
Opinion

Guest view: SJ makes encouraging progress on homelessness

By Kathy Miller and Adam Cheshire / Special to The Record

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The timing for this update of the progress being made to serve the estimated 1,500 homeless children and adults in San Joaquin County coincides with the biennial Point-In-Time-Count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless in the county, as mandated by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The count is scheduled for Jan. 30 and requires many volunteers to capture the data that is so important to our efforts. Much of our state and federal funding to address homelessness is formula-based, so the more individuals we can accurately document, the more funding we will receive to provide services and address community needs. We are pleased to report that we are on track to gather the largest homeless count in San Joaquin County history. We've received volunteer commitments from every county homeless service provider, law enforcement agency, county, city and state elected officials, and dozens of churches and nonprofit organizations.

In addition to this essential data collection effort, there is encouraging homelessness reduction progress to share:

- **Whole Person Care Pilot.** The three-year, \$18.3 million county-sponsored pilot focuses on reducing homelessness, increasing alcohol and drug treatment and decreasing emergency room visits and hospitalizations. Savings to the medical system will be used to create a county housing pool. This program is fully operational, with hundreds of individuals enrolled. The 15 recuperative beds at the Gospel Center Rescue Mission being funded through this program are seeing positive results as individuals choose to enter long-term treatment

programs, reconnect with family or accept housing and services following their stay. Rescue Mission staff estimates that 82 individuals have been redirected from the streets.

- **Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Funding.** A new collaboration between the county and the Housing Authority of San Joaquin is working to provide 37 units that will offer a range of permanent housing and supportive services to individuals and families by 2020. Another \$8.2 million is funding services at a new Recovery Center which opened in October 2018. In partnership with the Community Medical Centers, the Recover Center offers medical and behavioral assessment, sobering and treatment to individuals with mental health and substance use issues, as well as providing law enforcement more positive options than jail or emergency rooms for those unable to care for themselves.
- **Homeless Emergency Aid Program Funding.** The \$7.1 million one-time state funding was awarded to the San Joaquin Continuum of Care to address homelessness and housing. Funded projects include \$3.25 million to DCDC Housing First- a partnership between Stocktonians Taking Action to Neutralize Drugs, Housing Authority of San Joaquin, Stockton Shelter for the Homeless, Central Valley Low Income Housing Corporation and the City of Stockton- to develop self-contained “tiny home” units (studio through three bedrooms) that will be rental accommodations for people identified through the SJCoC’s, “Housing First” principles.
- **Victory Gardens.** In collaboration with the county and the Housing Authority of San Joaquin, this proposed 49-unit affordable housing development exclusively for homeless veterans will be built on four-acres in French Camp. Adjacent to San Joaquin General Hospital, the Veteran’s Stockton Clinic and the proposed VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic, the project proposes using HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program vouchers to provide rental assistance for homeless veterans. In addition to providing deeply affordable income-based rents and wrap-around supportive services to our deserving veterans and their families, Victory Gardens will offer an on-site community center which will have offices for case management and service coordination, along with a technology center, fitness center, multipurpose room for events and classes, an outdoor patio and community gardens.

We encourage any individual or organization interested in volunteering for the upcoming Point-in-Time Count to contact Adam Cheshire at acheshire@sjgov.org or Jon Mendelson at jmendelson@readytoworksjc.org. You will be appropriately trained, partnered with experienced volunteers and greatly appreciated.

Kathy Miller represents District 2 on the county Board of Supervisors and is the board representative on the San Joaquin Continuum of Care.

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