# My experience, Version one:

I was drawn to the embrace of the Ministries of Dégagé,

A sanctuary for many, seeking solace, in unity's display.

In the heart of Grand Rapids, they shine, a guiding light,

Offering more than just help, making burdens light.

I ventured within, an open heart, my guide,

To volunteer, to stand by their side.

Within the kitchen's warmth, hope and nourishment blend,

Every serving a gesture, where kindness extends.

A mosaic of life, in every face I met,

Moments shared, impossible to forget.

Not defined by age or race, their diversity clear,

In Dégagé's embrace, common ground was near.

Guided by a friend, through corridors of care,

Dégagé's offerings, a breath of fresh air.

Echoes fill the space where nightly rest unfolds,

Silent during daylight, with stories yet untold.

As I pondered the myriad of paths to a doorless night,

Addiction, loss, turmoil, in both shadow and light.

Not one plight I found, unique to those outside,

Reflecting on our shared struggles, my eyes opened wide.

The revelation was clear, as clear could be,

The face of homelessness, resembles you and me.

Misconceptions shattered, stereotypes broken,

In each interaction, unspoken words spoken.

Beneath the surface, our similarities shine,

In helping others, we ourselves refine.

Dégagé's lesson, a truth so profound,

In giving, our shared humanity is found.

With purpose and passion, their mission clear,

Transforming lives, year after year.

Aiming to ensure homelessness is rare,

A testament to the power of collective care.

We're all woven from the same human thread,

Needing shelter, a meal, a place to lay our head.

Focusing on the bridges, not the divides,

We find strength in unity, setting differences aside.

# My experience, Version two:

In the embrace of Dégagé's Ministries, my day began,

A haven for the homeless, offered with a helping hand.

Although open-mindedness was my guide from the start,

Media's images haunted me, of souls disheveled, their hope torn apart.

Media and Hollywood’s portrayals, vivid and stark,

Had painted shadows, deep and dark.

Yet I stepped forward, curious and keen,

To see beyond the screen, to witness the unseen.

The city's streets, not a canvas of dismay,

But paths like any other, in the light of day.

No tents in rows, nor filth-strewn ground,

Just people in need, where hope is found.

Guided first to where slumber's peace is kept,

Expectations whispered as through corridors I stepped.

Not cots in cramped array, but bunk beds, crafted with care,

Stairs, not ladders, dignity in the air.

A hall not of despair, but care’s gentle embrace,

Cleanliness and order, a surprising grace.

For women seeking refuge, these halls offer a haven,

A harbor of comfort, where safety is engraven

A place of transition, not a triage of war,

A beginning, not an end, with open doors.

My eyes opened to the reality, a narrative to amend,

In Dégagé’s warmth, preconceptions bend.

Through halls extended, past doors ajar,

Facilities for all, both near and far.

Lockers, showers, a quiet room's embrace,

A computer's glow, in a thoughtful space.

My view shifted, from dismay to hope,

Seeing not an end, but ways to cope.

Not as lost causes, but transitions in care,

Revealed in statistics, a truth laid bare.

Half find their path in weeks but two,

Forty percent in a year, their skies anew.

Only a tenth in shadows might stay,

Most need but a moment to find their way.

In this revelation, my heart found peace,

Seeing not 'other,' but kinship's release.

Transition touches us all, it's clear,

Walls or no walls, we're all here, near.

Staff and volunteers, a light within,

Burning bright against life's din.

Hope in their eyes, not defeat's resign,

In service, a step toward a line so fine.

Then came my turn, to serve and share,

In a kitchen clean, with care to spare.

Not a scene of despair, but community's heart,

From salad to dessert, a culinary art.

The people, like any other, came in stride,

Gratitude abundant, in the divide,

No age, no race, just faces anew,

In clothes of many, a life's view.

Perceived differences, began to fade,

As lunch was served, a connection made.

Far from the dire scenes news images portray,

Just people, in essence, the same in every way.

In movies and media, shadows cast,

But here, in light, true stories amassed.

Homes or no homes, our humanity connects,

In transition, in care, a new path reflects.

Indeed, tent cities and despair reside,

In shadows where the worst of woes collide.

Yet, this is not the face of all in need,

No more than troubled streets, the whole society's creed.

Just as in homes across the land, wide and vast,

The darkest corners cannot define the cast.

Each soul's journey, under the vast sky,

In hope of compassion, on which we rely.

This journey within, a profound shift inside,

From skewed views to understanding, wide.

I, too, transformed, by the truths I saw,

A heart opened wider, in awe of every awe.