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## Story of Boys & Girls Club CEO going undercover as homeless getting national attention

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Tim Metcalfe, left, owner of Metcalfe's Market, Will Green, center, director of the Mentoring Positives Program, and Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, shared their stories of going undercover as homeless with the media at Grace Episcopal Church Tuesday.

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## Pat Schneider



Pat Schneider

Pat Schneider joined The Capital Times in 1989 and has written on a wide variety of topics including neighborhoods, minority communities and the nonprofit sector.



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The story of Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, enlisting two friends to go undercover with him into the world of Madison's homeless population is going national.

**Yahoo Shine** posted an article Wednesday about Johnson's expedition — with Tim Metcalfe, owner of Metcalfe's Market, and Will Green, director of the Salvation Army of Dane County Community Center — onto the streets and into a shelter last week.

Their aim, Johnson told Shine, was to learn what homeless people experience, provide aid to an exceptionally needy case and raise awareness.

"As a nonprofit leader I thought it was important that I understood the issue, so I can know how to tackle it," Johnson said.

The men brought back **powerful stories** of life-changing encounters. They spoke briefly at a news conference Tuesday of efforts underway, through The Road Home in Madison, to find permanent housing for a mother they met who was living in a vehicle with her four children.

And their undertaking is raising awareness through an **ongoing debate on social media** over whether masquerading as homeless people to learn about is an appropriate thing to do. Johnson told Shine he doesn't regret the subterfuge.

"At the end of the day, we'll be helping people," he said.



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"And it's been getting the word out, so it was worth it."

Some homeless advocates agree. Michael Stoops, of the Washington, D.C.-based National Coalition for the Homeless told Shine he applauds the three Madison men for hanging out with homeless to learn about them.

"If it's done right, it's not an exploitative thing," he said.

Stoops runs the coalition's **Homeless Challenge Project**, in which formerly homeless guides accompany participants as they experience D.C. streets in the guise of homeless people. The educational intent of the program goes beyond "homeless tourism," Stoops told Shine. Several schools and organizations around the country, including the University of Notre Dame Center for Social Concerns and Seattle Pacific University, organize undercover-homeless social experiments for educational purposes, Shine reports.

But a venture that offers \$2,000 tours of homeless life on the streets of Seattle as the **Sub-Urban Experience** is **drawing heat**. "**Tacky as hell**" is how one poster put it on Facebook.

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**Tags** Pat Schneider, Homelessness, National Coalition For The Homeless, Michael Johnson, Will Green, Michael Stoops, Tim Metcalfe, Boys And Girls Club Of Dane County, Yahoo

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