

Hope For The Homeless

Changing Lives Lends A Helping Hand

BY LIBBY WELLS



BOCA RATON real estate magnate James Batmasian may be worth a fortune, but it's his philanthropic work that shows his true value. Since moving to South Florida in the 1980s, he has helped support dozens of charitable, cultural and educational organizations.

One of his latest initiatives is Changing Lives, a nonprofit he started in 2019 to help the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. Changing Lives has evolved into a resource center for people who need housing, food, clothes, mental health and wellness referrals, employment, job training and more.

"You come here to get the resources within the community, from cheap to free, to help you get your life back together," says Batmasian, a New Jersey native and Harvard Law and Business School graduate who started building his real estate empire while he was in college.

Batmasian, 74, is battling not just homelessness, but also the conditions that cause it, such as a lack of affordable housing, unemployment, substance abuse and mental illness.

Changing Lives sponsors sober home stays. Recovering addicts get help reinstating their driver's licenses, buying cars and getting jobs so that they can pay their own way.

"On Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas we offer to reunite them with their families," says Batmasian. "They're clean and sober, not the same person who was kicked out of the family. In fact, some never come back to Florida. They stay with their families."

The COVID-19 pandemic adds urgency to Changing Lives' mission. Many indoor spaces that previously were available for meals and other services have shuttered.

"It has definitely made it more challenging, but I think God is with our mission," says Batmasian, who says he's grateful for the local businesses, professionals and others who volunteer their services to Changing Lives.

"I would like other people to join these causes and share my vision."

Batmasian says that currently, he and his wife, Marta, fund 70 to 80 percent of Changing Lives. "That's not a good thing," he says. "Because if something happens to us, it's over."

"I would like other people to join these causes and share my vision," he adds. "I think God wants us to use all the talents He gave us for His glory, to be our hands and feet on this Earth."

For more information, call 561-961-4635 or visit changinglives.me.