

Our New Year's Resolution – Ending Homelessness in Our Community - 1/10

It's that time of year when we look at what we want to improve in our lives, so we resolve to lose weight, stop smoking, or exercise more. Maybe it would be a good time as a community, to decide to engage and really help our neighbors experiencing homelessness in our community. Not just work on the issue, but solve it.

Homelessness is Complicated: Anyone that has engaged in addressing the homelessness challenge understands that it is complicated. It's more than just housing, but without housing, the problem only gets worse. It is more than drug and alcohol addiction, but without adequate staffing and program resources, the addictions go unchecked. It is more than moving people experiencing homelessness out of sight because they just find another location, which often results in homeless camps that are besieged with crime and unsanitary conditions. With that, our region's parks and trails become less safe and, in some areas, unusable. There is no simple solution. If there were, San Francisco and many other cities, would not be overwhelmed by the adverse impacts of growing homelessness. Are we going to wait until we get to that point, or can we do something now - as a community, to help those in need?

The Community Is Ready to Act: Over the past year local governments have come together to work on this issue. They established the Community Homeless Advisory Board (CHAB) and meet regularly to look at the challenges while working together to develop solutions. The CHAB commissioned a study by OrgCode Consulting and have already implemented some of the recommendations of the report. The former Northern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services (NNAMHS) campus was acquired from the state to house and rehabilitate homeless women and children and is being renovated. However, there is no funding to renovate or relocate the Record Street men's shelter. The Crossroads Program, which has over a 90% success rate, provides housing for those battling addiction and transitioning out of homelessness. The program has expanded for the women, but still has a waiting list for the men. There are also public/private ventures like the Village on Sage Street and the Eddy House expansion for our homeless youth. Still, we lack a real coordinated and funded plan, not just to help those experiencing homelessness, but to reduce or even eliminate homelessness in our community.

Zero Homelessness is possible: A collaborative methodology was first pioneered in the healthcare sector to combat the spread of deadly infections. The only program that has proven to reduce or eliminate homelessness is a similar collaborative methodology. According to the New York Times, "nine communities in the United States have reached a rigorous standard known as "functional zero" for chronic homelessness — a standard that indicates homelessness is rare." This is one goal our community should consider as our New Year's Resolution.

So How Do We Do This? While complicated, the solution is not impossible. There are a few things we can do to get us on the Zero Homeless List. First, demonstrate a commitment by the entire community, community leaders, care providers, businesses, citizens, and the Veteran's Administration, to work together to achieve a "functional zero homeless" outcome. Second, establish a system that monitors the homeless by name, in real-time with tailored solutions. Third, continue efforts to increase affordable and transitional housing. Finally, provide the funding needed for the facilities and wrap-around services that will guide those in need through the system to a better quality of life. If we continue to do more of the same, we will get the same unsatisfactory results. Most of us know that it is time to do more to help those experiencing homelessness. Let's make 2020 the year we decided to work together to achieve zero functional homeless in our community.