



By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

Former Imperial resident Mike Smith, now of Lincoln, has seen an outreach program he began two years ago spread across the country and beyond.

“Skate For Change” was featured on Nebraska Public Television Sunday night.

Two years ago, Smith, who is a skateboarder, began skating through Lincoln, offering bottles of water and socks to homeless people he encountered.

Skaters from his The Bay indoor skate park in Lincoln wanted to help. “I’d post a photo and people would say ‘Wow. That’s incredible. Can we come?’ and we’re like, yeah, of course, but you have to bring stuff.”

Since that time skateboarders have been handing out water bottles, socks, food and hygiene kits to the homeless.

It’s expanded beyond Lincoln to Omaha; Seattle, Wash.; Toronto, Canada; Chicago, Ill.; Detroit, Mich.; Kansas City, Mo., and Albuquerque, N.M.

Skate For Change has a life of its own now, Smith said.

“My vision is that this is bigger than myself, and something that I’ve inspired in leaders all over the world,” he said.

Smith wants to melt into the background at this point. “I don’t have to be involved” for the idea to be successful. “It happens on its own because kids are inspired to go be awesome.”

Smith, who works with low income and runaway teens at The Bay, noted that one of his skaters came up with the idea to share Thanksgiving two years ago with homeless people under a bridge in Lincoln.

Over 20 youths took grills and tables to the bridge to give about 60 people living there a Thanksgiving meal.

Even if a town, such as Imperial, doesn’t have homeless people living in it, the skaters can become involved in Skate For Change, Smith said. Youths can raise money for the program, which is under The Bay’s umbrella. That money will be used to purchase socks, bus passes and more for homeless everywhere.

“It’s cool to see it (Skate For Change) grow,” Smith enthused.

For more information concerning the program, see skateforchange.org.