

Homeless have no shelter options in Tahoe



Wesley Shira and his dog Loci are sleeping outside in South Lake Tahoe until he finds a job to afford a roof over his head. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Wesley Shira had a bedroll, some other belongings and his dog to keep him warm last night. The expected low in South Lake Tahoe was 30 degrees.

He called it camping. Others would call it being homeless.

“In this town it’s really hard to come up with any kind of long-term solution for something like that,” El Dorado County sheriff’s Lt. Pete Van Arnum told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Over the years there have been numerous homeless people we have found deceased in the meadows.”

Members of Lake Tahoe Collaborative are looking to create a warming room in South Lake Tahoe that might be open six months

a year at night when the temperatures drop below freezing.

The Collaborative is a group of leaders of mostly nonprofits and government social service departments who meet monthly to bring awareness to the needs of their respective populations and to help find solutions so efforts are not duplicated and resources not wasted.

The Collaborative's subcommittee working on the warming room has gained traction with the Salvation Army, Del Oro Division, which represents this area. Nicole Zaborsky is talking to the folks off the hill this week about the proposal that has been submitted. The Collaborative is working with Barton Foundation on the proposal.

"They will see what they can assist with," Zaborsky, who is on the subcommittee, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The main reason such a facility has not been started sooner on the South Shore is that no entity wants to be the lead agency, plus there is no one to foot the bill. But South Lake Tahoe isn't alone; there is no shelter for the homeless anywhere in the basin.

Red Cross has said it can provide cots and emergency supplies if the Collaborative opens a warming room.

Leanne Wagoner, who is also on the subcommittee, foresees needing a place for about 20 people. She added it could be in the industrial area, and most likely not in a residential area. It will also need to be on a bus route.

The subcommittee is assessing whether a permanent bathroom or port-a-potty would be best. Should men and women be in the same room? What about kids? Pets? Security? People to supervise? Food?

All of those questions and more still need answers.

But for Shira and his dog Loci they wish the warming room were

a reality.

“I don’t have a place to stay. I really could use a place,” the 32-year-old Shira told *Lake Tahoe News* as he stood Tuesday at the driveway entrance to Safeway holding a sign asking for work. “I have my ServSafe card. I can cook and handle food at any restaurant. But a lot of people don’t want to give people like me a chance.”

He has found work here before so he hitched a ride and returned.

It’s not unusual for Tahoe’s homeless to be transient. They think the area, especially being a 24-hour community, is rich with jobs. They don’t know people call Lake Tahoe “poverty with a view”.

Van Arnum said his department used to have money for bus passes to send people to a warmer climate. He said the county also in the past would hand out vouchers for hotel stays, but that resource has dried up.

He regularly talks with the Tahoe Area Coordinating Council for the Disabled and the National Alliance on Mental Illness about what more can be done for the homeless in the area. Working with local churches is one option, but it is not consistent.

“A lot of times people end up in town destitute with kids and it’s heartbreaking,” Van Arnum said. “We don’t have the funding and facilities in Tahoe for that.”