

# SHELTER from A3

“So we try to provide some opportunity for some dignity for them, as well as reduce the impact on others,” he said.

However, Meyers added that one disappointing aspect has been the way some in the community have treated those camping in the area, such as backing vehicles up to the tents and pumping fumes at the homeless.

Others have pulled up, shining their lights or flashing them on and off at the tents “and just mistreating and harassing these individuals,” said Meyers. “Some of them have had crises occur in their lives and that’s why they’re in the situation. They’ve never been in this kind of situation before.”

The reasons for each person’s predicament can vary, and in this lies the problem of building solutions. While some may struggle with addiction, others may have mental health problems. Each poses its own set of challenges.

Meyers hopes that, instead of bullying or mistreating, people would strive to find ways to help get them back on their feet.

“So that’s what we’re trying to do, in a nutshell,” he said.

Despite the ill treatment by some, city staff have noted that there are others who have been coming by and bringing food at night and checking in on their welfare. Police officers will also make regular rounds.

Some success has already been found on some fronts, too.

In at least one case, one of the people camped at the site was able to get a job and move on. Another is in line to get housing.

Many barriers still remain, however.

Cottage Grove’s low housing vacancies is an ever-present high hurdle for many.

“There are a couple of the individuals that are on the list to get housing, but they can’t because there isn’t anything in the county let alone

need other housing,” Meyers said.

Other resources are available for those struggling to grab a foothold, too.

“Living under a canopy in the back of the parking lot doesn’t quite get there,” he said. “But at least we’re trying to treat them in a way that

such facilities will only act as a magnet for more homeless, effectively turning Cottage Grove into downtown Eugene.

community that are homeless will come out. The ones that are hiding under the bridge, or the ones that are in some place where they are not visible, we will start to see them.”

There are an estimated 40 people who are homeless in the Cottage Grove community.

Meyers said he believed the numbers of unhoused youth is about 200, though programs like McKinney-Vento which work with such youth operate on a broader definition, which may account for the high number.

But even if a transitional housing program were to attract homeless from outside the area, Meyers reasoned that the problem could solve itself if the program allows upward mobility which consistently makes space for new people.

In the end, he said, it falls on the community to solve the problem.

“The federal government has failed, the state government has failed, the county is struggling,” he said. “And that’s why the courts have pushed it to the only level of government that can really do anything — that local government where it takes individuals working with individuals.”



DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

The site at the Community Center is considered a temporary solution by the city to address homelessness.

Cottage Grove,” said Meyers.

While the city’s strategy is to provide a way for people to get back into traditional modes of living like a house or apartment, other deeper problems sometimes must be addressed.

Obtaining identification, for instance, is a common problem for many.

This was the case for an individual at the Community Center site. The lack of ID was preventing him from getting a job.

Determined to assuage his misfortune, a staff member took him to the DMV and obtained an ID with him so he could continue his job search. And because he didn’t have an address, the city allowed the use of the Community Center’s for the identification.

“But it’s a long, difficult process and we desperately

On the Community Center site, individuals have access to a portable bathroom and wash station.

Nonprofit Community Sharing also debuted a mobile shower trailer this year. Since opening in July with just 14 visitors, showers a month at the trailer rose to 39 in October.

“And that’s one of the things we’ve seen, is getting them cleaned up, getting them to the showers, getting them back to where they feel like they’re starting to fit back into society,” said Meyers. “So we’re working those things out to try to make it a little easier for them to take advantage of other services.”

Some problems may require institutional assistance, though, such as with people whose drug addictions have incapacitated their ability to make decisions in their best interest.

“That’s something the state has got to address, and we can’t address,” said Meyers. “But the ones we can address are those people that are just struggling to survive, and as a result of an illness, or an accident, or a job loss, or some crazy crisis that occurred in their life, are now homeless.”

The question of what to do to enact true problem-solving, though, is why Meyers sees the Community Center site as only a temporary solution.

we’re going to help.”

The list of challenges for one individual can run so deep, though, sometimes a great deal of attention is needed to navigate onward and upward.

“You’ve got to assign one person to be with them and walk them through those steps as they try to get that squared away,” Meyers noted.

As one approach, the city is looking at the “Housing First” model, which places shelter as a priority, removing many of the stressors and hurdles that come with homelessness.

“If they’re going to get out into the workforce and they’re going to get things taken care of, they need to solve the ones that are tough first, and the toughest one is housing,” Meyers said. “The ‘Housing First’ model will get them into something that’s stable ... then some of the others start falling into place.”

Lately, the city has been seriously considering the option of setting up transitional housing, though conversations on what that might look like have only just begun among various community channels.

The idea of setting up a site for the unhoused does not sit well with all in the community, however, as even the Community Sharing Warming Shelter has sparked fears

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