"Be respectful." When you come up to someone resting or sleeping in the alley or behind a building, treat them as if you are walking into their living room, because for that person it literally is their home." Enrique Cardiel is our neighbor, friend, and public health coordinator. Enrique has been mobilizing and training ECM staff and other community members on how to safely pick up the needles on our streets. We have learned from him and others the core issues and problems with our city and national systems regarding drug use and addiction.

Syringe pick-up isn’t glamorous: the search for the needles among all the other trash blown next to fences and buildings; the myriad of smells signaling people living outside. This has become a part of our ministry’s work this past year. Our community, like so many others, has been changing. Opioid drug use has increased and the visible signs of addiction and struggle have become very common. Each morning, Laura picks up the needles outside the front of our clinic from people who have used the night before, and we often arrive to someone sleeping on our office porch. Every few weeks we walk through the streets of our neighborhood to pick up needles together as staff or with another group that Enrique has recruited. Last Sunday with a couple of local church groups, we picked up over 1,300 needles in three hours in the immediate streets surrounding ECM office, where we had picked up three weeks earlier.

And yet, needle pickup does not address addiction; it is simply meeting a basic environmental public health concern. What else can we do? What can you do? See people with drug problems as someone’s son or daughter with an illness. See the humanity in each person. See Jesus in each person without judgment. Build relationships. Examine and question our systems of “dealing” with drug addiction, homelessness, and mental illness. Become aware of and change how you and those you know talk about people who use drugs and the assumptions that are often made. Learn about other ways of approaching the opioid crisis: the Portugal Model*—shifting from a criminal approach to a public health approach—is a good place to start. This model implements integrated and readily available treatment that addresses the individual’s physical, psychological, and social needs. Also important are access to quality education, social networks, and jobs for young people.

As we interact daily with our neighbors, we practice kindness and compassion. ECM’s main “house office” has become a place to engage and help, to invite and connect with these neighbors. We often give food, water, a place to rest, a phone call, a safe place for those that come through our doors. We also continue to connect and work with leadership and partners in our city who are working to provide services and help to “the least of these” among us.

Thank you!

Thanks to Ashlee Smalley and the UNM Physician Assistant class for hosting and inviting us to a Masquerade for Medicine fundraiser this spring. This fabulous event raised money for ECM’s One Hope Clinic and a local homeless shelter. We used the money to buy a phlebotomy chair and dental supplies.

Thanks to Sandia Presbyterian Church for inviting us to be a part of the annual Chile Festival. We were able to raise money to buy hygiene kits for people living on the street and dental visit vouchers.

We received a $13,000 grant from the Albuquerque Community Foundation. The grant supports first time dental visits and other dental expenses. Thank you!

The warehouse roof is finished! No more buckets catching rain. THANK you to all who donated money or time, however big or small. We couldn’t have done it without you.

“\textbf{This has changed my family’s life,}” John Mutter said, when asked about his experience in ECM’s food cooperative. The amount of vegetables and fruits we get are not something we would ever have been able to afford before. We would be going through the fast food drive-thru and ordering from the dollar menu, because it was affordable for us. Now my kids are so excited to see what interesting food came in this week. We are in the kitchen together cooking all kinds of foods that we never would have tried before. Then we sit around the kitchen table and eat together. These are all changes that my family has made with the help of the food that we get each week through ECM’s Co-op. I am so thankful, you have no idea how much this has done for us!

ECM staff pick up donated food (mostly perishable fruit and vegetables) from local stores five days a week. Since the co-op started in 2012, ownership and participation have been an intentional part of the program, building dignity and community among everyone who receives food. Picture and summarized conversation used with permission.