

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

*Homeless Population*

Dec. 14  
2012

I have been following, with interest, the "My Word" columns in the Times Standard regarding the homeless population. There have been four articles between November Twenty First and December Sixth. Each article contained a good bit of factual information regarding our city and county homeless problem. Differing viewpoints were offered by the authors including the private citizens, the county director of Health and Human Services, and the Eureka Chief of Police. A number of local charities, non-profit organizations and the Humboldt County Health and Human Services Department are involved. None of the "My Word" articles, or "Letters to the Editor" that followed, addressed the question of how much it costs to operate the homeless program. I am not trying to place a cost on human life because the life of an individual is priceless. I am questioning whether or not the taxpayer is getting the most value out of each dollar spent. The charity and non-profit organizations involved in the homeless program have a certain amount of expenses. They usually try to keep their salaried people to a minimum but someone has to be paid to run the show, then there are the goods and services rendered which are not free. Question: How many of the homeless do they serve and what would be the per capita cost? Next is the Humboldt County Health and Human Services Department. They are the largest organization within Humboldt County government and every employee is salaried. Do you know that the second highest paid non-elected official is the Health and Human Services Director? The organization is so large that the director's responsibilities call for a much higher salary than the other departments. To make matters more complicated, Health and Human Services draws its operating funds from the federal and state governments as well as the county General Fund. Federal and state funding of certain mandated programs within the organization confuse the issue and does not leave the County Board of Supervisors with a clear cut responsibility for governing the Department. Not only do we have a lot of high salaried county employees involved with the homeless, we have two large facilities that are leased by the county to house some of the operations. The Welfare office, on West Washington Street and the "Professional Building", at Fifth and F Streets are leased from the private sector. The Fifth and F location (four floors) doesn't house "workers", only upper management. Don't forget the fleet of autos. This is a huge, confusing operation. What is the cost to run it and how much is being spent on each homeless individual plus the other county indigents? Does the size of the Department rise and fall with the size of the indigent population? No!! I think that the Board of Supervisors has a big problem that needs to be thoroughly investigated. On a hopeful note: I wish you a Merry Christmas.

Fred Nelson for Community Comment