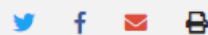


Advocates: Helping western Nevada County's homeless people takes a village

Environment | September 15, 2019

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Special to The Union



KNOW & GO

WHAT: 22nd annual Yuba River Cleanup

WHEN: Saturday, Sept. 21

WHERE: Various sites in the Yuba River and Bear River watersheds

INFO: www.yubariver.org or 530-265-5961, ext. 201

Editor's note: This is the second in a three-part series produced by nonprofits Hospitality House and South Yuba River Citizens League to discuss issues surrounding homelessness in western Nevada County and its watersheds, as the 22nd annual Yuba River Cleanup approaches on Sept. 21. See part one with this story at TheUnion.com.

"I question the word 'homeless'. I was standing in the middle of someone's home, as bad (to me) as it was. I'm thinking there should be another word instead of 'homeless.'" — 2018 Yuba River Cleanup volunteer.

Homelessness in California impacts everyone. During the annual Yuba River Cleanup, volunteers see firsthand the realities of homelessness in our region at sites near Deer Creek and Wolf Creek. [Last week, with the help of the Hospitality House, we explored the homeless issue here](#) in our watershed looking at the big picture — who they are and where they come from. Today, we look at the steps the Nevada County community is taking to help our homeless citizens and how we, as individuals, can be more informed residents.

WHAT IS BEING DONE

" ... the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness conducted a study that found homeless people cost taxpayers an average of \$40,000 per person per year; considering there are 410 confirmed homeless individuals in Nevada County, this equates to roughly \$16.4 million dollars annually.

How is our community addressing the homeless problem in Nevada County?

Like all problems, there is no one solution. Rather, the solutions to our communities homelessness issue are more of a patchwork of community actions that overlap one another, creating a quilt that covers our entire community. This patchwork of solutions is bound tightly through community partnerships with multiple organizations working together to support the overall goal: Alleviate homelessness in Nevada County.

Organizations like the Friendship Club help homeless youth; Sierra Roots provides a warming shelter every winter and weekly lunches to those in need at Pioneer Park; and Hospitality House operates the only year-round emergency homeless shelter in all of Nevada County. Earlier this year, Hospitality House even opened the Outreach Dorm to help individuals who may be struggling with substance abuse or related ailments receive shelter.

Lack of affordable housing in general is a hurdle in our area. Hospitality House has been working closely with County of Nevada, City of Grass Valley and Regional Housing Authority to introduce subsidized housing to the community. The County has already purchased land for a project and if grant funding is awarded, housing construction could begin by 2021. Additionally, County of Nevada, Hospitality House and affiliated nonprofits are exploring ways to introduce a day services center to the area. This would give homeless individuals a welcoming place to go during the day where they will have a chance to have purpose and receive services.

HOW TO HELP MITIGATE RISKS

Our community is concerned about the homeless increasing fire risk, drug use, and violence. How do we help reduce these risks in our community, get folks off the streets, and out of the woods?

To help people transition from the camps and streets into housing, the County of Nevada in partnership with Hospitality House, Turning Point Community Programs and AMI Housing, developed the Homeless Outreach and Medical Engagement (HOME) team. The HOME team, a professional team of social workers, visits folks on the streets and in camps every day with a goal to move them from the forest and into the shelter. Individuals are also offered a variety of services including treatment, mental health, and physical health.

Fire is a concern for all of us, which is why community cleanups are so important. Helping to cleanup camps along waterways and in forests reduce risks for health, fire, and contamination of waterways. SYRCL is hosting the Yuba River Cleanup on Sept. 21 to help cleanup camps on Wolf Creek and Deer Creek. Like SYRCL, Hospitality House also hosts cleanups of encampments in May and October to mitigate fire risk, protect ecosystems, and beautify our rivers, beaches and trails. Their next scheduled camp cleanup is Saturday, Oct. 12, and involves volunteers from the community and homeless camp communities lending a hand.

We are often fearful when encountering someone experiencing homelessness or aren't sure if we should approach or offer a helping hand. Hospitality House welcomes calls to its outreach team for support. The HOME team can be reached directly at 530-470-2686 and will visit homeless residents who may need assistance.

IF YOU HELP, WILL MORE COME?

Are these benefits for the homeless encouraging more homeless?

Some people may wonder if providing more services for homeless individuals is increasing the number of homeless people moving to Nevada County. The answer is no. As we touched upon in the first article in this series, the majority of homeless people in our area are locals and/or have direct family ties.

Earlier this year, [The Union published “If you build it, will they come?” by David Langness](#), a 25-year advocate in helping homeless people, which debunked the notion of people migrating for services. However, doing nothing is not a viable option. Back in 2002, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness conducted a study that found homeless people cost taxpayers an average of \$40,000 per person per year; considering there are 410 confirmed homeless individuals in Nevada County, this equates to roughly \$16.4 million dollars annually.

The same study showed that costs to taxpayers is halved if you place people in supportive housing, inclusive of the costs of the support and the housing. So while some may feel helping those in need is enabling them to stay homeless, and dislike the idea that the County is actively looking to build 40 units of supportive housing to help those in need, this work intends to actually increase the rate of return on permanent, supportive housing – which decreases taxes in the process.

Every citizen can take action to improve our river, our watershed, our planet, and our community. Take action today by joining the Yuba River Cleanup on Saturday, Sept. 21. Sites are filling fast but we need hundreds of more volunteers to keep our watershed safe and beautiful. Find out more in the next Yuba River Cleanup: Homeless Citizens Series installment on Friday, when we will be looking at guidelines for cleaning up around homeless camps and ways you can help the homeless during and after the Yuba River Cleanup.

Ashley Quadros is development director at Hospitality House. Daniel Belshe is community engagement manager at SYRCL.