

Helping Hands for the Homeless/Needy in Nevada County

SUMMARY

The Nevada County Grand Jury (Jury) conducted a survey of currently available assistance programs for the people in Nevada County who are temporarily homeless. This report is intended to be an informational report to the citizens of Nevada County.

The investigation focused on food, shelter and the adequacy of resources relative to the need. The Jury found there are a number of services provided by non-profit organizations as well as some local businesses. The number of people needing assistance has increased significantly in recent months.

Reason for Investigation

The homeless problem is growing and is complicated by socio-economic conditions. The recent economic downturn has increased the numbers of people needing immediate services. This report is intended to provide information to the general public and to those who have recently become homeless and are unaware of services available. These needs are being addressed by groups of dedicated organizations and individuals. The resulting demands are threatening to exceed the resources available to those in need. There is a waiting period to enter the county's social service system to receive aid. Non-profit agencies provide prompt and ongoing support. The Jury is authorized to investigate any non-profit organization, which receives money from local government.

Background

There are several different groups that make up the homeless population: those that prefer the homeless lifestyle, the drug and alcohol addicted, mentally challenged, disabled, and those that are victims of our economic downturn. Various agencies work to feed and shelter individuals and families who require assistance. The Nevada County Health & Human Services Agency supports these activities.

Procedure

The Jury interviewed members of the following agencies: Nevada County Health & Human Services, Emergency Assistance Coalition, Hospitality House, Food Bank, Salvation Army, Nevada County Housing Development Corporation, Grass Valley Police Department and the Family Resource Center of Truckee. Members of the Jury observed and participated in a survey of homeless people in Nevada County.

Findings

1. Available records show a sharp increase in the number of people applying for short-term assistance with food and shelter. Every agency interviewed indicated that its resources are stretched to the limit.
2. There is no indication that the increase in demand is due to new arrivals from outside the county.
3. A census of the homeless population in Nevada County was conducted on January 23, 2009. Homeless people were interviewed at meal-dispensing stations, shelters, camps, and in transit. This survey used standardized methodology developed by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The results of the survey are yet to be released.
4. It is estimated there are 50 to 60 homeless children in Nevada County.
5. Some examples of the expanding need:
 - a. The Food Bank provided food to 770 families in January 2009 compared to 392 in the same month in 2008.
 - b. The demand for services from the Emergency Assistance Coalition, which provides food, shelter, and/or gasoline, has more than doubled.
6. Nevada County funding for the support community increased 40% over the past year.
7. Some coordination exists among the non-profit organizations for the homeless. The Nevada County Health & Human Services Agency is planning a workshop in the Fall to better coordinate these efforts.
8. The Food Bank gives food to anyone without exception.
 - a. The Food Bank utilizes 78 volunteers and employs three staff members.
 - b. The Food Bank's annual budget is approximately \$233,000. The greater portion of this money comes from private donations.
 - c. The Food Bank receives food monthly from a Sacramento farmer's group. A truckload of food is also provided by the Mountain People's Warehouse in Auburn twice a month.
 - d. The Food Bank delivers food to Hospitality House once a week.
 - e. Approximately one third of the Food Bank food is provided directly to families.

- f. The main distribution point for families to pick up their grocery supplies is located in an industrial area. The parking lot has heavy truck traffic, presenting a safety hazard for families with young children.
9. The Interfaith Food Ministry is a collective of religious groups, civic organizations, volunteers and donors, distributing groceries at their Whiting Street location.
10. Three churches serve food prepared by volunteers:
 - a. St. Patrick's Church
 - b. United Methodist Church
 - c. St. Canice Church
11. Details on time and location are available at the Hospitality House Welcome Center.
12. The Salvation Army provides shelter at the Booth Center for nine families for up to 180 days. They currently have a waiting list.
13. The Emergency Assistance Coalition provides vouchers for shelter, gasoline and/or food. Their goal is to provide short-term assistance.
14. The Family Resource Center of Truckee provides gift cards for food and sponsors a weekly hot meal night.
15. The Town of Truckee does not have a shelter for its homeless population.
16. Hospitality House receives guests at the Welcome Center where they are screened for security assurance, health conditions, sobriety, and police record check. The following services are provided year-round at the Welcome Center:
 - a. Lunch five days a week
 - b. Showers and laundry facilities
 - c. Information referral
17. In addition to the above, from October 15 thru April 30, Hospitality House coordinates the services provided by participating churches. The following is provided to approximately 30 people:
 - a. Transportation to and from the host church.
 - b. Overnight shelter at various western Nevada County churches.

c. Dinner at the host church

18. There is no limit to the number of nights of shelter for each guest from October 15th to April 30th.
19. Volunteers of the hosting church monitor and provide overnight security.
20. Pets are not allowed at these shelters.
21. The Nevada County Department of Social Services publishes a directory of organizations one can go to for support. The pamphlet is called Nevada County Community Resource Directory and is available at local libraries and online at www.Dial211.com.
22. During the months when shelter is not available, many homeless shelter in communal camps in high fire hazard areas.

Conclusions

1. Nevada County, local businesses and the non-profit community are doing a commendable job providing food and/or shelter to the temporarily homeless community considering the resources available to them.
2. Non-profit resources are stretched to the limit. These organizations are in need of continued and increased community support.
3. Communal camps could be a fire hazard.
4. Coordination across the different support agencies needs to be improved.

Recommendations

The Jury encourages county residents to support the needy through their organization of choice with money, food and/or time, so that services supporting the homeless and needy can be provided year-round.

Responses

None required