
Guest Column: 5 things that effective homeless services are and are not

February 5, 2024

Del Norte Mission Possible has withdrawn from the purchase of the property at 1070 Highway 101 North as a location for a homeless shelter. Complications with the owner's existing obligations and community feedback made the property unsuitable, even though it is currently zoned to allow a homeless shelter to be located there. DNMP has spent the last two years attempting to secure a location for shelter facilities on its own. More than 38 different properties were considered. Three serious negotiations were started that ultimately fell through. DNMP is now working more closely with the County of Del Norte to find a workable site within the time frames allowed by our grant requirements. The shelter and other services to resolve homelessness are still going to happen. As this work moves forward, it is important to talk about what effective services for the homeless are and what they are not.

1. They are not warehouses or holding places for unhoused persons.

They are staffed and managed places to live for participants who are prescreened at an offsite location before admission and are assigned individual case managers to develop plans that empower them to take control of their lives.

2. They are not drop-in or hang-out spaces.

They are gated facilities that limit access to those who are registered to be there. No one, including participants, will be allowed to loiter outside of the facility.

3. They are not a free ride.

Shelter participants will be working daily on the goals of their individual case plan. Yes, they will have access to showers, restrooms, laundry facilities and safe storage for personal belongings and basic meals. But this does not suggest hand-outs alone. These things are necessary for mental and physical stability. Once these are met, a person has the stability to take advantage of the hand-up approach to meet their goals.

4. They are not competing for other county monies.

Homeless service facilities will be built with private, state and federal grants which have already been awarded to Del Norte County for very specific priorities. These grants must be used for the specific purposes for which they are designated. The funding will be spent somewhere on services to resolve homelessness. In

fact, homeless services can save local tax money by reducing “hidden” expenses that the community is already paying. Doing nothing costs more taxpayer dollars than creating an organized plan and program.

5. They are not a magnet for unhoused persons to come here.

Our county’s 2023 Point-In-Time Survey showed that more than 70% of the homeless surveyed had lived in Del Norte County for more than ten years. Common reasons given for homelessness were a sudden loss of income, family breakup, and domestic violence. These are our neighbors who have fallen on hard times. Priority is given to locals who will be properly screened and admitted. In fact, we have learned that many unhoused persons here are single women, veterans, foster children who have aged out, those recently discharged from the hospital, physically and developmentally disabled persons, and even students in elementary and upper grades.