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HOMELESS ADVOCATE ASH USS LAUNCHES FROM THE GROUND UP TO LEVERAGE POWER OF COMMUNITY TO SOLVE HOMELESSNESS

Focus Will Be on Collaborations to Propose, Design Compassionate Responses

PHOENIX, Ariz. (July 12, 2021): Homeless advocate Ash Uss, who experienced first-hand the challenges of not having housing and later became a tremendous resource about homelessness through her years of work at Andre House, has launched [From the Ground Up, LLC](#) to develop specialized data-driven, community-centered strategies for alleviating homelessness “from the ground up.”

For the last several months Ash has been consulting on projects with the Phoenix Rescue Mission, St. Vincent de Paul, City of Scottsdale, Arizona State University and Home Matters® to Arizona. In those and future projects, her team will apply “what is needed for each potential project or solution including research and data collection, partnership building, visioning, project management, identifying funding streams and advocacy and zoning support as needed,” she said.

“Having worked on projects for the last few months, the need became increasingly clear for more creative, more dignified solutions to homelessness in the Valley,” she said. “With the new funding coming into the Valley and the ongoing regional planning efforts to address homelessness, it’s important to support those efforts by injecting a new, excited energy into those conversations that also keeps in mind the unique perspectives and needs of the most vulnerable people in our community.”

The basis for From the Ground Up came from a collaboration between Uss and Mike McQuaid, who founded the Human Services Campus and served for many years on its board, including as chairman, before his untimely death last summer from Covid-19. The two had planned to collaborate to build community-based housing for people with serious mental illness.

“From the Ground Up carries on Mike’s vision. He firmly believed that homelessness could be solved with the ‘right kind of love and support that can make all the difference in the world,’” Uss said. “From the Ground Up carries on Mike’s vision. People experiencing homelessness are not a homogenous group of individuals. Their reasons for experiencing homelessness are complex and the barriers to ending their homelessness are often compounding. The assistance they need to succeed can be difficult to navigate. We use research and data to help communities better understand these complexities and we partner with individuals from every sector to design and implement strategies to reduce these complexities. We advocate for solutions to the root causes of homelessness and housing insecurity.”

Ash believes that the significant gaps in shelter and housing solutions can be “addressed to meet the unique needs of the most vulnerable.” Those gaps include:

- Lack of shelter beds and permanent housing
- Failure to adequately address deeply rooted mental and emotional client needs
- Failure to adequately address a lack of community, social isolation and personal dignity
- Lack of healthcare and social services readily available and easily accessible
- Inability to navigate the complex labyrinth of available social services and healthcare systems
- Need for more private participation and innovation in developing communities and solutions

“People are sleeping and dying on the streets,” she said. “Shelter-based solutions can and need to be implemented as soon as possible, while permanent housing solutions require urgency, but longer-term planning. It is never too soon to engage community members, stakeholders and elected officials in conversation about the need for creative responses to homelessness.”

Among the projects Uss is involved with are:

- Phoenix Rescue Mission: designing and executing an in-depth gap analysis to identify assets, needs and service gaps in the community and identify additional ways the Phoenix Rescue Mission can provide those essential community services.
- St. Vincent de Paul: providing project management assistance on a variety of strategic initiatives and regional efforts to address homelessness in the Valley.
- Home Matters® to Arizona: supporting the first statewide Home Matters initiative focused on a new generation of affordable housing, connected communities and healthier individuals, families and economies.
- City of Scottsdale: working with the Human Services staff on the innovative new Brick to Brick program through which people experiencing homelessness receive an hourly wage and case management services supporting their transition out of homelessness.
- Arizona State University: working with individuals from the Center for Applied Behavioral Health Policy on an AHCCCS-funded grant to help recovery residences and sober living homes.

“We are committed to supporting the development of shelter, housing and services in ways that strengthen communities, instead of harming them,” she said. “Paying close attention to the needs of low-income communities and neighborhoods susceptible to housing discrimination and gentrification, we seek locations that will not concentrate poverty. We also seek shelter and housing locations that allow residents to connect within their housing community and with their neighbors in the broader community in which they live.”

For more information on From the Ground Up, visit <https://www.fromthegroundupaz.com/>.

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