

January 11, 2019

To the Forty Under Forty Selection Committee:

I would like to call your attention to Melissa O’Neil, CEO of Central Iowa Shelter Services for your 2019 Forty Under Forty Class.

There are few people that have the business acumen AND the spiritual muscle of Melissa. She brings a strong understanding of numbers, programming and how to “get it done.” However, her greatest characteristic is the spiritual strength she brings to work and this community EVERY day. Melissa witnesses the most broken part of our community… adults who are broken, hopeless and either ready to give up or maybe already did. In her work, she practices the tough love and finds ways to bring her clients back into the world of hope.

With 150 emergency shelter beds and 57 low income apartments, she must balance how to fund operations and still provide a culture of love and support. I was impressed to learn more about their community garden and commercial kitchen. Here, CISS is training chronically homeless clients on job training skills specifically for the food service industry. As this program continues to strengthen, we will see more of the homeless population placed in food service jobs – a first step to ending their homelessness and getting them back on their individual life journey.

Another remarkable task Melissa took on in summer of 2018 was the Summer Meals Program. Over 165,000 meals were provided to food desserts around the metro, providing meals to school-aged children that may have otherwise gone hungry. She accepted the challenge last summer without much notice or planning time, and is working to develop a much more robust program for 2019.

Melissa is a former collegiate athlete. She brings the endurance she learned in this role to our community. She is pouring her passion into Central Iowa and our way of tapping her future potential is to pull her into the family of Forty Under Forty.

Thank you for your time and effort in reviewing all the applicants for 2019. I am confident Melissa will stand out in the crowd, not because of the flashiness of her application, but because of the work she does for Des Moines and all of Iowa.

Sincerely,

Tina Mowry Hadden

Forty Under Forty, Class of 2002

Net due within 15 days