

Truckee-North Lake Tahoe trying to address socio-economic inequities of residents

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – Gated communities with manicured golf courses and spas – home to people who may have multiple addresses. A couple miles away much lower end housing inhabited with people living check-to-check.

While this dichotomy of the haves and barely hanging ons seems to becoming the norm throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin, the stark contrasts were pointed out in a presentation last week at the Truckee Donner Chamber of Commerce meeting.

“Living in Tahoe is the tale of two cities,” Alison Schwedner, director of the Community Collaborative of Tahoe-Truckee told the group gathered at Truckee Tahoe Airport. “It’s important to balance the two. We need to create an environment where families can live and thrive.”

Her group of 45 agencies is trying to address the needs of community members in the North Lake Tahoe-Truckee areas.

“Data shows a lot of families are struggling,” Schwedner said as she went over stats from the just released Community Report Card.



Kings Beach opened an affordable housing complex in 2014. Photo/LTN

She talked of how people line up at the Family Resource Center because it's warm and they may not have heat at home or be able to afford it. Project MANA provides food to half the people who live in Kings Beach. The waiting list for the more than 400 affordable housing units in the region is more than two years. Tahoe Truckee Unified School District provides 1,000 free breakfasts each day; 37 percent of the students receive a free or reduced lunch.

Getting help is a problem for many because of the state line and three counties – Nevada, Placer and El Dorado. Donner Creek Mobile Home Park is in Placer and Nevada counties. That means neighbors could be seeking help from different agencies. And sometimes that help is not right in town, and without a personal vehicle the aid may be out of reach.

Two contributing factors to what is keeping people down are low wages and the high cost of living. With most jobs being tourist oriented, they are minimum wage or about \$11 an hour at most.

In 2011, the ACCRA Cost of Living Index put Truckee at ninth most expensive place to live in the United States.

Schwedner said it costs more to live in Truckee than the California and national averages. This means housing, food and everything combined costs more in Truckee.

“A lot of people technically live in poverty, but they don’t qualify for federal aid,” Schwedner said.

This in turn means people are turning to nonprofits for assistance.

Housing can be an issue. Schwedner showed a picture of affordable housing in Kings Beach that could be described as squalor. Then she showed the facility that opened last year – new, clean and a place people are proud to call home.

Tahoe Forest Hospital did a recent Community Needs Assessment that found while most people are healthy, with heart disease-obesity-tobacco use all being on the low side; there is an abnormally high use of alcohol in the area.

“We tend to be binge drinkers. We drink more than the state and country,” Schwedner said.

A question on the survey asked if people had a drink in the last 30 days. The hospital found that 81.1 percent of the people said yes. This compares to the state average of 55.5 percent and national average of 54.5 percent.

Mental illness is also something nonprofits are seeing as an issue and something the collaborative wants to address.