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## Here's an app that will make a difference in our community

By HEBER TAYLOR Feb 14, 2017

The Jesse Tree is about to launch an app. A test version should be available by March 1 at [jessetree.net](http://jessetree.net).

The announcement, which was made Friday at the Galveston Islamic Society, is big news. When people fall through the cracks of our society, they tend to fall hard.

Ted Hanley, executive director of the Jesse Tree, tells the story of Curtis, an 8-year-old boy he found sleeping on the sidewalk in Galveston with his father and little brother many years ago. It was during a blue Norther, and the boys were cold and hungry.

The little boys got a lot of attention. It was around Christmas, and for a while two little homeless boys had an electric train set.

But the underlying problem of the family's misfortune was the father's addictions. The toys ended up in pawnshops to support those addictions.

It was the '80s, long before cellphones, so Hanley taught Curtis how to make a collect call. It was the technology of the day. Curtis had Hanley's phone number on a piece of paper in his shoe — a simple technology that came in handy when the boys' father finally ended up in police custody in New York.

People fall through the cracks in many ways today. Someone loses a job, health insurance lapses, and a problem with untreated diabetes makes it impossible to find work or pay rent. There is rarely one problem — almost always, the problems come in networks.

Through the years, the Jesse Tree, a faith-based organization, has done a good job in countering the network of problems with a network of solutions. People come to the Jesse Tree to get food at one of the Friday Food Fairs. While they're there, people can sign up for classes on managing diabetes and other chronic diseases. They can fill out forms needed to get medical care. They can get help finding cheaper prescriptions. They can get the tools to manage their own problems, regain control of their own lives.

Sometimes, people just need help. And, with the app, the information to help a person who has fallen through the cracks could be on your cellphone. You could, in other words, become a trained volunteer. You could help address a problem, rather than just talk about it.

That's why members of Gulf Coast Interfaith, an organization that represents Galveston County's many religious communities, were at the mosque on Broadway, learning about the app.

The session was filmed by Penny Appeal USA, an organization based in Virginia that is helping to support the app's development.

Oussama Mezoui, founder and CEO, said Penny Appeal USA saw great potential in being able to reach people who are struggling to let them know about opportunities for services, care and help through in-app updates.

The app could be a powerful tool in the hands of good-hearted people, regardless of whether they attend a church, synagogue, temple or mosque.

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Heber Taylor, a retired newspaper editor, lives in Galveston.

