive impact April has on the community of Norman. April’s true impact on Norman is through her humble and genuine ability to help us to find within ourselves the kindness and compassion that makes us caring people, as well as to develop the strength and determination to reach beyond ourselves to build a welcoming and kind community. Though her gift of inspiration, she has guided the good citizens of Norman in creating a respectful, nurturing program to help our community members who are in immediate need. Through Food and Shelter, April gives Norman a wonderful example of how one human spirit can instill hope, joy and purpose in us all by helping others.

In closing, there is much more I could include in this letter about April’s extensive education and her work with numerous state and local organizations focusing on the annual Norman Crop Walk event, community education, women’s service and family resource centers. However, I wanted to describe in this nomination letter the greater impact April has on those served through Food and Shelter, as well as those who volunteer and support Food and Shelter. Therefore, I’ve attached her resume to further elaborate these many details. I am truly amazed that April has not received the City of Norman Human Rights Award in past years. She is one of the most, if not the most, deserving citizen of Norman to be recognized and honored by this award.

Sincerely,



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References:

- 1) Food and Shelter 2018 Annual Report, www.foodandshelterinc.com
- 2) Give Smart OKC, Nonprofit Profile by Oklahoma City Community Foundation, 2017
<https://givesmartokc.guidestar.org/profile/1126052/food-shelter.aspx>
- 3) Norman Transcript, July 23, 2017, "McKnown Village takes shape in east Norman", by Joy Hampton. https://www.normantranscript.com/news/mckown-village-takes-shape-in-east-norman/article_a85a35f2-7021-11e7-b833-fba3ef4a1ca4.html
- 4) Food and Shelter website, <http://www.foodandshelterinc.org/get-help#need-shelter>