

Miracle Messages

South Florida Pilot

Kenan Charitable Trust Grant Report #3

January 2021



Zoran celebrating the holidays at home, after being reconnected by Miracle Messages

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Introduction

Overview of our third report

In the 18 months that Miracle Messages has offered our services in South Florida, we have recorded 239 messages from people experiencing homelessness to their loved ones, delivered 129 of those messages, and reconnected 68 individuals with their loved ones. 19 of those individuals have gotten off the streets as a result. Others have rediscovered and rebuilt relationships that provide them with resources to improve their circumstances, as well as the innumerable benefits of having a social support system.

There is no question that Miracle Messages is on course to meet the objectives of our funded pilot in South Florida. However, as we look towards the future of our work--taking into consideration the growth potential and sustainability of what we do--we have also identified some important areas of growth for our organization. Even as we continue to change lives by doing what we've been doing all along, we are working on additional ways to fulfill our mission, to help people experiencing homelessness develop meaningful social support.

In addition to a review of our work in South Florida over the past 18 months, this report also includes a discussion of two new strategic objectives: Miracle Friends, a 1:1 phone-based buddy system for people experiencing homelessness to connect with a supportive volunteer, and Miracle Money, a direct cash gift program that allows selected individuals to work with their volunteer Friend to achieve specific goals. The Miracle Friends program was mentioned in our last report; since then, the program has shown great promise as a way to scale our organization. Miracle Money is a brand new pilot program, and an exciting new way for us to apply our theory of change by showing exceptional trust in our neighbors experiencing homelessness.

Finally, a note of terminology: in previous reports, we have referred to unhoused individuals that participate in our program as “clients”, but this term has always felt out-of-sync with our organization's mission and values. Given the way that we relate to our participants, we have instead started using the terms “Unhoused Neighbor” and “Unhoused Friend” wherever possible. In this report, for simplicity and brevity, we will refer to our Unhoused Neighbors and Friends as “Participants”.

Report structure and contents

The body of this report is divided into four sections:

- 1) Updated program budget
- 2) Demographics of participant population
- 3) Progress report on strategic objectives

- 4) Answers to questions posed by Kenan

Section 1: Updated budget

Budget Narrative

At the 18-month mark of this initial two year grant bringing Miracle Messages to South Florida, the significant progress that we documented in the mid-term report has only been accelerated.

To show how far we have come over the past six months, it is worth briefly reviewing the gains we noted in the mid-term report. In the first 12 months of our operations in South Florida, we successfully reconnected 45 people experiencing homelessness with their loved ones, with 9 getting off-the-streets as a result. These figures indicated that we were well ahead of schedule with our two year goals of facilitating 80 reunions and getting 10 people off-the-streets.

Since July 2020, we have facilitated an additional 23 reunions, for a total of 68 reunions over the past 18 months since the start of this grant period. Even more remarkable, since July 2020, an additional 10 individuals have gotten off-the-streets into stable housing or living with family again, for a total of 19 individuals off-the streets over the past 18 months. An additional two individuals got off-the-streets for a period of time, but then returned to homelessness. **This figure of at least 19 people confirmed to be off-the-streets as a result of Miracle Messages in South Florida is nearly 200% the two year stretch goal of 10 people off-the-streets.**

And obtaining housing is only one of several positive outcomes we have recorded through these reunions. We can confirm that at least 55 of the 68 individuals who have reunited through Miracle Messages have experienced a discernible positive outcome, with an additional nine individuals unknown (too early to tell or unreachable), with only four reunions either negative or neutral.

As a result of this continued success in South Florida through our General Manager Gabby Cordell, we made a full-time employment offer, which is reflected in the updated budget, below. As was the case noted in the midterm report, we have continued to invest the bulk of our time, resources, and funds into “hiring personnel and allocating time from current staff members” to our work in South Florida, with the other costs negligible (materials, travel, accommodations, etc).

Budget Amendments

Our updated budget is as follows:

1. **[REDACTED]**

Section 2: Demographics of our participant population

As in our second report, we evaluated the demographics of two groups of participants: those who recorded messages with us (who wanted to reconnect with loved ones) and those who successfully reconnected.

What we included

A breakdown of our participant demographics is below. We looked at five categories:

- 1) Client age
- 2) Client gender
- 3) Years disconnected from loved ones
- 4) Years on and off the streets
- 5) Housing status at time of message recording

The demographics of our participant population are below. **Our main takeaways from this demographic analysis was that we are generally reaching and serving an older, chronically homeless population who are unhoused and unsheltered.**

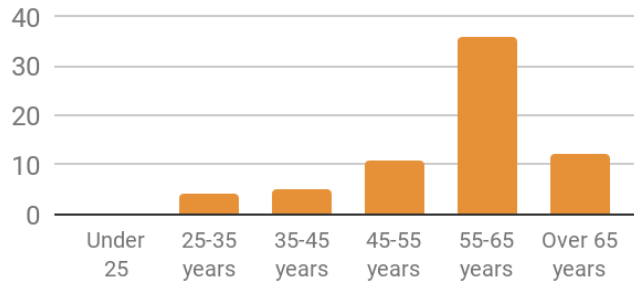
As noted in the previous report, this is a very hard to reach population; it is also a medically vulnerable population. The impact of giving this group of individuals support and potential avenues to get off the streets cannot be overstated.

Age of Unhoused Participants

The average age of our unhoused participants is 57 years old (both for those who recorded messages and for those who reconnected.)

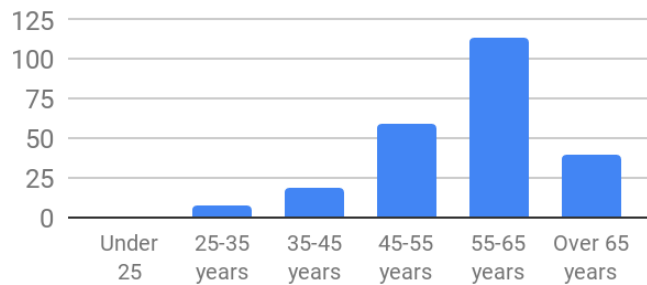
Age Breakdown of Miracle Messages participants		
Clients that reconnected with loved ones		
Over 65 years	12	18%
55-65 years	36	53%
45-55 years	11	16%
35-45 years	5	7%
25-35 years	4	6%
Under 25	0	0%
TOTAL	68	100%

Age Breakdown of Reconnected Participants
7/2019-Present



Age Breakdown of Miracle Messages participants		
All Messages recorded		
Over 65 years	39	16%
55-65 years	113	47%
45-55 years	60	25%
35-45 years	19	8%
25-35 years	8	3%
Under 25	0	0%
TOTAL	239	100%

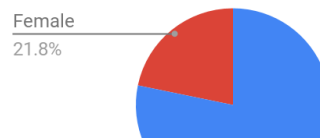
Age Breakdown of All Participants
7/2019-Present



Gender of Unhoused Participants

78% of those who recorded messages, and 72% of those who reconnected, were male.

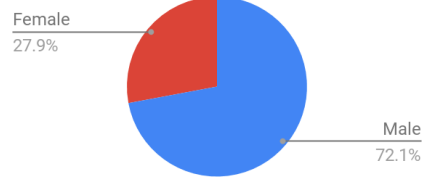
Gender Breakdown All Participants
7/2019-Present



Gender Breakdown		
All recorded		
Male	187	78%
Female	52	22%
Total	239	100%

Gender Breakdown		
Reconnected		
Male	49	72%
Female	19	28%
Total	68	100%

Gender Breakdown, Reconnected Only
7/2019-Present

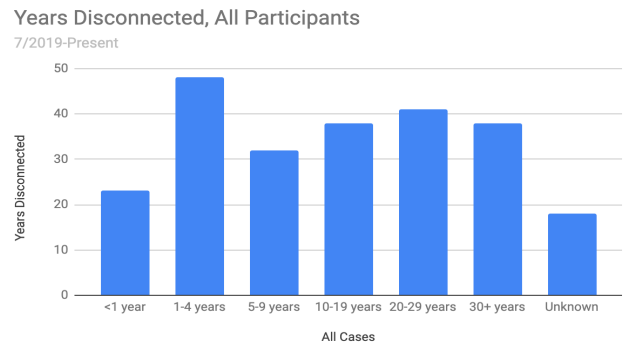
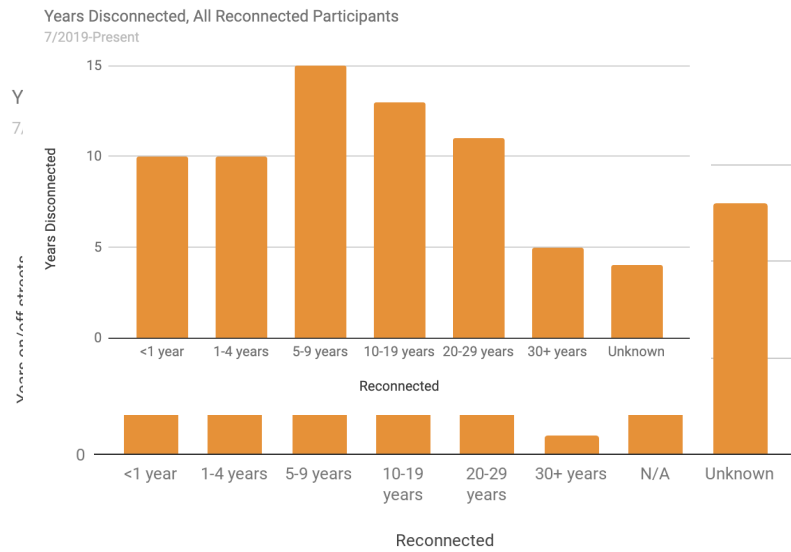


Years disconnected from loved ones

Our most recent numbers show that our unhoused participants have been disconnected from their loved ones for 14 years on average.

Years Disconnected		
Reconnected		
<1 year	10	15%
1-4 years	10	15%
5-9 years	15	22%
10-19 years	13	19%
20-29 years	11	16%
30+ years	5	7%
Unknown	4	6%
Total:	68	100%

Years Disconnected		
All Cases		
<1 year	23	10%
1-4 years	48	20%
5-9 years	32	13%
10-19 years	38	16%
20-29 years	41	17%
30+ years	38	16%
Unknown	19	8%
Total:	239	100%



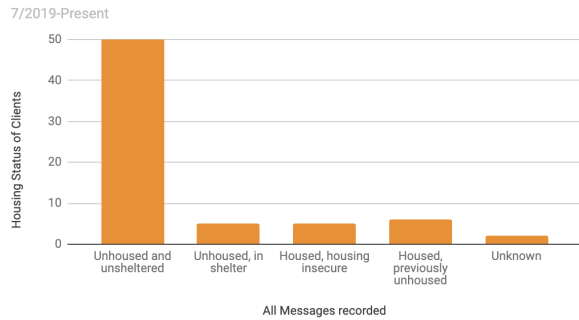
Years on and off the streets

Our most recent calculations show that our participants have been homeless/on-and-off the streets for an average of 7 years.

Years on/off streets

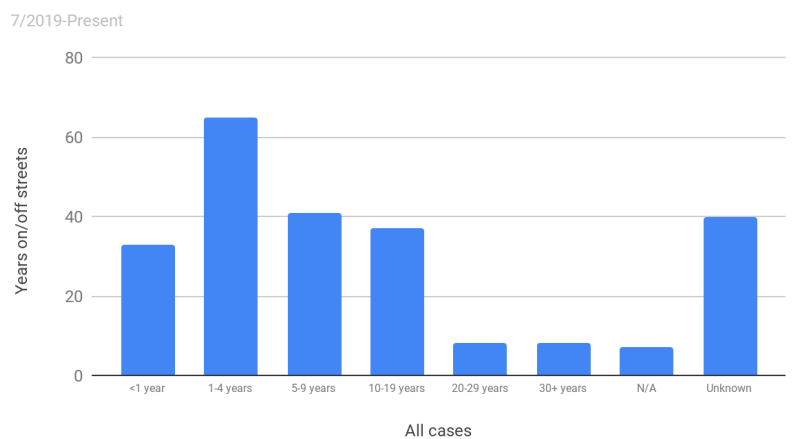
Reconnected		
<1 year	9	13%
1-4 years	15	22%
5-9 years	14	21%
10-19 years	8	12%
20-29 years	4	6%
30+ years	1	1%
N/A	4	6%
Unknown	13	19%
Total:	68	100%

Housing Status of Participants, Reconnected Only



Years on/off streets		
All cases		
<1 year	33	14%
1-4 years	65	27%
5-9 years	41	17%
10-19 years	37	15%
20-29 years	8	3%
30+ years	8	3%
N/A	7	3%
Unknown	40	17%
Total:	239	100%

Years on/off streets, All Cases



Shelter/Housing status

74% of those who reconnected, and 72% of our participants overall, reported being unhoused and unsheltered.

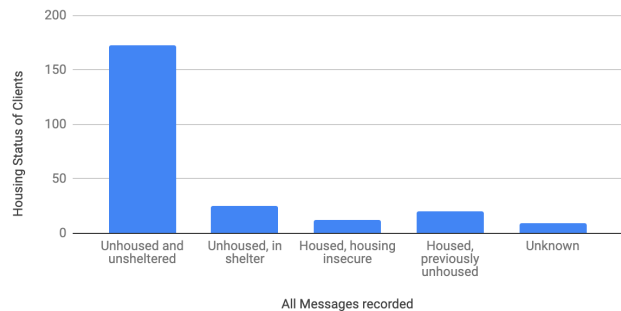
Housing Status of Clients		
Reconnected		
Unhoused and unsheltered	50	74%

Unhoused, in shelter	5	7%
Housed, housing insecure	5	7%
Housed, previously unhoused	6	9%
Unknown	2	3%
TOTAL	68	100%

Housing Status of Clients		
All Messages recorded		
Unhoused and unsheltered	173	72%
Unhoused, in shelter	25	10%
Housed, housing insecure	12	5%
Housed, previously unhoused	20	8%
Unknown	9	4%
TOTAL	239	100%

Housing Status of Clients, All Participants

7/2019-Present



Section 3: Status of strategic objectives

Objective 1: Reconnect and Reunite

At the outset of the pilot, we proposed that we would reunite 80 people with loved ones over a two year period, with at least 10% of reunions leading to housing or living with family. **As of this writing, we have reconnected 68 people with loved ones, and 19 people have gotten off the streets as a result of reconnecting.** This total consists of 15 people who were confirmed to have gone home or to have found housing, and 6 who were unconfirmed but could reasonably be assumed to have gone home or found housing. Two individuals who went home but returned to the streets were excluded from this total.



We also set a goal of having a positive outcome (in terms of physical health, mental/emotional health, or social health) in at least 50% of cases in which there is reported data. As in our midterm report, we have seen myriad positive outcomes from the reconnections we've facilitated. These results include improvements in physical well being (including housing) and social and emotional well being. These outcomes are tabulated in "Objective 3: Demonstrate Impact" below.

Objective 2: Fine-tune our model

When we designed this pilot program, we set a goal of approaching at least 10 messages recorded per month within 9 months of program start date, and devised an outreach plan to meet that goal. **With 239 messages recorded over 18 months, (an average of 13 recorded messages per month) we have already exceeded that goal. However, over the course of the pilot, our methods for recording messages have evolved significantly. The quality of our messages have improved (information collected, follow-up, locating family), not just the quantity of messages.**

Updates to our outreach and volunteering on model

When we embarked on our South Florida Pilot, we anticipated having a three-pronged approach for outreach: A General Manager, who would oversee outreach, several Community Ambassadors, who conduct regular outreach in the community, and volunteers, who would attend service events and record messages on a regular basis. We also anticipated receiving referrals from other service providers.

In our last report, we discussed a shift in our outreach strategy: rather than having a three-pronged approach, we made our General Manager the sole touchpoint for recording messages and relaying information to partner sites. This updated structure has exceeded our expectations, and we are now using South Florida as a model for our other local pilots. We do not anticipate hiring Community Ambassadors or depending on outreach volunteers in any of our future pilots. We no longer believe our Ambassador model is suitable for scaling this work.

This shift to having the General Manager as our sole touchpoint for recording messages and facilitating reconnections is reflected in our decision to amend our budget and make Gabby Cordell full-time, as discussed in the budget section above.

Updates to our partnership model

Miracle Messages has primarily sourced our cases by having Gabby visit partner sites and offer our services to guests. Originally, we had hoped that service providers at these sites would begin referring participants to us; however, this has happened only rarely. For the time being, this puts the onus of offering Miracle Messages entirely on Gabby.



The two tables below illustrate how partnerships have worked in practice.

The first table, “Source of Cases (who referred the case)”, lists the person who actually identified the unhoused individuals wanting to reconnect, and completed the referral form. Since Gabby Cordell runs Choose Love Foundation and serves as Miracle Messages’ General Manager, cases sourced from Choose Love and Miracle Messages both come from Gabby’s outreach. In total, Gabby’s outreach comprises 63% of all cases “referred”.

Source of Cases (who referred the case)	
Choose Love Foundation	35
HOPE S. FL. Ft. Lauderdale, FL	50
HOPE S.FL. Pompano, FL	10
Jubilee Center	5
MIA CASA	1
MM Hotline	2
Mother Teresa's Soup Kitchen	5
Our Father's House Soup Kitchen	6
Showering Love	3
Sisters of Charity, Camillus House-Lazarus Project	1
The Lord's Gift House	6
Miracle Messages	115
TOTAL	239

The second table, “Location where case was recorded”, shows the location where the cases were recorded. Most often, this means that Gabby visited the location, asked guests receiving services there whether they would like to reconnect with loved ones, and referred the cases if the answer was “yes”.

Location where case was recorded	
Choose Love Foundation	32
HOPE S. FL. Ft. Lauderdale, FL	88
HOPE S.FL. Pompano, FL	18
Jubilee Center	22
Mother Teresa's Soup Kitchen	8
Other Location	41
Our Father's House Soup Kitchen	6



Showering Love	6
Sisters of Charity	3
The Lord's Gift House	14
MIA CASA	1
TOTAL	239

The key takeaway from this data is that unhoused people who access services at our partner site locations are interested in participating in Miracle Messages, but partner sites only rarely make referrals. More than 80% of our cases were recorded at a service provider site, but less than 40% of the cases were referred by someone besides our General Manager. These numbers illustrate what we had long suspected: that staff and volunteers at other service providers are unlikely to be a steady source of referrals for Miracle Messages, even though the people who use their service are interested in reconnecting with loved ones.

It is not entirely clear to us why other service providers do not make more referrals, especially given that the referral requires little additional work, that the service is free of cost, and that the outcomes can be so transformative. Our best guesses about the why other providers do not refer are that 1) asking our reunion question requires a staff member or volunteer to think of solutions outside of the immediate service area (serving food, providing supplies, etc), and 2) the in-depth, high trust conversations required to refer a case are too time and care intensive for most service providers to undertake.

In this pilot, we have solved the problem by making Gabby full time. However, as we look at scaling our model, we are beginning to think that the Miracle Friends program will play an important role in building partnerships. Unlike reunion service referrals, which require an in-depth conversation, Miracle Friends referrals are easy to make: the form takes 1-3 minutes, the information needed is very basic, and no follow up is required. See <http://miraclefriends.org>.

By referring unhoused individuals to the Miracle Friends program, partners can connect their guests to a supportive volunteer for regular check-ins. Once an unhoused participant has been matched with a volunteer, the volunteer can ask the Friend about lost loved ones; if the unhoused participants wants to reconnect, the volunteer can make the referral.

Additions to our Model: Miracle Friends and Miracle Money

As mentioned above, Miracle Messages has developed two new programs in the last year: Miracle Friends, and Miracle Money.

Miracle Friends (1:1 buddy system) currently serves 124 unhoused Friends, each of whom paired with supportive volunteers (mostly in California, though we have had three Friends from Florida).



Miracle Friends is 100% virtual and remote. Each matched Friend pair is supported by a caseworker at a participating partner site, and a mentor from the Miracle Messages community. The role of volunteer Friends is to offer general companionship and support, not try to be a caseworker or provide specialized help.

We see Miracle Friends as a way to scale our impact by connecting more unhoused individuals with social support, even if family can't help. We also see it as a way for volunteers to be part of the solution when it comes to addressing homelessness, in a way that is more practical than having them engage in site outreach.

Miracle Money (direct cash transfers for select Miracle Friends participants) will disburse the first cash gifts for ten selected participants (all in California) in early February. Miracle Money is modeled off of [a successful UBI pilot in Canada](#). The project consists of monthly cash stipends for people experiencing homelessness to provide stability and the opportunity to plan for the future. We raised **\$40,000** to provide 12 Miracle Friend participants **\$500/month for six months** for transportation, clothing, housing, savings and other essentials. Recipients are members of the Miracle Friends community, whom we have grown to know and trust over many months.

Our decision to pilot Miracle Money arose from our core value of meeting people where they are in life. As much as we believe that relational poverty is poverty, we also know that poverty—the lack of funds to take care of one's basic needs—is poverty. If we can build on the relationships we've developed to truly address poverty, we want to do it, and we believe in the power of human connection to create a path for healing and growth.

Objective 3: Demonstrate impact

To date, Miracle Messages has recorded messages for 239 people, and has reconnected 68 people with loved ones. Our key metrics are below.

Key metrics to date

Metric	7/2019-2/2020	2/2020-7/2020	7/2020-2/2021	Total
Messages recorded	111	43	85	239
Messages delivered	47	36	46	129
Participants	24	21	23	68

Reconnected				
Participants off the streets	3	6	6	19 (15 confirmed, 4 unconfirmed, 2 went home but returned to streets)
Positive outcomes from reconnecting	Cumulative measure only	Cumulative measure only	Cumulative measure only	55

Reconnection outcomes and post-reunion data

At the outset of the pilot, we set a goal of collecting post reunion data from at least 40% of reunited participants and their families. The diligent work of our General Manager, Gabby Cordell, has made this seamless for many participants--because of the relationships that she has built, we are often able to remain in contact with our South Florida participants.

Gabby's ongoing communication, combined with our post-reunion outreach efforts, have allowed us to stay in touch with many of our participants, and to track how their reunions impact their lives.

For each of the 68 reconnections, we evaluated the primary outcome of reconnecting. **The breakdown of these outcomes is in the table below.**

Outcome of reconnection			
Housing/Home-Confirmed		15	22%
Housing/Home-Unconfirmed		6	9%
Social safety net		14	21%
Improved mental or emotional health		19	28%
Improved physical health		1	1%
No clear result		11	16%
Negative interaction with loved one		2	3%
Total		68	100%

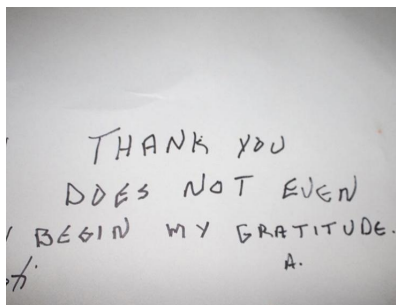
A more in-depth description of each reconnection's outcome can be found [HERE](#).

Section 4: Stories

Featured Reunion Stories

The greatest testament to the power of our work are the stories of the participants who reconnect. These stories illustrate the power of social support--whether the result is housing, a restored sense of hope, renewed motivation to move forward, or simply a respite from the loneliness that often comes along with being homeless.

Austin



Austin had long been a regular visitor to the Choose Love Foundation food truck on Tuesday nights, when we offered him the opportunity to reconnect with a loved one, he originally asked about an old friend and her mother. Early searches indicated that the mother had passed away, and the friend had no online presence; when Austin heard this news, he asked to be reconnected with another friend, Stephen, in St. Croix.

Our volunteer was able to reach Stephen's wife, who passed the message along to Stephen. She then texted to say, "Stephen would very much like to reconnect with Austin". Stephen and Austin began connecting by phone, and Austin began making plans to visit Stephen.

The reconnection with Stephen changed Austin's outlook, and motivated him to begin looking for a life beyond homelessness. He told Gabby that he had grown "tired of the b.s." on the streets. This motivation resulted in Austin finding a place to live.

Zoran



Zoran had only recently become homeless when he met Miracle Messages. He had been a steady supporter of his family until an accident left him unable to work for a few months; just as he was medically cleared to go back to work, the pandemic hit and his job in the restaurant business disappeared. Having been separated from his wife for the last couple of years and his parents no longer alive, Zoran found himself on the streets, sleeping in Bayside park. His pride and

feelings of shame were preventing him from reaching out to his wife and son who were living in Nebraska.

Though he knew how to reach his family, he felt too ashamed of his situation to reach out.

As the holidays approached he began to reconsider. Gabby spoke to him about how easy it might be to slide into homelessness--how quickly 2 months turns into 2 years and into 20 years (!). The following Tuesday he was waiting for Gabby and quickly said, "I've been thinking about what you said and I'd like to try."

It took about a week to get his wife on the phone, another week or so to get them both on a call, and soon we were making travel arrangements. We flew him to Lincoln, Nebraska in time to spend Christmas with his family.

Linda



Linda had been homeless for 25 years before encountering Miracle Messages; when she met Gabby, she was living unsheltered on 14th street Overtown bridge. She is an active substance user and has several chronic illnesses. She asked Miracle Messages to find her children, whom she hadn't seen since they were small children, and who were now in their 30's. Her message to them was "Thinking of you. I miss you. I love you."

A Miracle Messages volunteer located Linda's daughter, Evelyn. She and her brother immediately flew to Miami, searched the streets with Gabby, and met their mom for the 1st time since they were children.

Since Linda does not have an ID and would not have been allowed to board a flight, her children rented a car and drove her home. They are now caring for her as she begins substance withdrawal.

The last message from the family, received on 1/20, read as follows:

"Linda is getting help. She is being loved immensely. What continues this miracle is that she's not the only one that's been reconnected through this. Family that hasn't talked in ages are all coming together, putting their stuff aside for a greater purpose of unconditional love. This moment with Linda holds everything in it for our family. Every family, every person, is touched by this. We all are healing with her."

Section 5: Responses to Kenan Prompts

Kenan prompt 1: gains made by population

After 18 months of work in South Florida, it is abundantly clear to us that Miracle Messages work has an outsized impact on a hard-to-serve population of chronically homeless adults. The tabulated data and stories above clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of our approach.

As indicated by the demographic in this report, Miracle Messages is serving an older, unsheltered, chronically homeless population. The ability of our organization to make these for these individuals feel loved and cared for is a major gain for this population; to see individuals in this group get off the streets at such high rates with such a simple intervention is astounding.

Kenan prompt 2: bright spots and lessons learned

It is clear that our organization has hit its stride in South Florida. Gabby's work, paired with the highly effective Case Solving Community, has allowed us to consistently solve cases, facilitate reconnections, and help people rebuild relationships.

We have also been delighted to discover that the Miracle Friends program can also provide meaningful, nourishing relationships for people experiencing homelessness who do not have family to reconnect with. Not only does this allow us to expand our reach to those unhoused neighbors who can't or won't reconnect with family, but it also makes referrals easier and provides an avenue for achieving scale.

As discussed above, we have learned that partner sites are not a reliable source of case referrals. We believe that our decision to make Gabby full time is the best way to apply what we've learned in the short term, but we also hope to bring Miracle Friends to South Florida to strengthen our relationships with other service providers in the long term.

Kenan prompt 3: broader impact and knowledge sharing

During this pilot, and especially in the last six months, Miracle Messages has developed several new channels for sharing knowledge and broadening our impact. These include:

- 1) Intern program with college and university students.** In the summer of 2020, Miracle Messages engaged more than 30 college interns in our work. These students learned about our work by participating in our programs; many were paired with Miracle Friends. The interns also put on a screening of the film "The Invisible Class", followed by a

discussion of the structural and systemic reasons for homelessness. In fall and winter, Miracle Messages has continued to engage student interns in the fall and spring. Interns report that this direct exposure to people experiencing homelessness--and the unique perspective that they gain from working with us--demystifies and shatters stereotypes.

- 2) Educators coming together to incorporate Miracle Messages into their classrooms.** In the last 18 months, Miracle Messages has engaged educators and students from Universities across the country. Professors at major universities are incorporating our work into their courses on homelessness, both as an academic topic and through service learning and practicum engagements. In the last several months, we have begun convening educators to speak to each other about how they can share knowledge about relational poverty and homelessness with their students.
- 3) Miracle Friends White Paper.** In the first three months of the Miracle Friends program, we surveyed all participants about their experience. We then analyzed and published the results in a white paper ([linked here](#)).
- 4) Deal in progress to create docuseries with Ish entertainment.** In the last three months, we have engaged with Ish Entertainment to begin crafting a docuseries. The series, which is tentatively scheduled to air on Discovery's streaming service (Discovery+), will follow our work and tell the human stories of homelessness and relational poverty that are so often missing from the public discourse..
- 5) Application of relationship-first model to direct cash transfer programs.** In addition to our own Miracle Money pilot, we have begun engaging with Mayor's for Guaranteed income to see whether our learnings about relationship-building might support local direct cash transfer programs. The one pager we developed for this is linked [here](#).

Kenan prompt 4: challenges and learnings

The biggest challenges and learnings have been around our partnership model, as discussed above. One additional challenge that we've identified is the difficulty of working with people with severe mental illness, ongoing addiction, or underlying trauma. This is reflected in the participants who went home and returned, and also in those who reconnected but couldn't return home because of ongoing substance use or mental health issues.

Even though this is an ongoing challenge (and a devastating one when it prevents someone from finding a safe home) we have also learned that Miracle Messages is still worth offering to individuals with these challenges. Stories like Linda's show just how willing families may be to work with their loved one, despite the challenges they may face.

Kenan prompt 5: project sustainability

Overall, Miracle Messages has grown its name and brand tremendously, and this has resulted in a healthy inflow of donations from individuals. However, we see sustainability as more than having the money to keep doing what we are doing--we want to build an organization that can grow and scale.

As our work has evolved, we've begun to see a sustainable future that fuses our reunion service, the Miracle Friends program, and the Miracle Money program into one offering. We see the Miracle Friends program as a growth engine--it can serve many people, engage community volunteers, and connect us with partners all at once. Miracle Money is our innovation engine--it gives us an opportunity to showcase how relationships can support a practical intervention like direct cash transfers. And the reunion service, with its transformative outcomes and beautiful stories, will continue to provide our program participants with the amazing opportunities for connection, love, and support.

Our leadership team remains committed to growing and scaling the organization. Though the pandemic and geographic barriers prevent us from meeting in person, we are in regular communication through online meetings, frequent updates on individual cases, and a robust tracking and documentation system. We have also set a culture of empowering our staff and volunteers: we have incorporated Gabby, our volunteers, and our unhoused Friends into our work as participant designers, so that our work is infused with firsthand knowledge and lived experience.

