

Honoring Black History: How Topeka JUMP aims to make systemic changes

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Posted: Feb 2, 2022 / 09:35 PM CST

Updated: Feb 3, 2022 / 02:52 PM CST

<https://www.ksnt.com/hidden-history/black-history-month/honoring-black-history-how-topeka-jump-aims-to-make-systemic-changes/>

TOPEKA (KSNT) – For the past decade, a Topeka nonprofit has worked with people in the Capital City, identifying injustices they see in the community and trying to make systemic changes.

Since 2012, Topeka Justice Unity & Ministry Project, or JUMP, has worked to be a voice for marginalized groups and to fight for justice. They focus on a number of areas to better the community. One topic specifically is mental health. It's no secret the COVID-19 pandemic impacted many people's mental health.

"I think it's been difficult for all of us and all of us have gone through some things emotionally and mentally," said Pastor Raymond Berry of Gethsemane Worship Center. "So what we have had to do, we've had to make some adjustments in the way we do things."

Pastor Berry said Topeka JUMP is hands on but like most of us, they had to move to Zoom. This allowed them to continue to meet and try to come up with solutions to keep things going and to keep each other safe.

Even through these changes, he said Topeka JUMP has continued to grow and found out that even through the pandemic there's a real hunger for justice and a desire to take action. Topeka JUMP has what they call "house meetings," where people come together to voice their concerns.

"In the process of our listening, our house meetings, it seemed like mental health continued to come up and not just mental health, but mental health crisis, and how there's not enough services to meet those needs," Berry said.

He said because there's not enough needs in the community, many times they end up in jail since there's nowhere else to put them because there's no resources to take care of their mental health. And unfortunately, many times it's people of color who end up in those situations.

Topeka JUMP estimates about 8,500 Topekans are struggling with addiction. They said a major barrier to overcoming addiction is social support, reliable employment and stable housing. That's why they work to expand Oxford Houses in Shawnee County, which is a low-cost home helping addicts prevent relapse.

In October 2021, a proposal was approved, allowing 14 new Oxford Houses with 100 new beds to be built over the next two years.

“We’re taking this seriously and our voices are not going to be stopped,” Berry said. “We’re letting them know we’re not a fly by night organization, but we’re here to stay.”

That proposal shows just how important it is to have meetings like their Nehemiah Action meetings. Topeka JUMP encourages the public to voice their concerns.

“If they could just meet us there, that sends a message to those public officials, this is something we need to be working on, something that needs to be resolved,” Berry said.

The next meeting will be at 7 p.m. Monday, May 9 at Lee Arena on Washburn University’s campus. These meetings allow congregations, the public and public officials to look at problems and solutions when it comes to mental health.

Topeka JUMP encourages those who are struggling right now to reach out to them.

“You’re not in it alone. There are different people that are trying to work on this issue,” Berry said. “There are people that are trying to come up with solutions to help you as you walk through your crisis. We don’t want to see individuals because of the lack of resources end up in jail and not receive the treatment that they need.”

Topeka JUMP said they’re always accepting donations. If you’d like to donate, or just want more information about the organization, [click here to go to their website](#) or [here to their Facebook page](#).