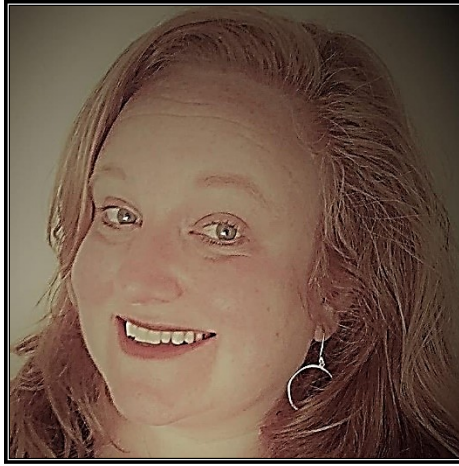


VAGABONDING IN VACATIONLAND

May 29 - June 4, 2020

News and Views on Peninsula Homelessness Matters



THE CIRCLE OF SUCK - Shelter in WHAT Place?

by Vanja Thompson, Guest Columnist

On April 3, the county's revised shelter in place directive was "continuing to exempt homeless individuals from the order but urging government agencies to provide them shelter." I called five separate government funded agencies that day in search of shelter for my peninsula friend Nicole, and only one was able to locate one bed in South County. As I reported, recited, showed her screenshots of things I'd found and then realized weren't options she said, "I told you it's a crazy circle, right!?"

To make matters worse, March's above-average rainfall, storms, and beach advisories continued into April. The homeless weren't just unsheltered. They were soaked. And their usual resources had (ahem) dried up: places they'd routinely go to get dry clothes, replacement camp items, or laundromat vouchers were closed, tapped out, or only operating by phone in the early days of the county's COVID-19 response.

That same day, I thought I'd found a beacon of hope for my unsheltered friend when I read the Governor's press release boldly (and wordily) titled: "At Newly Converted Motel, Governor Newsom Launches Project Roomkey: A First-in-the-Nation Initiative to Secure Hotel & Motel Rooms to Protect Homeless Individuals from COVID-19."

I got online and, on the phone, immediately to do what (I thought) I do best: find information.

With one exception, everyone I talked to – several working from newly jerry-rigged home offices – seemed genuinely sympathetic but hadn't heard of Project Roomkey and redirected me to sister agencies. And when I'd restate where I'd already called, they'd acknowledge that resources had gone from scarce to nil, they weren't certain of the most current information either, and emergency funding news from higher up was confusing and changing moment to moment. It really was a crazy circle. A circle of suck I called it grouchily, every time I hung up another unsuccessful phone call.

"I regret that I do not have better answers to your question about options for unhoused individuals," emailed Wendy Root Askew, County Supervisor Jane Parker's Legislative Aide and esteemed homelessness advocate, lamenting, "the fact is that our resources for homeless neighbors remains wholly inadequate to meet their needs." But she urged me to keep looking and mentioned the county's Whole Person Care pilot program.

NIMBY YIMBY - Project Roomkey Exists!

On May 1, for the first time, I spoke to someone at Community Homeless Solutions who recognized the words, “Project Roomkey” and explained that the program wasn’t one an individual could apply for, but rather a state program set up to fund local programs who, in turn, would reach out to their most vulnerable clients.

A few days later, on May 5, when I delivered food to “David” at a homeless camp (because food banks are drive-through only during shelter-in-place), he pointed to a man sitting on a log next to his packed bags and told me, “Hey, that guy’s going to that thing you talked about, he’s going to Project Roomkey!”

I hopped out of my car and met “Allen” who politely answered my onslaught of questions. He’d been called by his Interim McHome program social worker and was on his way to a nearby hotel. Two days later, Nicole got a phone call from her County Behavioral health social worker. After some hit-and-miss issues, five days later she got a ride to a hotel too.

And indeed, in the past month there’s been a lot of activity, if not a lot of news. And less news isn’t a bad thing, in my opinion. Not In My Back Yarders in LA county protested outside three motels on Saturday carrying signs, some reading “Rosemead is not dumping grounds - No Project Roomkey” and “Shame on [motel name]. Shame on our county!” And here, I’ve seen several posts on Nextdoor by NIMBYers asking each other which motels are housing the homeless through Project Roomkey, or COVID-19 positive people through the Alternative Care Sites programs.

At press time, all current hotel rooms (about 200, but I’m unable to confirm the actual number or how many are allocated to homeless) have been filled. But Root-Askew urges local hotel owners who are interested in contracting with the county to contact her or any of our County Supervisors or the Emergency Services Manager Gerry Malais directly.

Nicole’s been indoors since last Tuesday May 12. She’s been assigned a nurse through Monterey County’s Whole Person Care program, which strives to become a one-stop for chronically homeless Medi-Cal recipients who may have multiple chronic diseases, and mental or substance abuse disorders which often lead them to frequently use the emergency room.

If You or Someone You Know Is in Need

Contact your/their county social services worker either through Cal-Fresh, Behavioral Health, or Medi-Cal – or any program you’re involved with. If you don’t have a contact, call 2-1-1 or the Monterey County Health Department at 831-755-4500.

County-Installed Public Portable Toilets & and Hand Washing Stations (HWS)

Seaside:

Robert’s Lake – two toilets, two HWS
440 Harcourt – five toilets, two HWS
610 Olympia – two toilets, one HWS

Monterey:

Transit Center – two HWS
Del Monte Ave across from Naval Postgraduate School – two HWS
El Estero Park – one HWS

Sand City:

Bay Ave. and Ocean – one toilet, one HWS
Calabrese Park – one HWS
Recreation Trail West of Playa and Metz – one toilet, one HWS

MORE RESOURCES

Monterey County Whole Person Care <https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/health/public-health/whole-person-care>

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County Board of Supervisors, <https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/clerk-of-the-board/board-of-supervisors-meetings>

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