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It's 'Personal': Drug Court Participant Cooks Meals for Homeless During Pandemic

Rashee Roberson knows what it's like to be down on his luck.

He'd been out of a job. He'd gone hungry. He even faced the possibility of a stint in prison.

But after entering the New Jersey Judiciary's drug court program last year, he began to look at life differently.

So when he passed groups of homeless people in Plainfield who were confused about where to go or what to do during the COVID-19 pandemic, he decided to do something to help. He brought them homecooked meals.

Fifty of them.

"When I pass these people all the time, I just see them standing out there all the time, whether it's raining or snowing. I said, 'you know what? This is something I want to do,'" the 33-year-old married father of three said.

Roberson spent a couple hours in his kitchen in Plainfield last Saturday cooking fish, chicken and shrimp as well as rice, mashed potatoes and peas. He paid for all of it, including the containers in which he delivered the lunches.

Some of the recipients, he said, seemed confused by his act of kindness, while others thanked him earnestly. He told them he was just glad he could help.

The shelters take them in at night, but they have nowhere to go and no way to get food when the shelters close during the day. Many of them, Roberson said, don't understand the need for social distancing during the pandemic.

"There's so many different people doing so many different things trying to help out during this time and so I figured why not play my part, why not play my role," he said.

He'll do it again this Saturday, he said, but this time he'll have help. After posting about his efforts on his Facebook page, Roberson said, several friends and acquaintances volunteered to pitch in with their time or donations.

He said his experience in the Union Vicinage's drug court program provided the impetus to act on his desire to help the homeless. It's allowed him to reflect on the good things in his life now – he loves his new job as a truck driver and he's more engaged with his three young daughters.

“This is the drug court program at its best, when our participants bring their experience full circle by paying it forward and helping others who are struggling. Random acts of kindness can be the greatest therapy,” said Donna Westhoven, manager of the Judiciary's drug court program.

Roberson said he had personal reasons for helping.

“I haven't always been fortunate enough to get help myself. I went hungry, I couldn't feed my kids. It was super rough for me,” Roberson said. “I received so many blessings in the past few weeks alone, so out of the kindness of my heart, it's something I just wanted to do, to give back to people that are less fortunate.”

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