

# THE OPEN DOOR

FROM THE CORE COMMUNITY OF ANDRÉ HOUSE

FALL 2020

## *NO LIMITS*

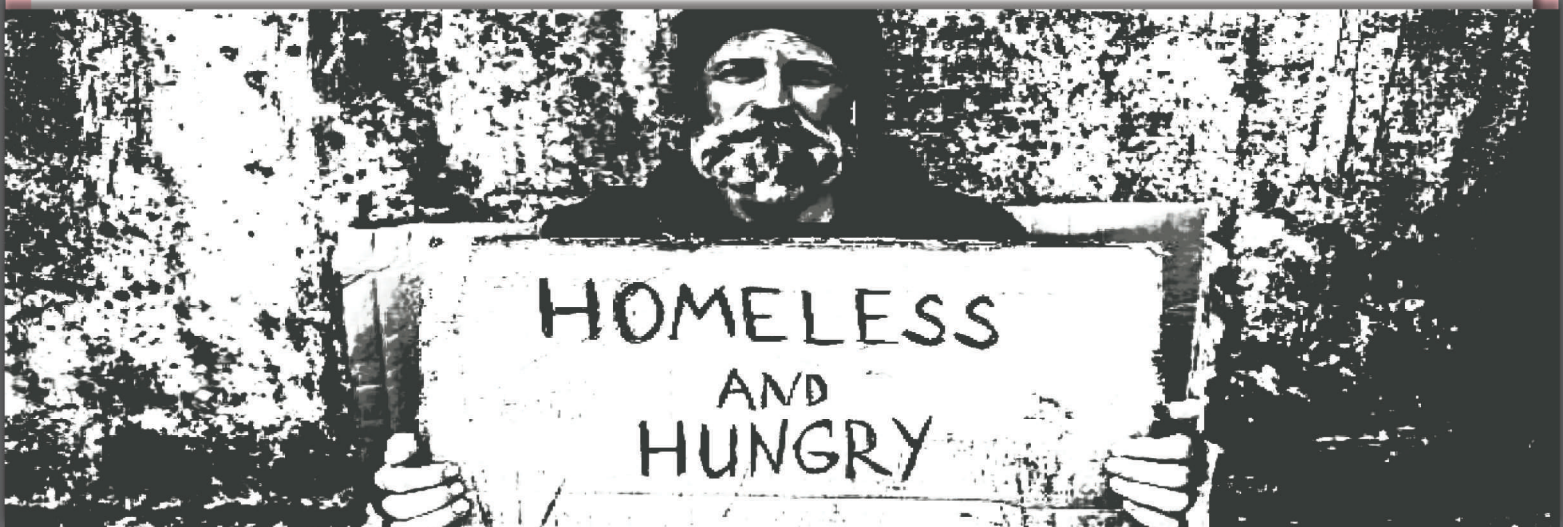
*FR. DAN PONISCIAK C.S.C. DIRECTOR ANDRE HOUSE*

“At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with compassion for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd.” Anyone who has ever volunteered at Andre House has experienced what Jesus is speaking about in the Gospel of Matthew. So many days, I look at our guests and ask the question of what more can we do for them? How can we help them feel loved? Feel welcomed? Feel at peace?

The Catholic author and theologian, Henri Nouwen defines the word “compassion” as “to suffer with.” He goes on to say in his book on the subject, that “compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears...to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion into the human condition.” (Nouwen, *Compassion*, 3-4)

Henri Nouwen’s description of compassion is a fitting image of what it means to me to serve here at Andre House. Our ministry, everything that we do to serve our guests, emerges from a desire to love and to share in the suffering of others – to walk with our guests into those places that others would prefer to avoid. So many of our guests experiencing homelessness suffer in isolation while sleeping on the streets completely invisible to the rest of the world. Many of our guests suffer from invisible illnesses – the ravages of mental illness and addiction that can steal hope and peace and replace with it with suffering and fear. Andre House tries to provide a place where everyone who walks through our gates are welcomed, loved and supported no matter who they are – whether they are experiencing homelessness for the first time or if they’ve been on the streets for years. It’s the same love and support that so many of you who are reading this newsletter have experienced in your time at Andre House.

Our compassion has no limits and it does not have any boundaries. From the very beginning, it was compassion that moved our founding volunteers and Holy Cross Religious to begin this beautiful ministry out of the back of a pickup truck and in an alley and it is compassion that drives us into the future to continue to advocate for our friends and neighbors experiencing homelessness. One of our big projects happening now is asking the City of Phoenix to amend the Special Use Permit governing our neighborhood so we can shelter more people. We are currently limited to 425 beds. That’s nowhere near enough for the people who have to sleep outside in tents. No one should have to sleep outside and after the hottest summer of record here in Phoenix, we need to do more to shelter those experiencing homelessness and to offer people hope for a life that doesn’t include being homeless. If you’d like to help us advocate, sign a petition or simply learn what is going on, please visit <http://fromstreettohome.org>.





## *BECAUSE I CARE*

*BRENDAN DEVLIN ANDRÉ HOUSE CORE STAFF*



The idea of moving across the country, to the middle of the desert, in the blazing heat, to serve those experiencing homelessness, in the middle of a pandemic seems.. actually really crazy when you think about it. Funny enough, it's exactly what I did. Why, you ask? It's hard to say one reason why I decided on such a fantastic leap of faith just months after I graduated college, but upon reflection, I think

my plethora of answers could be boiled down to a singular word that can encompass so much: compassion.

Compassion, to me, is the art of caring. It's doing the little things right to show you mean it when you say "I'm here for you". It can be shown in a variety of ways and surely finds itself within the many little things that Andre House does to make those without a roof over their head feel at home. My own compassion for others is what brought me here.

When people would ask me why I was deciding to move to 115 degree Phoenix just as the temperature back home was getting good, I often would meet them with a laundry list of reasons why I thought it would be a great step for me. Almost immediately after saying this, I would wonder to myself if the reasons I provided were enough to actually follow through with something so drastic. As I'd think more and more about my "reasons", I always found solace in what I deemed my biggest reason: because I care. This is the reason why I decided to come to Andre House. I wanted to be at a place where all judgments are left at the door, and all you had to do was care as best you could. While it can be a great challenge to care about a group of people who are different from you, I see it as a way to measure who I really am as a person. If I'm able to care and love someone I have never seen before in my life, without an ounce of judgment, not only can I contribute to making Andre House a better place, but I think I can contribute to making the world just a little bit better of a place too.

On a daily basis I am inspired by my fellow staff members' fierce compassion for others. Truly, their ability to care so much is why Andre House is well known for being a place where everyone has a place. One instance that sticks out to me specifically was when one Thursday, our dinner line was running a little slower than usual. We had only served about 70 meals through the first half an hour of service. Needless to say, something had to be done. Andrew, a good friend and fellow Core Staff member of mine, is a guy who is by far one of the most compassionate people I've ever met. Luckily, he's also a pretty good problem solver. In response to the slower line, Andrew, fueled by his compassion and desire to feed everyone, decided to adapt and bring food containers out to the street to make sure anyone in that line was guaranteed a hot meal that night. Though it seemed like a small gesture, a guest of ours remarked to me that "No, it's not just a little thing to come out onto the street to serve and care for people like that. It's a big deal."

Sometimes, at a place like Andre House, acts of compassion can get lost in the everyday hubbub of the nature of our work. I think it's extremely important to recognize the reasons why we do a lot of the different things throughout our days. More often than not, a simple "because I care" can illuminate a much deeper sense of understanding, meaning, and compassion for others.





## THOSE WHO KNOW

ANDREW CECE ANDRÉ HOUSE CORE STAFF



When I think about compassion, I think about our guests at Andre House. Of course, these are the people whom we aim to be compassionate toward, but in my experience, they are often the ones demonstrating compassion through their words and actions. At Andre house, I've seen people who don't own many shirts literally give the shirts off their backs. I've seen people wait in an extremely long dinner line only to turn around and give their meal to another

person who they thought needed it more. I've seen people that are going through unimaginably hard times consistently checking in on me and asking how my minor finger injury is healing. So when I was asked to write an article on the topic of compassion, my immediate thought was to go to the experts. I sat down with a few different guests that I'm close with, and asked them to talk to me about compassion. I let them know that they could talk about Andre house, or tell a personal story or simply explain what compassion means to them. Here's what they had to say:

### Felicia

"Compassion is when you love somebody and you're relating to one another, doing things together, getting to know one another, sharing love together, talking things out, and working toward things together."

### Sunshine

"I'll never forget going to Wendy's at 11pm at night and I was in my feelings, and then it dawned on me to get out of my own feelings and to be there for someone else. So when I saw the guy at the drive thru, the first thing I asked him was "let me start by saying 'how are YOU today?'. He was very thankful and let me know that I was the first person to show concern for him all day...which broke my heart all over again."

### James

"Most of the people at Andre house are caring people and they care a lot about us and want to see us get where we need to be. I would say that most of the people at Andre House are pretty good at showing compassion. They speak to us respectfully, answer our questions and help us out to the best of their abilities whenever we have a problem."

### Juleen

"I see Andre House being compassionate by always giving and giving and giving and sharing things. And listening to us...you're always there for us. Not just giving physical things, but always there emotionally for us and mentally there for us. I don't know where you guys come from, but it must be a special place. That's why we like coming here so much."

### Greg

"Compassion is showing love and kindness to others who are hurting. There are a lot of people here (at Cass) who are hurting and in need. You can see it in their facial expressions. "

The staff at Andre House is very compassionate, even when they themselves are having a bad day...they still take the time to talk to you about your situation. The staff gets an A+ in my book. I know when I'm having a bad day, Brendan, Gracie, Karlee or any of the staff can cheer me up...and I mean every word of that! People notice that I may be having a bad day and they cheer me up. If they have the time, they take the time to talk to me about it. Compassion.

I was raised to show compassion. Compassion means to show love to your fellow man, and that idea was instilled in me by my parents. I have learned that when I see people hurting that need compassion or love, I will go up to them and talk to them about their situation and it always cheers them up.





As a member of core staff, it's sometimes easy to act out of love and show compassion. Sometimes it can be as simple as remembering that your friend asked for a baseball cap yesterday after losing his, and today you found a few that matched the description he desired so he could choose between them—after he forgot he even asked you to look for him. It can be as simple as putting aside freshly donated body spray and scented lotion for your friend who always asks for some when we never have any and gifting it to her as soon as you see her. It can be as simple as giving your friend a single carrot just because you know he likes carrots. I was able to show these three guests that I love them by doing something so small for them, and after each moment, each one of them told me they loved me in return.

In the back of my mind, I knew that these three things I did for my friends would make them happy. There are other small actions I know I can take and have taken at times that make our guests feel loved and cared about. I see my other fellow staff members do them all the time, too. Being hospitable, loving, compassionate, and kind is the job we signed up for. But sometimes, our guests know how to act out of love in an even better way than we do.

As I sit outside the door to the bathrooms one afternoon, monitoring the number of people entering the building and ensuring they are wearing masks, one guest walks out of the door and informs me that there's a woman laying on the floor of the women's bathroom who didn't move out of the way when she prompted her to. Since it's my job to supervise the bathrooms right now, I go inside and check out the situation. Sure enough, there is a woman laying on the floor of the women's bathroom, taking up most of the floor room. I nudge her to ask if she is alright and if she can move out of the way, but she doesn't respond and instead begins to throw up into her mask and onto the floor. She continues to throw up, and I realize there's nothing I can do except wait for her to finish and respond to me. Of course, I make sure she isn't seizing and is breathing before deciding to wait it out with her.

I escort the other woman in the bathroom at the time out the door, making sure she doesn't trip over legs. I then prep to clean up the mess and our guest before going back in and checking on her. She finally responds to me and immediately apologizes for throwing up, insisting that she'll clean it all up herself. I assure her to not worry about it and let her know that she can take all the time she needs to sit up so we can work on getting her back out into the parking lot.

I leave the bathroom to gather more cleaning supplies while she gathers herself the best she can, and I see that another guest wants to use the women's bathroom. I tell her it's currently closed, briefly informing her of the current situation, but she emphasizes her desperate need to use the bathroom and claims she'll take full liability if anything happens to her upon entering. I let her in while I continue preparing for the clean up.

I enter the bathroom again, and to my surprise, I see the second guest on the floor with the first, and she's speaking to her in such a kind voice, reassuring her that nobody is mad that she threw up and that it's not her fault. She begins to wipe her face, I ask if she wants gloves to help, to which she denies, after referring to the first guest as her sister. I tell them that I will get a new change of clothes for her to change into and that I've left a mop bucket outside the door.

Soon after, I come back with a change of clothes and laundry detergent, and the second guest begins washing the first's clothes while she changes in the bathroom stall. As she washes her dirty clothes, the second woman repeatedly offers her thanks and appreciation to me in helping her dear friend instead of just making her deal with it on her own. She compares me to a saint for working at Andre House and helping those experiencing homelessness through difficult times, but all I can think about is how moved she has made me because of how much compassion she was showing towards her friend in cleaning her and the mess up. If anyone was a saint in this situation, it wasn't me. It was her. Once the bathroom and our friend were clean, they both exit the bathroom after thanking me once more.

I keep thinking back to this incident because it was so heartwarming to see the love that the second guest had for the first. I didn't know either of these guests' names before this day, but the both of them showed me such a beautiful act of compassion. I was concerned about our guest when I first saw her lying there, but the truth is, I wasn't looking forward to cleaning up when she began throwing up. It was after the second guest walked in that I realized I still had a selfish reaction to the situation. Although it can be easy to show compassion sometimes, I'd like to use this day as a lesson for myself on how I can act more compassionate in more challenging situations.







## *PRACTICING COMPASSION*

*GRACE GARDNER*

*ANDRÉ HOUSE CORE STAFF*

Compassion is a big word. No, not in the sense that it could stump someone on the SAT. In the sense that it carries a lot of weight and has the ability to change people's lives because there is an action associated with it. Not only does it mean that we can relate to someone else's pain, but it means that we are moved to action, in hopes of alleviating that pain. It means looking at the big picture and breaking a few rules when we need to. It means trusting our gut, especially when we know it's going to be challenging. It means putting love above everything else and trusting that God can take care of the rest.

Just the other day, God provided me with the experience that would not only shape the premise of this letter, but would ultimately shape my entire view of compassion. It was a Tuesday, which is my day in the kitchen when I, along with my amazing volunteers, make hundreds of plates of spaghetti for our guests. It was the middle of the afternoon and one of my volunteers told me there was a guest knocking on the St. Francis room door. So I started walking over, preparing to tell this guest that we serve dinner at 5:30 and that sometimes we have extra snacks over at porter, when I opened the door and was greeted by a totally different situation. This woman told me that she needed a new set of clothes because she smelled terrible and people were making fun of her for it. I believed her. I knew she needed another set of clothes. I knew that in that moment, I had the choice to open my heart, practice compassion and break the rules, or close my heart and turn her away.

So together we went back to the clothing closet. Being in her own clothes was so awful, that when we entered she immediately took them all off before starting to look around. We talked for a little bit while I contemplated how many more rules needed to be pushed to the side in this situation and prayed that the Holy Spirit would take care of this woman and help me to love her. Eventually I offered her an emergency shower that I realized was more important than trying to tell her that showers ended 30 minutes ago. Just a change of clothes was not going to solve this. So I took her to the showers and while she was showering, I quickly checked on everyone in the kitchen. Everything was running smoothly. There were people washing and chopping lettuce for the salad and my cooks had already started mixing the spaghetti. God was taking care of the kitchen for me.

By the time I got back to the showers, she was wrapping up. She got out and started getting dressed, but none of the clothes she had picked out fit, so I ran down to the basement to get a few things. After about 40 minutes, she was finally dressed in clean clothes and smelled of fresh soap. I had learned what her name was, a little about where she was from and that it seemed like it had been a long time since someone told her she looked nice and that they liked her outfit. As we were walking back out, she asked for some water. When I came back, I handed her the water and she gave me a big hug and told me she loved me. Then she walked out the door and I walked back into the kitchen.

Emotionally, it drained me. It broke my heart to see someone had to go through that and then that I could make such a big difference with just a shower and a change of clothes was challenging. I was angry, hopeful, tired, sad and grateful all at the same time. Though, even in the midst of all of those emotions, there was a sense of peace because I knew that God was present the whole time. He was guiding me, helping me open my heart to love, to trust that he would take care of everything else, and that it was him who would fill me back up so that I could keep on serving and being present the rest of the day.

Compassion is a big word. It often takes a decent amount of effort to be emotionally available to others and then to do something, anything, that can help. It also doesn't always have to be that way. When trying to figure out what I should write about for my small portion of this newsletter, I really wanted it to be applicable to the person reading it. Just reading a story about compassion can be nice and uplifting, but so often I find myself wanting real life advice on how to practice it in my life better than I am. Practicing compassion, to me, just means opening your heart to love, and most of the time, that can be through the smallest things. Things like doing your roommate or partners dishes, giving a stranger a smile or compliment when it looks like they are upset, or being present to a friend after a rough day. There are countless ways everyday that we can open our hearts. With Jesus's help, we can find them, listen and act, trusting that he will lead us and take care of the rest. P.S. Don't be afraid to break some rules. I mean come on, Jesus did it all the time, the gospels are full of it! So can we.



## WHY I LIKE MY JOB

ZACHARY BOLLER    ANDRÉ HOUSE CORE STAFF

110 degrees was an average day for August, but my New York baby skin was not feeling excited about another day in the heat. I was about halfway through my porter shift and the line of guests were comparably irritated about waiting for supplies in the hot sun.

As I was grabbing some ice, I heard a yell that a lady across the street needed some medical attention, so I quickly delivered the ice and grabbed my phone.

I was prepared. This was far from the first time that I had dealt with a situation like this already in the first month of my job. Dehydration, excessive amounts of drugs, and whatever virus happens to be going around at the moment, causes many dangerous situations among the guests.

I walked across the street and was met by a large brown dog who was whining and standing beside his owner, Tara. Tara was not well. My quick analysis told me that she was suffering from heat exhaustion, but I was not hasty to make a judgement. I crouched down and said a few words, but she could barely respond between bouts of shaking and retching. The water she was sipping wouldn't even stay down. Although I am usually reluctant to call for support, I knew that she was in immediate need of medical attention and something had to be done.

I opened my recent calls and saw that 911 had been dialed three times in the last week. When they arrived, I pulled her dog away and kept him by my side on a tight leash. He was almost frantic with excitement and his concern for Tara was evident.

Believe it or not, in many cases when the paramedics are called, the recipient ends up not leaving for the hospital, either because they don't wish to in the end, or if it is decided that hydration and a little first aid will resolve the issue. In this case, however, after Tara's high blood pressure, nausea, and severe lack of mental cognition was acknowledged, the medics quickly called for an ambulance. As she was transported on to a stretcher, the last view I saw was the big dog jumping into the ambulance and Tara refusing to leave without him.

Four days later I had forgotten about the incident. It was nothing too out of the ordinary, and I had not heard anything so I assumed it was all taken care of.

I was sitting on a chair monitoring the numbers of guests entering and returning from the restrooms and watching the clock for when I could start the dinner shift. Suddenly a lady began calling to get my attention, and walked around the fence to where she could see me better. She didn't know my name yet, but she said "You're the young man who helped me a few days ago and called the ambulance." "I just wanted to say thank you because you saved my life."

I was stunned. I had not recognized Tara at all- she looked like a new person- she had color in her cheeks, a smile on her face, and was wearing a beautiful, clean dress. She then proceeded to describe her stay in the hospital, and the various surgeries and procedures to get her health restored.

I had helped people like her before, but never had they come back to find me and offer a personal thank you. I jumped up from my chair, almost crying, and we hugged each other for a few valuable seconds. I felt an instant connection with her, and experienced an indescribable feeling of gratification.

I'm turning thoughts around in my head. This has got to be the best reason ever for putting my own ambitions on hold, moving to an unfamiliar place, and working a job that a lot of people would probably reject. A situation like this is everything to me, and the amount of fulfillment I feel is insuperable. The words from the gospel of Matthew, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me," hold true for nearly every aspect of the work at Andre House. Compassion, care, and empathy that we try to shower on our guests is really the work of the Lord.

*(continued)*







*(Zach continued)*

At the age of 19, I am the youngest person ever to be a core staff member at Andre House. Although I don't perceive this as a label or a demeaning title, I have this in the back of my mind and know that what I am doing now is shaping my future. As I am adjusting to life in a new workplace, a new city, and with new people, the same values of compassion and care are manifested through myself and the people around me. Without holding each other true to them, we could not offer it to our guests.

As I continue this ongoing process, I treasure my experience with Tara. Even though such personal encounters are often hard to obtain, it motivates me and provides incentive to work hard and support the work at Andre House.

## A CALLING

MATTHEW BREWSTER    ANDRÉ HOUSE CORE STAFF



When one thinks about the call to help others, what comes to mind? For me, what immediately comes to mind would be jobs that allow you to help people. Which actually covers most jobs. Being a teacher, being an officer of the law, being a firefighter, being a priest, being in the military. Anything that calls you to act in service.

Being on core staff requires precious few prerequisites. We are all intelligent, happy, and we get along great. But past that? We weren't asked for an extensive background. I believe our previous employers were reached out to, but they didn't ask for us to have background at a hospital or anything like that.

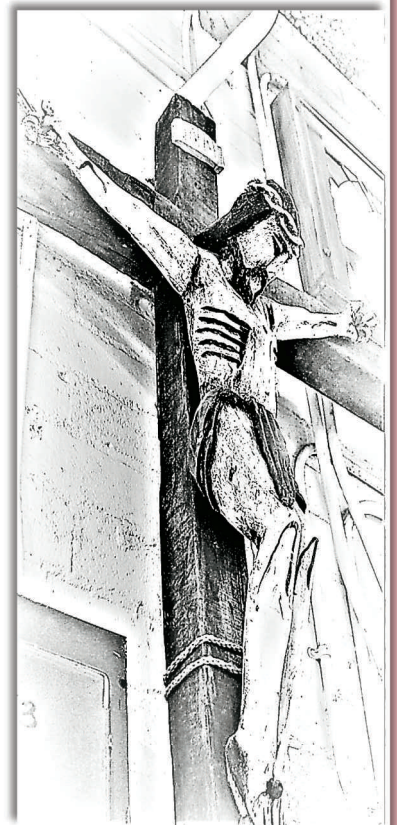
On our first day here though, I experienced less than ideal interactions. I felt personally attacked. I was angry. And I wasn't sure what to do. That was when I truly understood what they were looking for in our application process and our interviews. Compassion.

### **Compassion.**

*The ability to have "sympathetic consciousness of other's distress together with a desire to alleviate it" (Merriam -Webster). To try to understand why someone is calling you mean names, to ignore that anger, and to help people in moments of distress.*

The call to help others is something that the initial document of Vatican II, Dei Verbum, directly calls us to do. This document outlines the places in the bible where Jesus asks us to do more. To give more. To ask of ourselves to do God's will not with the intent of gaining access to heaven, but to put ourselves in God's shoes and fulfill his work here on Earth.

We can sit back and ignore the plight of the poor, but almost the entire bible tells us that we must do something. Do our best to alleviate any pains that people have. I believe that is why I am here, and that is how I plan to spend my year.







André House  
of Arizona

André House  
PO BOX 2014  
Phoenix, AZ 85001  
Phone: 602-255-0580  
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[www.andrehouse.volunteerhub.com](http://www.andrehouse.volunteerhub.com)

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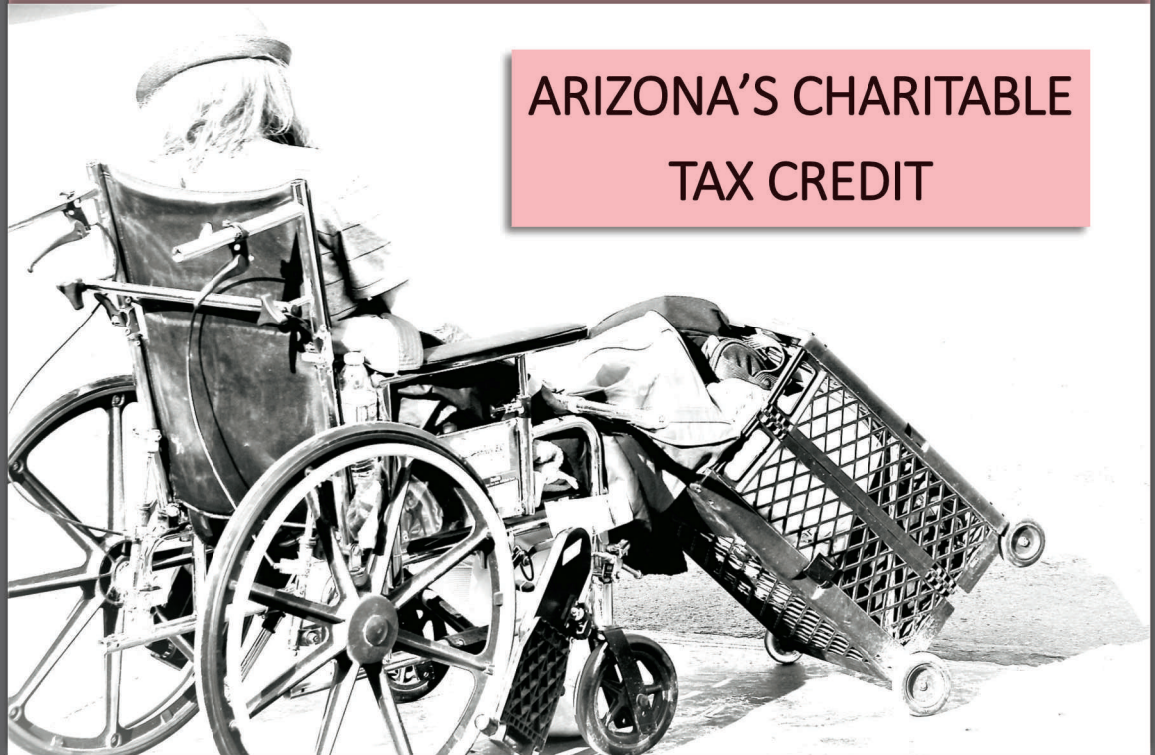
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**Andre House PO Box 2014 Phoenix, AZ 85001**