

Announcement:

Warming Center Program is closing its Secret Garden Women's Shelter, and Footbridge Services Center including storage, laundry, showers, device charging, and coffee cart. Warming Center's pop-up emergency shelter and cold/wet weather gear distribution programs will remain open this fall/winter season.

This announcement includes information about the nonprofit, the programs that will be closing, and some background on why we're closing at this time, including opinion about what's happening in City and County homelessness that has some bearing on this decision.

Warming Center Program

For 10 years Santa Cruz has oriented towards an unsuccessful and financially draining Housing First paradigm, while homelessness has mushroomed out of control. As part of this orientation, homeless shelters have closed forcing more people to suffer nights outside in the wintertime. There were many stories of death due to complications related to hypothermia. 9 years ago, Warming Center Program was started by a group of community members to ensure that not a single person would have to face hypothermia. Utilizing 5 local church halls, a shuttle service and more than 100 volunteers, this program has served as many as 200 people in a single night. We instituted cleaning protocols, a women's only zone, and placed our highest priority on those with mobility challenges and in so doing, revolutionized local shelter standards. We offer two laundered blankets, comfy floor pads, and chicken soup served all night long. We've featured a unique EMERGENCY HOTLINE (831) 246-1234 so people can find out information about when and where shelters will be open, as well as leaving a message if one is in distress. Warming Center has flourished without sustaining support from the city or County (who're responsible for human health).

After providing 4 years of Warming Center, we began seeing a vast set of unmet needs in homeless services, so we opened our storage program.

Footbridge Services Center

Footbridge has featured needs-oriented homeless services, including a storage program that has operated for more than 5 years serving more than 1,000 clients; laundry, providing more than 10,000 loads in 4 years; and Sunday showers that have offered 50 showers each Sunday, including dozens of hygiene and clothing items that make life complete. Additionally, we host an organized electrical device charging system and a coffee cart. This suite of efficient and well-run homeless services under one roof, has established that a basic-needs orientation is transformative. In fact, we should never again see storage programs in Santa Cruz County that aren't paired with a laundry service and donation distribution program.

Special note: This program remained open every single day of the pandemic allowing people access to their belongings and keep their clothing clean.

Secret Garden Women's Shelter

In early 2021, we opened a 12 bed women's shelter (including a quarantine space). There is a community room, food storage and preparation areas, and weekly shower and laundry programs. This grew out of a concern that there isn't a women's shelter in Santa Cruz and noticing that many pre-existing homeless shelters place women physically next to men (which is extremely alarming). Secret Garden Women's Shelter is quite unique in the county as it features a dorm/community-style that empowers residents, rather than a 24/7 desk management style that acts to "baby-sit" individuals with little expected of them. Another hallmark that sets Secret Garden apart, is that it's volunteer run – keeping costs down. In fact, Secret Garden is the most cost-effective bed-per-night shelter in the region. The volunteer component offers the value of putting caring community members in direct contact with people. There is a management support structure. Featuring our Achievable Goals casework program, the focus of this shelter is to help support individuals as they find balance in their lives and ready themselves for future possibilities including housing. Many of our residents have moved on to better and stabilized circumstances.

Over the past several months, we've watched as Santa Cruz County deprioritized the most vulnerable and placed them at the bottom of the list of housing opportunities. As they closed the pandemic shelters and motels, those who were told they'd receive housing were instead given a tent. Secret Garden came to the rescue for several of them and we now have half dozen residents who have medical vulnerabilities or mental health challenges that make housing opportunities difficult to achieve.

Government Funding Opportunities and Housing First

In the years we've been in operation, we've reached out for support to police chiefs, fire captains, city managers and their assistants as well as more than a dozen city council persons whose terms in office come and go so fast it almost makes the head spin. This has had a destabilizing effect. We now have homeless management systems at both the city and county that not only refuse to include our services in their multi-million-dollar funding programs, they ignore our work completely. Local governments ride free on the backs of our programs while reaping the benefits. It is said, the answer to ending homelessness is that local homeowners will open their spare bedrooms to rent to those who experience chronic homelessness. It's been a well-documented failure and asserting that homelessness is ended by putting people in non-existent housing opportunities exacerbates the conditions of homelessness. The story is the same in every similar city on the west coast.

Programs only exist where funding exists, seemingly without the need for successful outcomes. Our programs are needs-oriented, and then we find funding as we go. In our case, successful outcomes have been automatic. Providing basic needs for all who need it, with the lowest barrier to entry possible, allows people to become more self-responsible. The Housing First paradigm will successfully move a small portion of those who sleep outside into housing, though the data shows that most of those fall back to homelessness. Yet, providing people with

hygiene essentials and storage allows them to self-heal and gets them ready for a range of possibilities that housing may include.

We as communities lay the blame of homelessness on many factors, yet do we take responsibility for this, our shared challenge? We've allowed the county and city to take control of this challenge, but to what end? We've seen millions upon millions of dollars spent on things that have little effect on reducing or improving street homelessness. After 5 years of unclean and unsafe mega-camps that only double in size every year, we'll now watch the city spend more than \$14,000,000 on mitigation, management and the enforcement of a new anti-homeless ordinance.

All the while, this little nonprofit has done the impossible. We have created two shelters and an entire novel homeless services center without the aid of these millions of dollars. But it hasn't been easy. Our director has never been paid an appropriate salary and our building is going to be replaced by a large apartment building soon. We've heard lip service of help to relocate from both city and county officials but they've turned their backs on us.

In 2020, the City of Santa Cruz had attempted to construct encampments in 4 natural areas (Temporary Outdoor Living Ordinance), which was resoundingly protested by the community. Next, the city planned to line sidewalks in 3 light industrial districts with tents as they do in cities like San Francisco. This too was unanimously rejected with the entire neighborhood of Seabright protesting (remember Seabright Strong). Finally, the city decided to reach out to local nonprofits to invite them to help with this challenge. They instituted an application process for several program types including 24/7 encampments on property, hygiene programs, shelters and outreach programs. Warming Center Program had applied first for its Women's Shelter and later to operate a Transitional Encampment. Both were not only not rejected, but no answer was received. The city decided to operate its own encampment. Months later, City Homelessness Coordinator, Larry Imwalle called to invite Warming Center to submit a proposal for a storage program. We offered a fast-break proposal that would include a slight expansion to our already successful program. Again, no reply was given. We've recently heard that the city is planning to redundantly duplicate our storage program nearby without adding laundry or a donations distribution program. This news has contributed to our decision to close shop.

Encampment Services, Advocacy, and Operation

Our foray into homeless services began in 2011 with the 200 tent Occupy Santa Cruz encampment located in the San Lorenzo Park Benchlands. Nearly every person who slept outside at that time had moved into the protest encampment which featured two community kitchens, daily meetings, and a series of basic rules. We saw the vast improvement of many who'd been suffering for years outside. Inspired by this, in 2012, Brent Adams toured several northwest cities with successful nonprofit operated encampments, and he returned home to establish Santa Cruz Sanctuary Camp. His list of infrastructural and management dynamics was included in Andrew Heben's book [Tent City Urbanism](#). To date, the city and county have refused to institute a permitting process by which a nonprofit may operate encampments according to strict guidelines. While instead, all we've seen are years of unsafe meg-camps. We

believe that if local churches and nonprofits had had the chance to operate encampments rather than the unlimited mega-camps, our homeless problem would be vastly improved by now.

Without the ability to host encampments, our nonprofit has been busy working to improve conditions within encampments. We instituted a list of encampment Community Agreements in order to affect change within encampment cultures that have been experiencing excessive homeless on homeless theft and trespass into nearby neighborhoods. We spent a year hanging fliers and distributing this list of agreements. We finally began making agreements with entire encampments to adopt these agreements, thus creating Harvey West and Dakota Landing Agreement Camps. In these spaces instances of theft dropped to zero and neighboring areas were no longer trespassed. Rather than support this effort, the city closed these small camps and threatened to issue citations to anyone who attempted additional Agreement Camps. This was dispiriting, especially in light of the much larger crime-ridden encampments.

We've worked with the City of Santa Cruz and Association of Faith Communities by operating a shower trailer in San Lorenzo Park Benches for 5 hours every Friday for more than a year.

We spent more than a year helping to manage the trash removal program for Camp Paradise and Hell's trail. This was unfunded, yet very difficult work that entailed constant contact with a remote homeless camp of as many as 150, located near-to our facility.

Where is the Community At Large?

Rather than supporting important programs like ours, Santa Cruz residents are busy protesting stupid activities within the city or they are mesmerized by enticing marketing campaigns that invite them to "help end homelessness" by donating money to already well-funded organizations. When considering what to support, local residents are mostly confused. In addition to so many mega-camps, we've seen years of failed programs and projects by the city and an entire Housing First quagmire. We had mistakenly thought that by doing exceptional work addressing basic needs, we would have an easier time raising needed funding. We were wrong.

Why Are We Closing?

We have vastly helped to improve the quality of the lives of those who suffer sleeping outside. We've transformed the experience of homelessness for every city resident to something that is more hygienic and empowering. Regardless of a lack of sustaining funding, we've added a new needs-oriented program each year. We believe that the city and county have been disingenuous with funding and program opportunities. All the while, we've seen a decline in the quality of our community as camps proliferate and Housing First fails. Community members have been led astray with these conflicting messages. As long as you don't pay attention to what's happening outside, you may believe their assertions. This has had a grating effect on our ability to continue on. We've spent the several months wrestling with how to sustain these programs and locate another suitable building, but it's been tough going. As grant funding

increasingly demands a Housing First focus, and individual donations fall off, this work – which was already difficult to maintain – will be ever harder to keep going. We're proud of all that we've achieved with so little. We challenge the city and county to duplicate this work.

Time-table For Closing

Warming Center Shelter and cold-weather materials distribution center

Remains active this winter

Secret Garden Women's Shelter

We're already 30 days into the 100-day closing cycle. We'll strive to meet our commitment that not one resident will be turned out to the street. We're seeking housing and shelter alternatives.

Footbridge Storage

Doors will close November 15

Laundry and Shower Programs have already ended

Truly,

Brent Adams

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