

Letter: Warm room helps more than homeless

To the community,

Our community needs the temporary shelter that the warm room provides – not just for those homeless guests who use it, but for everybody else, too. Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge could tell you why.

The warm room is open to keep people from freezing to death in the winter. It is open from mid-December to mid-April when temperatures are dangerously cold. The warm room is basically a big room with about 30 cots, a table with non-perishable food, donated items (clothes, boots, toiletries), and a toilet and sink. One staff member supervises and a crew of volunteers helps operations. Social workers volunteer their time and expertise to counsel guests to find jobs, housing, mental health counseling, medical assistance, or other needs. Local businesses and service groups are invited to donate time and resources to help with anything from haircuts and showers to job placement and blankets.



Annie Davidson

The warm room is not comfortable. Guests sleep in one room together, sharing everything from noises to smells. Food and donations are limited. There is no shower. To stay, each guest must adhere to rules to maintain safety for the group as a whole. Guests cannot leave once they come in for the night,

and they are expelled for breaking rules about drug/alcohol use or violence.

Some folks in South Tahoe are against the idea of a temporary shelter here. Their views focus on the idea that if the people find a shelter, they will stay here when they would otherwise leave. These critics of the warm room argue that the guests bring bad things to our community – and it's the warm room that is keeping them here. Just like Scrooge in the beginning of "A Christmas Carol", they suggest that it's someone else's problem to care for others.

As a volunteer last year, I saw the operations of the warm room firsthand: cleaning cots, vacuuming, stocking and cleaning the food table and donations, talking with guests and staff, listening. Helping out, I learned that I need the warm room as much as the guests do. I learned how much I need to be reminded that homelessness is complicated and those who are homeless are people, just like you or me. I learned that, by helping out, I gain compassion for others and receive kindness back a hundredfold. I learned about being grateful for the blessings in my life and how sharing blessings is at the heart of any strong community. I learned that telling people to go away when they are down and out will never solve our collective problems. For all these reasons, we all need the warm room.

You can help, too. Join the volunteer team or donate toiletries or non-perishable food. For more about the warm room project of the Tahoe Coalition for the Homeless, go **online**.

And may God bless us, everyone.

Annie Davidson, South Lake Tahoe