

I Still Have My Shoes!

Rev. Sharyn Cosby
Oklahoma Family Empowerment Center
NBA Incubate Initiative Affiliate Ministry
October 2017

Here at Oklahoma Family Empowerment Center (OFEC) we have the awesome opportunity to work with and provide services to some of Tulsa's most vulnerable populations daily. These individuals include at-risk youth, those struggling with mental health illness and the homeless, to name a few. I would like to share a story of a young man, we will call him "Joe" for the sake of anonymity.

Joe comes to OFEC each day to eat lunch. He is an above average built, African American male, in his mid- to late-twenties. But, for reasons unknown to us, we stopped seeing Joe for a few days. As director and being used to seeing him, I became concerned about where he was. Thankfully, he showed up the same day. It was raining and cool, but not only was he sparsely dressed; he had no shoes on. By the look of his feet (dirty and blistered), it appeared that he had been walking with no shoes for several days.



Thankfully, Julius Maindi Fellows, Licensed Professional Counselor and OFEC's newest team member was present. It was Julius' first day in his new role as Community Outreach Director. He went into action. Julius sat down with "Joe" and listened to his story. He learned that Joe was held at gun point and robbed of his shoes. He heard how Joe started college and was a promising wrestler. Soon into Joe's college years, he developed schizophrenia. He had to drop out of school and go back home. But, Joe's family was challenged by his paranoia and frequent outburst. He soon found himself living in the streets.

Unfortunately, Joe's story is typical of many of the homeless.

While OFEC many not be able to change his clinical diagnosis, we could offer him care and hope. Before leaving Joe was cleaned up, given a new set of clothing, tennis shoes, and a hygiene care package (toothpaste, toothbrush, comb, brush, body

wash, and deodorant). Joe left the office smiling, with a full belly and a bounce in his step.

Joe remains close to the 11th and Garnett Road area of Tulsa, close to OFEC's location. He says, "I feel safe around here." He continues to drop by for lunch each day. Each time I see him, Joe reminds me, "I still have my shoes!"

*The NBA incubates new ministries, supporting social entrepreneurs of faith who are serving their communities in a variety of innovative ways and empowering these Disciples-led health and social service projects to focus on growth, impact, and sustainability. Learn more at **nbacares.org/incubate** or by contacting Rev. Ayanna Johnson Watkins, Director of the NBA Incubate Initiative, at **awatkins@nbacares.org**.*