

Feb 2, 2021

Homeless Strategies Workgroup:

I believe there is a dire need in our community for services around drug rehabilitation and mental health. For the past 2 years, I have been a volunteer advocate for the homeless; first with HomesNow and now with Road2Home. I had clients camped around the vicinity of City Hall when the Camp 210 protest started. I was concerned that there could be unintended consequences to my clients. I encouraged them to stay where they were, but they all eventually moved to 210. Two of them moved from Basecamp, 2 from the area near the creek and another from near the fish hatchery. I continued to go to the camp 2-3 times per week to check on them, as well as a few other folks I had made connections with. I would reach out to any and all residents that I could, and if there was a conversation to be had, I would have it. Sometimes that resulted in finding out a particular need, and sometimes not. I did laundry for many, and brought small things from home that were asked for. I eventually helped facilitate testing and paperwork for four of them to move to tiny homes operated by HomesNow.

I feel that after Swift Haven opened, many of the more functional people at 210 were moved into tiny homes, leaving a concentration of highly dysfunctional folks at the camp. I believe that added to the chaos, along with a new trend toward more violent actions by the organizers and/or their supporters.

In January I saw the situation at the camp degrade; less volunteers, less donations, more damaged property due to bad weather and lack of laundry, more drugs, more fighting. I found fewer and fewer people that I could talk to or connect with. Many people were incoherent or clearly altered. Then on Jan 22nd, I was verbally abused and threatened when I tried to check on the health of a man lying face first in the road. I saw no volunteers on site, and no one was helping this person. I managed to ascertain that he was breathing, but that was all that I could do.

One of the people I became very fond of has severe mental disability. I was only able to check to make sure she was warm, dry and had food. Beyond that, there was nothing I could do. I had no ability to even find out where she came from or if she had any relatives nearby, because she was so delusional. I have no idea where she ended up.

We need more services for the mentally ill and drug addicted that I do not see available anywhere. This is not to say we do not need more high barrier shelters, but there is a severe lack of services for the people on the street that need to get off drugs and the others that need mental health care. I feel that since many of the homeless left in the camp, now at Geri Field are in need of these services. I hate to say that the camp should be removed, because that leaves the residents nowhere to go, but the "cooperative" does not have the training or expertise to manage this population. Neither do volunteers like myself. I feel like there are many homeless people that I can help, but this particular population requires specific training that most volunteers do not have. We need to find a way to shelter people that have these huge challenges as well as finding ways to connect them to the trained personnel and services that will help them.

Thanks for your time,

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