

Tahoe working to get homeless out of the cold

By Kathryn Reed

Putting a roof over people's heads from Nov. 1-April 30 is the goal of a small coalition of people on the South Shore who are making strides to create a warm room.

Marissa Muscat, who has taken on the role of project manager, is spearheading the efforts to create a nonprofit that would be in charge of the homeless center.

The goal is that it would operate from 7pm-7am, be for men and women, allow pets, and that it would be within walking distance of a bus stop. It would accommodate 20 people in a space no smaller than 700-square-feet.

"The warm room will also work to break the cycle of homelessness by providing clients with connections to community-based services including subsidized housing, food-clothing resources, counseling, financial management, health care, empowerment, and other services as needed," the draft proposal reads.

Mental illness, substance abuse and gambling problems are some of the issues facing local homeless people. Many are also veterans. Warm room committee members want to ensure people know what resources are available to them. They also recognize some people are resistant to change.



Proponents are working to provide homeless people a place to stay on the South Shore during the winter. Photo/LTN file

Advocates are looking for a fiscal sponsor. Live Violence Free's board of directors is contemplating being that entity. This would help the warm room be able to go after grants as it works to establish itself as a standalone nonprofit.

"Fiscal sponsors provide a link to the community and fiscal oversight, and may be able to assist in acquiring liability insurance and filing taxes. The local faith community has been supportive and is participating in this project. The Red Cross has agreed to provide blankets, staff training, and cots for clients," the proposal says.

Statistics show that the homeless situation in El Dorado County is increasing. The 2015 U.S. Housing and Urban Development count identified 247 homeless in El Dorado County, with 38 of them living in the South Lake Tahoe area. According to the warm room committee, local agencies believe the county homeless rate is closer to 600.

At a committee meeting last week some of the nuts and bolts of creating a warm room were vetted – such as discussing what the center should look like (it could be multiple places and not be at the same venue each night), creating intake forms for clients, security, the need to look at city codes, fundraising, getting volunteers, and being ADA compliant.

Besides creating the nonprofit, the committee is actively searching for a site or sites that would accommodate the seasonal warm room. Two toilets and a sink are needed, along with electricity, heat and trash removal. Showers would be optional. Storage for clients' belongings would be ideal.

It's estimated it will cost at least \$20,000 to keep the warm room open for six months. And that is operating with a cadre of volunteers.

For more information about the warm room or to help with the project, contact Marissa Muscat at tahoewarmroom@gmail.com.