

Independence T.O.G.E.T.H.E.R. program receives two awards and national spotlight

INDEPENDENCE, MO, UNITED STATES, October 3, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The City of

Independence received two awards last week for its Independence T.O.G.E.T.H.E.R. initiative and is presenting on the national stage this week. In both cases, this highlights the innovative approach the City is taking to solve two issues: assisting residents who are experiencing homelessness, and community beautification.



CSL is thrilled to be recognized, along with our partners at the City of Independence, for the Independence T.O.G.E.T.H.E.R. program."

*Doug Cowan, president/CEO
Community Services League*

Independence T.O.G.E.T.H.E.R. (Together Opportunities Grow Everyone To Help Empower Resiliency) is a partnership between the city of Independence and Community Services League (CSL). Through the program, participants obtain employment as a crew member reducing roadside litter along main streets in Independence and receive coaching to help move toward permanent housing.

The two awards come from the Missouri Municipal League, one being the Innovation Award for a Metro City with a population greater than 30,000, and the other being the Member Choice Award. "CSL is thrilled to be recognized, along with our partners at the City of Independence, for the Independence T.O.G.E.T.H.E.R. program. Receiving an Innovation Award from the Missouri Municipal League tells us that our work is on the cutting-edge, and validates that we are engaging in work that has the potential for long-term success in our community," said Doug Cowan, the president/CEO of Community Services League.

He continued, "being separately awarded the Member Choice Award is a humbling acknowledgement from our peer cities across the State of Missouri. We hope that other communities find inspiration in our work, and venture to find creative ways to find employment and housing opportunities for those experiencing homelessness."

"Receiving these awards for our innovation is wonderful and appreciated," said City Manager Zach Walker after the MML award ceremony. "The efforts that go into making Independence T.O.G.E.T.H.E.R. is both difficult and rewarding, and I hope others can follow our framework. This program has changed lives in our city, and I am eager to see it used elsewhere."

To that end, Walker and Cowan presented the success of Independence T.O.G.E.T.H.E.R. at the 2024 International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Annual Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on Sunday, Sept. 21. As noted in the session description, "this session will share the details of this highly successful program and some of the numerous success stories. Session attendees will be given specific details that can be easily implemented and scaled to their community."

Individuals in the Independence T.O.G.E.T.H.E.R. program are paid daily at a rate of \$12/hour for their work cleaning up roadside litter along main city streets. An additional \$3/hour is put in a housing savings fund. After every 100 hours, employees can request the \$300 be paid toward housing expenses. On top of monetary benefits, employees are also provided with proper work attire and supplies.

Launched in March 2023, this program has seen numerous "graduates" move into stable housing. In the first 10 months, the program had 73 total applicants (which had to be paused due to the long wait list). Of the 25 applicants that have been hired, 15 have been moved into permanent housing. In July, the program reached a different milestone: 500,000 pounds of litter picked up around Independence.

The program is funded through a \$100,000 grant from the city of Independence's allocation of federal American Rescue Plan dollars.

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City of Independence officials and CSL staff accept award from Missouri Municipal League.

