

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

January 8-14, 2021

MONTEREY PENINSULA MAKEOVERS – Part 2



Does anybody know where these women slept last night?

The five women without shelter in this composite photo, their identities protected by masks, received cars from Change a Heart Foundation in December 2020. Todd Sondgroth, founder of CHF, announced his Carmel-based 501(c)(3) hopes to give cars to five more homeless women in January 2021.

Is such generosity a good idea?

Photo by Change a Heart Foundation

WHERE ARE THESE WOMEN SLEEPING NOW THAT THEY HAVE CARS?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

FOLLOWING last week's question about where five local homeless women are sleeping in vehicles given them by Change a Heart Foundation in December, I meant to provide the answer(s) this week.

If possible, I'd do that. But the only thing I know for sure is where they weren't.

How do I know?

After last week's column was published, I sent a series of e-mail questionnaires to the mayors of the seven Monterey Peninsula cities, as well as individualized questions to representatives of organizations that help the homeless.

First respondent was Michael Fechter, founder of Orphan Productions, the 501 (c)(3) that operates One Starfish Safe Parking & Supportive Services Program. On Jan. 4, 2021, Michael e-mailed, "To date, none of the women given cars have applied."

Second and third respondents were Mayor Clyde Roberson and City Manager Hans Uslar of Monterey.

Monterey's response to Q&A

1. Are homeless people who live in their vehicles allowed to park overnight on public streets if no shelter is otherwise available in your city?

A1. 20-85 of the Monterey City Code prohibits people from sleeping in their vehicles between the hours of 2200 and 0600 except in areas designated for camping by the City or as otherwise permitted by the City Code.

2. If yes, are there any specific places you can name where they may or should park? If no, what happens if a woman or man is caught sleeping in a car parked illegally?

A2. If someone is found sleeping in a car, the night shift Officer gathers that person's information and that is forwarded to the Monterey Police Department's Community Action Team (CAT).

CAT then works with our community partners and members of the Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team to locate and assist a person with services.

CAT helps connect people to the Veterans Transition Center, Veterans Resource Center, Salvation Army, Gathering For Women, Adult Protective Services, Community Homeless Solutions, Monterey County Department of Social Services, The Housing Resource Center, The Coalition of Homeless Service Providers, the YWCA, and Monterey County Behavioral Health.

3. During Covid-19 Quarantine periods, people are advised to stay 14 days at home; how does this 14-day stay in place order conflict, if it does, with the 72-hour parking limitations on most public streets in which cities' municipal codes prevail? That is if someone parks more than 72 hours in the same spot, and the person is homeless, will the 72-hour rule be waived?

A3. The 72-hour rule applies to abandoned vehicles within the city. Some locations of the city have more restricted parking such as, "No Parking", "No Parking after sunset", or "No Parking between 2 am and 5 am."

A4. The City of Monterey understands the hardships our homeless residents encounter. We strive to work with our community partners to help those residents find safer and more permanent solutions. We encourage those with a vehicle to take advantage of the One Starfish Safe Parking program. Information on the program can be found here -<http://www.onestarfishsafeparking.org>

Update on One Starfish

Unfortunately, taking advantage of the One Starfish Safe Parking program isn't as easy as it might have been before the current Covid-19 pandemic shut people in and turned operations around. According to Michael Fechter's Jan. 4, 2021 e-mail, "One Starfish and the County Parking program are at 100% capacity. However, we help all those that apply in ways that are tailored to their personal situations and desires."

Orphan Productions' full-page ad in the recent Monterey County Gives 2020 edition (montereycountygives.com/orphan) states: "Through professional counseling, 50% of One Starfish Guests get rehoused within the year, 75% see an increase in income and 100% improve their overall health."

At present, some women guests of One Starfish are sheltered along with other homeless persons in facilities operated under the Project Roomkey program in which they stay in local motels. Whether or not the homeless women who received the cars from Change a Heart Foundation are involved with Project Roomkey is yet unknown. My investigation is ongoing.

Should further giveaways of cars be made to homeless women? Todd Sondgroth said he felt it "on his heart" to proceed with giving the gifts for which he solicited funds and actual vehicles in December 2020.

I question the potential harm that might come from giving cars to women who might not be capable of caring for the vehicles even if they can find legal places to sleep in them.

Michael Fechter's January 4 e-mail included: "We only take Guests in One Starfish/County parking that apply and meet the criterion for admission to the program. The eligibility rules are on our website: onestarfishsafeparking.org ."

Michael also said, "I spoke with Todd about his desire to give away cars before he started. My opinion (was) that giving a car to someone that cannot support the expenses of a car was not the best of ideas."

Also, on January 4, I got an e-mail from Todd Sondgroth that kicked off his fundraiser for the sixth and seventh homeless women's cars. It included, "These women have been extremely grateful, and I can't stress this enough, it is a game-changer for these women to have a safe place to sleep, plus reliable transportation."

To give or not to give to women who might not be able to responsibly maintain their vehicles once they become unreliable? If you want to share your opinion, contact Todd Sondgroth at bustodd@yahoo.com, 831-905-0482, or e-mail me at amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com.

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