

With millions for homeless, why so many still outside?

Commentary

J.D. Mullane



In winter, there is frostbite and death. In summer, there are ticks, mosquitoes and infections, not to mention threats from rabid wildlife.

Such are the hazards of living

in a tent in the woods of Bucks County, homeless.

Social servants who run local homeless aid programs are concerned that the Trump administration will cut program budgets for the county's homeless, estimated to be 511 men, women and children. One program, the Homeless Outreach Support Transition (HOST) will close May 1, according to a story by my colleague Thomas Friestad.

"If you eliminate these services, how much longer are they going to remain homeless before they can get into housing or find a job?" said Marlene Piasecki, chief

operating officer of the Family Service Association of Bucks County, which operates a homeless shelter in Bristol Township.

A great question, especially since the public money sloshing into Bucks County to help the homeless dazzles.

For example, the HOST program to help the homeless was started with a \$1.2 million Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

That's a lot of dough. But wait, there's more.

Each year since 2012, according to Friestad's piece, Bucks County has received \$26.5 million from the state in "human services block grants." (Montgomery County has received \$29.15 million!)

In addition, in 2016, Bucks County received \$1.87 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (Montco got \$4.13 million!)

For Bucks County, that's \$30

million. Divide \$30 million by 511 homeless. That comes to about \$59,000 per homeless person.

Rent for a decent apartment in Bucks County averages about \$1,100 a month, or \$13,200 a year. Toss in another \$300 a month for incidentals like gas or electric, and it comes to \$16,800 a year.

Which means that every homeless man, woman and child could have their own decent apartment — and a living expense of \$300 a month — and even with that generous stipend, \$21 million would be left out of the \$30 million that's supposed to help the homeless.

You could even throw in individual Uber accounts, clothing allowances, hire a full-time physician and several nurses and assistants, and an on-call dentist, and still have millions of dollars left over.

That's not my opinion. It's math.

The question is, with tens of millions of dollars of public money sloshing around Bucks County

to help the homeless, why are so many still living on the street?

Perhaps there's a wee bit of administrative overhead no one likes to discuss.

Or a lot.

Or maybe it's priorities of the social service agencies.

A fat chunk of the public money — \$26.5 million — is divided among about seven social service agencies in Bucks. It is used to fund programs for "recovery coaches" and "peer support" and "relationship building," and to help the homeless deal with myriad issues, from addiction to mental health to chronic medical maladies.

Which is fine. But if the idea is to help the homeless, those (mostly) forgotten men in their 40s and 50s, in poor health, freezing in a tent in the woods, shouldn't the priority be to get them inside, out of the elements so they don't die out there?

And not months from now. Not weeks or even days from now.

But now.

Once inside, a homeless man's life is instantly stabilized. Surely, the social workers know this. In a safe, warm place, healing begins.

What is the value of providing a homeless man with treatment for booze or drug addiction, or counseling or meds for mental health if, at the end of the session, he is returned to the squalid homeless camp from which he was plucked?

The whipsaw between clean, well-lit places offering soft-spoken words of counseling and encouragement and the harsh reality of the camps can breed a life-draining despair that's beyond the power of the best case managers to manage.

The Salvation Army's 19th century slogan crystalizes best practices on helping the homeless: "Soup, soap and salvation."

In that order.

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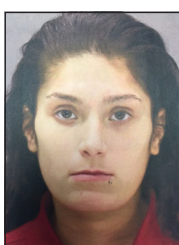
Woman spared prison time for botched armed robbery

By JAMES O'MALLEY
STAFF WRITER

A Bristol Borough woman has dodged state prison time for her role in a botched November robbery in Middletown that left one suspect dead and a second in a wheelchair.

Chasidy Demi Ramos, 26, of Buckley Street, pleaded guilty Friday in Bucks County Court to conspiracy and robbery and was ordered to serve one day less than one year to one day less than two years in the Bucks County Correctional Facility. She also must serve a concurrent five-year probation sentence.

Ramos was accused of going with another woman into Porfirio's Pizza and Pasta II, located along the 900 block of Veterans Highway, ahead of the alleged would-be robbers on Nov. 15 to scope out the business



Ramos

and report how many people were inside.

"There's a lot of mistakes that I've done, and I'm really sorry for all of it," she said. "I want to do better."

President Judge Jeffrey L. Finley told the woman he

would approve intermediate punishment — a prison program that handles house arrest and work release — should prison officials find it appropriate.

He warned, however, that any violation of the prison's rules would constitute a probation violation, and would guarantee the woman a "lengthy" stay in state prison.

Ramos has been on house arrest through pretrial supervision since December, according to her attorney Joseph Schultz. He said the opportunity to stay home with her family and three

children while on bail has proved instrumental in turning the woman's life around in the wake of the robbery.

Schultz also emphasized his client's cooperation with prosecutors, a point Bucks County Deputy District Attorney Lindsay Vaughan did not dispute.

Ramos also admitted Friday to a theft charge stemming from a November 2015 fraudulent return to a Home Depot in Bensalem.

Ramos was charged for her role in the robbery about a week after the incident along with Robin Soto, the other woman who entered the pizzeria and the mother of the two men — Justin and Shawn Rose — who allegedly tried to rob the business.

Soto, 52, is expected to be in court Thursday to face conspiracy and robbery counts.

According to police, the brothers were both shot during the robbery by a

customer at Porfirio's who was carrying a concealed handgun.

The shooter was cleared of wrongdoing.

Masked and dressed all in black, the brothers entered the restaurant pointing guns at the business owner and then pistol-whipped the customer, police say. Their weapons turned out to be pellet guns.

Shawn Rose, 24, died from his wounds.

Justin Rose, 23, was hospitalized and survived. He remains incarcerated at the Bucks County Correctional Facility where he is in a wheelchair because of his injuries.

Ramos was pregnant with a baby fathered by Justin Rose at the time of the robbery.

The man is scheduled for trial in June.

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Police seeking shooting witnesses

BRISTOL TOWNSHIP — Police are searching for a man who fired a gun numerous times into a vacant business late Thursday.

No one was injured in the shooting.

A motorist called police at 9:45 p.m. and reported a man firing a gun in the 2400 block of Durham Road at the intersection of New Falls Road, said Lt. John Godzieba.

The male suspect was last seen by a witness running from the area.

When officers arrived, they found the front window of the vacant business had been hit by several bullets.

Police could not find a suspect and recovered an undisclosed number of shell casings from a semi-automatic handgun.

Police are asking anyone who witnessed the incident and has information to contact them at the township's tip line at 215-788-8289, or email crimetips@btpolice.com

Cops: Man shot self outside 7-Eleven

Bensalem police said a man tried to kill himself Thursday night by shooting himself outside the 7-Eleven on Neshaminy Boulevard.

The shooting occurred at about 9:30 p.m., according to Bensalem police Lt. William McVey, who added the man sustained a bullet wound to the shoulder or chest.

He was taken to Aria Health's Torresdale campus in Philadelphia. No other details about the shooting were released Friday morning.



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A memory café is a welcoming place for people with forgetfulness or other changes in their thinking and for their family and friends. Memory cafés meet at a variety of places including coffeehouses, museums, or community organizations.

Our memory café will be different each time. We invite guest artists, some will offer education about memory changes, and some are just for relaxing and chatting. But our café shares these goals: to help guests feel comfortable and to know that they are not alone. Our cafés is a place to talk with others who understand what you are going through, to leave behind limitations and instead focus on strengths, to enjoy other's company, and to explore something new.



You are welcome to attend as many memory cafes as you wish!

Reservations are limited to 20 attendees.

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Please RSVP by March 29th to huntingdonvalley@artismgmt.com or (267) 571-2699.

As a courtesy, please give 72 hours notice for any cancellations.

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