

Balancing Compassion and Accountability

by Melissa VanDerStatt

Cully Pederson is one of the housing advocates at the CHUM Center where he focuses on adults who stay in the Emergency Shelter. His days are more often busy than not as he helps each person find housing, manage their income, and plan for the future.



"I am the type of person who, walks along a beach and picks up a beached starfish and puts it back in the water. I have seen people dump a bucket of water on the starfish. That doesn't solve the problem." said Pederson.

Pederson started working at CHUM 13 years ago, and still maintains an intense dedication to his work. Countless homeless or almost homeless individuals come into his office for advice and assistance, and they get it. Pederson refers to what he does as respectful re-parenting, quietly helping each person find their niche.

"It is a balance of compassion and accountability," said Pederson. "We try to promote a hopeful environment. But where does hope come from? I believe that hope comes from a person's sense of responsibility, in knowing how they can be responsible and meet their own needs."

With this mantra, Pederson assists the people visiting his office by talking about where they are now, how they got here, and what their plans are to achieve a more stable environment. He estimated that, after a period of time, 90% of the people who come through his office never need to come back. Pederson maintains that a person doing something for themselves is growing, and he trusts that people can make it for themselves with the proper support. "We all have wings, but I cannot fly for you." said Pederson, who seems very happy to be helping those who come to his door. His office is as welcoming and inclusive. He described the CHUM Center as a colorful place, and said that he wouldn't want it any other way. Pederson feels that there are so many dedicated individuals working at the CHUM Center, and the atmosphere is similar to that of a living room; a place where people can stop by for lunch, talk with friends, or pick up a jacket.

"You couldn't fall through the cracks here if you wanted to." said Cully Pederson.