

## HandUp works with SOS to engage more local homeless service providers, donors in crowdfunding

**The Lathrup Village-based South Oakland Shelter plans to hire a coordinator to help others use a new Detroit-focused page when it launches this fall.**

By [Sherri Welch](#)

San Francisco-based [HandUp.org](#), a crowdfunding platform designed to help fill the unfunded needs of the homeless and others trying to rise out of poverty, could give [Benevolent.net](#) a run for the money in metro Detroit.

As [Crain's reported](#) this week, Benevolent.net is re-engaging with local nonprofits and their clients after restructuring its operations to a fee-free model dependent on grants and donations. It's doing so with support including a \$20,000 grant from the late Marjorie Fisher, who had funded the web-based donation platform in prior years, and working directly with local nonprofits to validate causes.

Like Benevolent, HandUp, which has been posting the needs of the homeless in metro Detroit for the past couple of years, is also ramping up its efforts to connect with local nonprofits and their clients through a new collaboration with Lathrup Village-based **South Oakland Shelter**.

SOS, which had been looking into building an online fundraising site itself, approached HandUp in mid-2014 about coming to Detroit when it discovered the site and liked the functionality, HandUp founder and COO Sammy Rayner said in an email. [SOS began using](#) the main HandUp site that October and since then has raised more than \$74,000 through the platform for 209 individuals struggling with homelessness, SOS President and CEO Ryan Hertz said.

Soon after, the **Coalition on Temporary Shelter** in Detroit began posting needs on the site, which demonstrated there was a broader need and interest in using the platform across Detroit, Rayner said.

Now SOS and HandUp are teaming to create a Detroit-focused page that will raise

funds individually and collectively for metro Detroit homeless service providers and the clients they serve and a coalition of those agencies to jointly promote the site to their clients and donors.

The project is strictly mission-oriented for SOS, Hertz said, noting SOS is not receiving any sort of fee or annual contract amount from HandUp to serve as the local administrator helping to recruit local homeless service providers to the site and assist them in using it. "We have found crowdfunding to be an incredible tool for addressing barriers in our clients' lives for which there are funding gaps, and HandUp provides functionality which has allowed us to be very successful in this arena," he said.

By establishing the HandUp Detroit collaborative and a focused crowdfunding page on the larger HandUp.org site, SOS aims to help local homeless service agencies gain access to crowdfunding for their clients while collectively marketing the site and platform to donors, Hertz said.

"We are not acting as an operating arm of HandUp per se; more so, HandUp is our platform of choice in our effort to assist a greater number of clients throughout our community with specific assistance and engage a wider audience of donors to do so," he said.

HandUp is providing the technology, and SOS will help homeless service providers build capacity to implement it.

SOS recently secured a \$50,000 grant from the **Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan** to build the HandUp Detroit collaborative of homeless service providers. Operated by SOS, it will recruit and support new agencies using HandUp and collectively market the giving opportunities to donors with a metro Detroit branded site and campaign. Another grant of \$50,000 from the Detroit-based **McGregor Fund** will provide matching donations once the HandUp Detroit page is live. SOS plans to make a donation of at least \$10,000 to HandUp to help cover the costs of developing and maintaining the Detroit page, Hertz said, and spend an equal amount on marketing, branding and advertising the HandUp Detroit homeless services provider collaboration and page.

It's seeking to hire a **HandUp Detroit coordinator** to assist with bringing new agencies to the crowdfunding platform and posting needs on the Detroit-centric page, which is expected to launch this fall. So far, SOS, COTS and **Neighborhood Service Organization** plan to use the site, Hertz said.

Like Benevolent, HandUp is a free service for nonprofits and clients, with 100 percent of donations going to fund the needs of clients asking for help.

Both sites say they can track where donated dollars go and who they are helping to paint a picture of the impact they are having.

Operationally, however, the two are set up differently. While Benevolent operates as a nonprofit, **HandUP was established as a for-profit social benefit corporation** with a

social mission built in and the ability to attract funding that would allow it to scale the company.

"Beyond helping our nonprofit partners raise funding, HandUp was built to support collaboration across the philanthropic sector, local governments and caring citizens who want to make an impact on poverty," Rayner said. "We're excited to use this grant to strengthen collective impact in Detroit and also demonstrate a model to be replicated across the U.S."

Having multiple platforms to choose from to meet the needs of their clients is "all for the better," said Heidi Alcock, director of grant development and communications for the McGregor Fund.

"This is about creating a culture of innovation (and) new tools," she said. "Those plugging into HandUp and Benevolent will have an opportunity to learn ... to see what benefit they (each) provide to their work and their consumers."

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