

HOMELESS IN PARADISE
December 27, 2019 - January 2, 2020

IN OUR OWN BACKYARD - Part 10



WHAT'S THE HOMELESS-SHELTER STATUS AS YET ANOTHER YEAR DAWNS?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

BEING curious is great. If you have questions you feel are important, email them and I'll address them in order, starting with your current curiosity about shelter for area homeless people.

Will One Starfish Survive?

When One Starfish Safe Parking Program failed to appear on this year's list of McGives recipients in the annual fundraising campaign co-sponsored by the Community Foundation for Monterey County and Monterey County Weekly, readers asked:

“Will One Starfish shut down?”

“Will it get funding from sources other than McGives?”

“What happens if funding flops?”

Founded by Tia Sukin Fechter, Ph.D, and co-operated by her husband, Michael Fechter, under their non-profit Orphan Productions, One Starfish Safe Parking Program has several Monterey Peninsula church parking lots that host between one and six homeless women who sleep in their vehicles overnight.

A woman must apply for eligibility in the program; once accepted, continued qualification is ensured through a renewable monthly contract. Among eligibility criteria are strict rules that each client be drug-and-alcohol-free. Parking is allowed only overnight, not as permanent camping, and clients must vacate the lots early in the morning and not return until evening.

Entertaining men is not allowed. Nor is cooking by campfire or gas-powered stoves.

A monitor oversees the parking lots and a part-time social worker helps women with everything from finding work to healthcare and getting housing. It is basically a self-policing program in which, although amenities are spare, One Starfish clients have access to toilet facilities, trash disposal and water for washing and drinking.

According to a worried One Starfish client, contracts were late in December; she signed hers the week before Christmas, so the program is apparently intact through January 2020. She expressed concern that non-authorized vehicles and several men had recently entered the church lot, a woman had a propane stove in her vehicle, which she felt posed a hazard to other guests as well as the church property and the One Starfish Safe Parking Program itself, and someone has been parking fulltime.

I'm awaiting response from Michael Fechter to several questions I submitted by email, so all I currently know is that the only One Starfish Safe Parking program that allows both men and women (or families) to park overnight in Marina will soon relocate to Seaside (it was first funded two years ago by the County of Monterey, which has cut back funding).

Bethel Baptist Church, 390 Elm Ave., Seaside is going to host the approximately 15 vehicles now in the parking lot of retiring District 4 Supervisor Jane Parker, who reports experiencing no problems while the program was in her parking lot.

For the One Starfish story and to make donations visit <http://www.onestarfishsafeparking.org/>

How Is I-HELP Doing?

Facing its 30th year, Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program (I-HELP) seems to be doing just fine, both for men and for women, except a new Program Director is needed by I-HELP for Women because Lee Hulquist is retiring after being with I-HELP for Men at the beginning and returning recently to serve as Program Director for the women last year.

The part-time job is mostly afternoon/evening work that involves helping clients find housing, secure jobs and meet their goals. For details, email ihelpmontereybay@gmail.com.

At sites where I-HELP for Women provides overnight shelter and a meal for homeless women, if One Starfish Safe Parking clients are parked on the premises, they are often invited to dine indoors with the I-HELP women; however, I-HELP clients sleep indoors on mats and One Starfish clients sleep outdoors in their vehicles.

According to the I-HELP December 2019 Newsletter, last year I-HELP added a social worker and an intern for the women. They have been able to move more homeless women into housing.

The November average for I-HELP women was 12 per night. Five are new to I-HELP for Women. Five women are working (including two monitors), two receive Social Security, and 11 receive Social Security Disability (SSI).

On the men's side, about half the I-HELP clients are working.

In November, 31 individual men were sheltered in the houses of worship and other participating venues on the peninsula. Average number who received a meal and shelter per night was 19. Four men left the program, while six new men joined.

One man is legally blind, and the director is working to find him some other form of shelter than sleeping on a mat on the floor.

Thanks to the Rotary Clubs of Pacific Grove, Seaside and Castroville, I-HELP vans now have new spare tires, flashlights, lanterns, a bike rack and new signage, plus the program has new mats and sleeping bags. They also have a new bus driver, Yolanda Delgado, who brings 20 years of driving experience to her new job.

Unlike One Starfish Safe Parking Program, I-HELP (Outreach Unlimited) was on the 2019 McGives list and donations may be given through December 31 at <https://www.ihelpmontereybay.org/>.

Is Olympia Shelter Still Alive?

At this time, the shelter at 1292 Olympia Ave., Seaside remains a Work in Progress with no substantive updates to report.

What's New With Affordable Housing For Seniors?

A senior housing project is in the early talk stages in Seaside while the beautiful new CHISPA affordable housing project for seniors in Marina is set to open within days. It will be highlighted in next week's column!

Do You Qualify For Denti-Cal?

Is your income low enough to make you eligible for Denti-Cal, call 1-800-786-4346 for details on how to enroll. Or, first read this excellent piece about dental care through Medicaid from the Authority Post, "Discover Dental Plans for Seniors: The Best Dental Care at Low Cost" by Caleb Murphy, posted April 18, 2019 at <https://authoritydental.org/dental-plans-for-seniors#act> . If need be, substitute the word "homeless" for "senior" where appropriate.

Happy New Year!

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This column appears in the weekly edition of the Cedar Street Times at www.cedarstreettimes.com.

Photo: Courtesy of Tia Fechter



Tia Sukin Fechter, Ph.D., founder of One Starfish Safe Parking Program that allows homeless women to sleep safely in their cars, was KSBW's 2018 Jefferson Award honoree.

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