

FEWER OPTIONS FOR DISABLED HOMELESS

As a member of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee to finance homelessness and housing programs, I was eager to read your article on homelessness in the Dec. 27 Weekly.

I joined the committee because I see someone with a disability who is desperate for shelter on an almost weekly basis. The last two were elderly women, one in her late 60s and the other in her 80s. They came separately to Lane Independent Living Alliance (LILA) around the holidays. Both women used walkers for mobility. Neither was able to stay at the Mission because of their mobility limitations and other issues related to their disabilities.

Since the Mission is a private religious organization, it is not obligated to offer equal access to people with disabilities. It does a wonderful job of providing shelter to the population it serves. However, people with many kinds of disabilities cannot stay at the Mission and have nowhere else to go.

Other shelters in the county have specific criteria that need to be met before an individual is admitted. Merely being older and/or having a disability or multiple disabilities does not qualify a person for shelter space in this community. Senior and Disabled Services and Adult Protective Services also have pretty stringent limitations on the people they can assist. They were really hit hard by budget cuts a few years ago.

Neither of the women who came to LILA qualify for residential assistance. They would have to get much more disabled first. They both receive Social Security, but it's not enough cover rent, even if they are able to maintain an independent apartment without a caregiver and other support. Since it was close to the end of the month, both women had spent their Social Security checks trying to stay warm and fed. Medication and personal hygiene weren't even a consideration. The very basic necessities that give us a sense of security and self worth were not remotely available for these folks.

LILA is nonresidential, but we do what we can. Part of our mission is to advocate for the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities. The rest is to give people with disabilities the skills and support to survive as independently as possible in the community. Seniors with disabilities left out in the cold and wet aren't likely to survive very well, and I certainly wouldn't call being homeless in December independent living.

In one case we were able to scrounge up enough donations, some from the Mayor's Committee members, to temporarily put one woman in a private recovery house, give her some warm clothes (she came to LILA with slippers on bare feet) and work with her on a more permanent solution. After spending an afternoon at LILA while our staff tried to find her a bed, the other woman decided to spend the weekend moving from McDonalds to IHOP to stay alive in the cold.

I understand all the arguments against having a publicly funded shelter. A shelter is hugely expensive to run, and chances are voters won't agree to fund one. A shelter isn't a permanent solution to the problem of homelessness. However, I believe Eugene and Springfield can find some way make a little room at the inn for people whose only offense is that they are poor, older and disabled.

Lynne McKinney
LILA Independent Living Services Manager
Eugene

8 Locations in Eugene and Springfield



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- Chile Relleño
- Chile Relleño Burrito

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02.21 Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars
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