

Coordinating Homeless Services in Nevada County

Summary

Nevada County (County) Government is charged with the duty of meeting the needs of the citizens. The Nevada County Grand Jury (Jury) is charged to maintain the role of watchdog of County service delivery systems to ensure these needs are met. One of these needs, the plight of people who are homeless, has emerged as a growing concern to the citizens of the County.

Many agencies and individuals throughout the County provide support and services to persons who are homeless. These supports and services take many forms, both through funded programs and from volunteer groups. Although the number of homeless persons is difficult to accurately count, those who perform the counts estimate the numbers to vary between 300 and 600 people from year to year. A bi-annual Point-in-Time count attempts to verify this number but the rural and wooded nature of much of the County creates difficulties. Individuals who are homeless tend to be mobile and their location changes throughout the year depending upon the seasonal weather patterns.

The Jury interviewed individuals knowledgeable about homelessness in the County from both public and private organizations (non-profits). They found that many service providers affirmed the need for a single point of contact coordinator to facilitate collaboration among the agencies that provide services to people who are homeless and to help avoid duplication of services. In addition to housing, other wraparound needs include medical care, food, clothing, employment, job training, and education on the financial, social, and psychological requirements to maintain a household.

A Continuum of Care organization currently attempts to marshal these services, agencies, and individuals, through regular consultative meetings and communications. While it provides a venue for service providers to collaborate and exchange information, more extensive coordination is needed. Coordination is especially needed when service programs seek out and apply for grant funding from State and Federal projects that address homelessness.

While conducting this investigation, the Jury learned that the County is moving to recruit and hire a Housing Resource Manager. This position will provide a single point of contact to support the ongoing efforts to provide the multiple services required by people who are homeless. This report, in part, supports the need and justification for such a coordinator by asking the service providers what they need to augment their efforts to alleviate homelessness in the County.

Glossary

Behavioral Health County	Nevada County Behavioral Health and Human Services Nevada County
Jury	Nevada County Grand Jury
HMIS	Homeless Management Information System
non-profits	Non-profit private organizations

Background

The Jury had an interest in learning more about the homeless situation in our County. It was aware that a large number of organizations, both public and non-profits, are committed to mitigating the multiple issues that place people in the difficult circumstance of being homeless. Representatives of these organizations meet monthly as participants in the Continuum of Care¹ committee established by the Homeless Resource Council of the Sierras representing Placer and Nevada Counties, to discuss common issues, share resources and collaborate in ad hoc committees to develop proposals for grant opportunities. Many Federal and State grants require collaboration and endorsements from multiple service providers serving large numbers of people in order to qualify for funding. These requirements were one of the reasons that the Continuum of Care committee was established.

A review of information available on City, County, and Federal websites indicates the recognition of the immediate need for housing and related services for the homeless.

The Nevada City Homeless Directory lists opportunities for shelter in the city.

MyNevadaCounty.com contains a section on Housing and Shelter Needs that includes a listing of Hospitality House and the Salvation Army Grass Valley Corps as primary resources and includes phone numbers for the Red Cross, the Tahoe Safe Alliance, and the Nevada County Eligibility Services.

Nevada County Housing Services provides a current list of housing services that include the Booth Family Center, Quality Housing Development Corporation in Auburn, and assorted Placer County services along with the aforementioned Hospitality House and Salvation Army Grass Valley Corps. This listing describes the availability of day shelters, emergency homeless shelters, halfway housing, permanent affordable housing, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, supportive housing, shared housing, rooming/boarding houses, and transitional housing.

Even more information is found at Nevada County Shelter Listings adding the FREED Center for Independent Living and the Booth Family Center as housing resources and a link to Financial Help for the Needy.

¹ An underlined organization name represents a link to that organization's website. When reading the report online, click on the organization name to open the website. See the Appendix for a complete list of the organizations and their website addresses.

Nevada County Veterans Services lists services including claims assistance, online veterans' benefits, college fee waivers, and other benefits available to veterans. Additional veterans' services are listed including the availability of HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Vouchers for veterans.

Nevada County 211 consists of multiple pages on homeless matters. It is a free 24/7 information hub that connects people with community programs and services through a local call center and searchable web page. It is operated by Connecting Point, a community-based organization with funding from a variety of sources, including grants and Nevada County resources. Most recently it has developed a pocket sized resource guide focused on county resources for the homeless.

The Federal Government publishes useful information to those interested in the homeless issue through the Department of Housing and Urban Development for California. Clicking on the Find Homeless Resources link brings the County visitor to a page indicating the website and phone number of the coordinator of the Placer and Nevada county's Continuum of Care.

A variety of non-profits in the County have been working on the various aspects of homelessness and many of them have websites and work in the area of fundraising to provide the funds necessary to deal with the issue in the County. These websites include: Hospitality House; Salvation Army Grass Valley Corps (Booth Family Center); Sierra Roots; Divine Sparks/Streicher House; and Spirit Peer Empowerment Center.

In a presentation to the Nevada City Council in October, 2016 the Director of Nevada County Health and Human Services shared the data on who was homeless according to official counts and also estimated the *real* numbers as there are homeless people who do not want to be counted. Counts are taken every two years under HUD regulations and are referred to as "point-in-time" counts.

The number of homeless persons recorded in the County was:

- 345 in 2009,
- 190 in 2011,
- 314 in 2013, and
- 279 in 2015.

Of the 279 in 2015:

- 39% were chronically homeless,
- 9% were under 25 years old,
- 8% were veterans,
- 51% had mental health conditions or disorders,
- 28% had substance abuse problems,
- 11% had developmental disabilities, and
- 19% had physical disabilities.

The Director went on to estimate the actual number of homeless at that time to be between 250 and 600.

Approach

The Jury interviewed a variety of persons from agencies and programs with missions related to the various aspects of the homeless issue. These included:

- Continuum of Care,
- Divine Sparks/Streicher House,
- Grass Valley City Council,
- Homeless Resource Council of the Sierras,
- Hospitality House,
- Nevada County Behavioral Health & Human Services,
- Nevada County Board of Supervisors,
- Nevada County Health and Human Services,
- Nevada County Sheriff's Office,
- Nevada County Social Services,
- Nevada County Veterans Services,
- Salvation Army Grass Valley Corps, and
- Sierra Roots.

The Jury also attended a Continuum of Care meeting, reviewed websites, and also reviewed previous Grand Jury reports on homelessness concerns. Specifically, the Grand Jury Report of 2014-2015 addressed safety concerns with regard to fire in outdoor camps of people who are homeless.

Discussion

Like many people in the various communities in the County the Jury looked at homelessness as a single issue and was interested in identifying a solution to it. What the Jury discovered through its investigation is that homelessness is not a simple problem with a simple solution. To compare a middle aged man who has been chronically homeless for two decades to a homeless family with children is impossible since the causes, symptoms, and needs are completely different.

During the investigation the Jury identified a number of issues pertinent to the conversation regarding homelessness and some solutions. Ordinances designed to keep the homeless off our streets are not effective in making people who are homeless less visible, and more importantly they have no positive effect on them. There is a need to design and implement a multifaceted approach to effectively meet the needs of a diverse homeless population. Finally, there is also a need for better coordination of the efforts exerted by the various County departments, the non-profits in the County, and Federal programs if we want to make a difference in people's lives and make our communities safer. This coordination not only includes services but also funding. While these stakeholders have collaborated through the Continuum of Care, it is felt that more coordination can dramatically increase the effectiveness of service delivery.

The Jury interviewed a representative from the Health and Human Services Department of the County about the Nevada County Mental Health Urgent Care Center's Crisis Stabilization Unit, commonly known as CSU, which opened in January 2016. It has helped alleviate hospital stays, law enforcement involvement, and emergency room visits because it services patients with mental illness. There is a significant number of homeless people in the County who have mental health disabilities. This interview revealed the issues regarding poor communication and coordination of homeless services between County departments and non-profits that work with homeless people. It also emphasized the paucity of affordable housing in the County exacerbating the problem of homelessness. This early interview led the Jury to explore the creation of a County position to facilitate coordinated services to people who are homeless, and to coordinate efforts to provide more affordable housing.

A member of the Grass Valley City Council added to an understanding of the complexity of developing housing and meeting the different needs of homeless persons. People may find themselves homeless due to varying causes ranging from mental illness, alcohol and drug dependency, criminal records, economic problems, or by choice. The majority of homeless persons in the County is made up of people who were raised in the County and not of those coming from other areas.

While housing, both temporary and permanent, may be available to some, such as families with children, some people are barred from available housing by a variety of issues. People with companion animals or those with medications have difficulty securing housing due to rules for admission to housing facilities. Similarly, people with criminal records have difficulty obtaining housing as do those who have alcohol or drug dependency.

Affordable housing is currently in high demand in the County and there is an acute shortage of rental housing within the County overall. While organizations such as Sierra Roots and the City of Grass Valley have plans on paper for seeking funding and incentives from local governments for development, the barriers to such development are many. This led to the suggestion shared by most of the witnesses to develop county-wide plans with a housing coordinator. For example, state funded programs exist such as the No Place Like Home grants (a state funded program through California Department of Housing and Community Development). These grants guarantee funding of at least \$500,000 to rural counties including ours. These monies along with those secured through HUD, County and private funds could conceivably provide substantial funding for alleviating the affordable housing deficit in the County.

Witnesses suggested that the coordinator should be a permanent county position as those funded by grants are vulnerable to specific requirements of the grants and to the uncertainties associated with time limits. It was felt that a Housing Resource Manager position would free up personnel in Behavioral Health, Social Services, and Public Health to more efficiently fulfill their missions in the County.

A designated County position should provide the leadership and coordination to:

- identify and develop funding sources,
- provide skilled grant writing,

- work to overcome the culture of homelessness,
- serve youth under eighteen,
- help in the development of day shelters,
- provide post jail placement,
- coordinate placement of homeless persons after medical treatment,
- provide veteran services referrals,
- find housing for persons on medications,
- find appropriate housing for individuals with companion or service animals,
- find housing for ex-offenders and sex offenders,
- provide emergency placement services, and
- seek out funding for alcohol and drug addiction rehabilitation services for individuals who have no insurance to cover these expenses.

As the majority of identified homeless individuals live within city limits there is a need for coordination among the various agencies and organizations within our communities. It is felt that the County is in the best position to provide leadership in efforts to address the economic, social, and environmental problems associated with the homeless issue. A new committee has been formed, the Public Agency Collaboration Committee, that includes representatives from the various county and city agencies in order to work together between different jurisdictions seamlessly.

While there exists a conduit to discussion between all the agencies dealing with providing services to the homeless through the Continuum of Care, the level of cooperation is limited with the process being one of sharing information rather than coordination of efforts and services. Coordination is essential to ensure that both permanent and temporary shelter is provided but emphasis must also be put on developing wraparound services to meet the individuals' needs. History has shown that just placing a person in housing does not ensure that the fundamental problems of being homeless are completely resolved.

A multi-disciplinary coordinated approach would provide the most promise for successful results in meeting the multiple needs of homeless persons.

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Findings

- F1.** There are many different reasons for people to be homeless including mental illness, substance abuse, unemployment, under-employment, physical disabilities and sometimes, choice.

- F2.** There is a need for coordination of County departmental efforts with those of non-profit organizations within the County to provide assistance to people who are homeless.
- F3.** There is a need for more affordable housing in the County.
- F4.** There is a need for wraparound services that meet the needs of people who are homeless.

Recommendations

- R1.** The County should complete the selection of a Housing Resource Manager to coordinate efforts to provide housing and services for homeless people in the County. (F1, F2, F3, and F4)
- R2.** The Housing Resource Manager should be given the task of working with all stakeholders in finding ways to allow for the creation of more affordable housing in the County. (F3)
- R3.** The Housing Resource Manager should be given the task of working with all stakeholders to provide a seamless delivery of services to homeless people. (F2 and F4)

Request for Responses

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Nevada County Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

From the following:

None required

Appendix A

Nevada County Agencies and Departments Working on Homeless Issues

American Red Cross Gold Country Region

<http://www.redcross.org/local/california/gold-country>

Booth Family Center

http://grassvalley.salvationarmy.org/grass_valley/booth-family-center/

California Department of Housing and Community Development

<http://www.hcd.ca.gov/>

City of Grass Valley

<http://www.cityofgrassvalley.com/home>

Connecting Point

<http://connectingpoint.org/>

Continuum of Care

<https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/states/california/homeless/continuumcare/nca/lcoc>

Department of Housing and Urban Development for California

<https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/states/california>

Divine Sparks/Streicher House

<https://www.divinespark.us/>

Financial Help for the Needy

http://www.financialhelpresources.com/details/nevada_county_social_services.html

FREED Center for Independent Living

<http://www.freed.org/>

Grand Jury Report of 2014-2015, Illegal Campfires

<http://nccourt.net/documents/gjreports/1415-CIG-IllegalCampfires.pdf>

Grass Valley City Council

<http://www.nevadacityca.gov/pview.aspx?id=20690&catid=0>

Homeless Resource Council of the Sierras

<http://www.hrcscoc.org/>

Hospitality House

<https://hhshelter.org/>

Hospitality House Rapid Rehousing Program

<https://hhshelter.org/programs-services/homeless-prevention-rapid-rehousing/>

HUD for California Find Homeless Resources

<https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/states/california/homeless>

HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Vouchers

https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/vash

MyNevadaCounty.com

<http://www.mynevadacounty.com/Pages/home.aspx>

Nevada City Homeless Directory

<http://www.homelessshelterdirectory.org/cgi-bin/id/city.cgi?city=nevada+city&state=CA>

Nevada City Housing Services

http://www.shelterlistings.org/city/nevada_city-ca.html

Nevada County Behavioral Health & Human Services

<https://www.mynevadacounty.com/nc/hhsa/bh/Pages/Home.aspx>

Nevada County Board of Supervisors

<https://www.mynevadacounty.com/nc/bos/Pages/Home.aspx>

Nevada County Eligibility Services

<http://www.mynevadacounty.com/nc/hhsa/dss/Pages/Home.aspx>

Nevada County Health and Human Services

<https://www.mynevadacounty.com/nc/hhsa/Pages/Home.aspx>

Nevada County Homeless Immediate Needs

<https://www.mynevadacounty.com/nc/hhsa/dss/pa/Pages/Immediate-Needs.aspx>

Nevada County Mental Health Urgent Care Center

<https://www.mynevadacounty.com/nc/hhsa/bh/Pages/Crisis-Services.aspx>

Nevada County Public Health

<http://www.mynevadacounty.com/nc/hhsa/ph/Pages/Home.aspx>

Nevada County Shelter Listings

<http://shelterlistings.org/county/ca-nevada-county.html>

Nevada County Sheriff's Office

<https://www.mynevadacounty.com/nc/sheriff/Pages/Home.aspx>

Nevada County Social Services

<http://www.mynevadacounty.com/nc/hhsa/dss/Pages/Home.aspx>

Nevada County 211

<http://211nevadacounty.org>

Nevada County Veterans Services

<https://www.mynevadacounty.com/nc/hhsa/dss/vets/Pages/Home.aspx>

No Place Like Home Program

<http://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-funding/active-funding/nplh.shtml>

Quality Housing Development Corporation Auburn

<http://www.shelterlistings.org/details/23357/>

Salvation Army Grass Valley Corps

<http://grassvalley.salvationarmy.org/>

Sierra Roots

<http://www.sierraroots.org/>

Spirit Peer Empowerment Center

<http://www.spiritpeerempowermentcenter.org/>

Tahoe Safe Alliance

<https://tahoesafealliance.org/>