

Community Comment 10/14/2013

By Jon Sapper

The Homeless Issue

This is Jon Sapper for Community Comment.

Most of my comments have avoided political issues. But for today, I'm going jump into a topic that is on the minds of many people in our community....homelessness. The homeless issue is like the weather.....everybody is talking about it, but nobody seems to know how to change it.

In my humble opinion, homelessness is not the issue. It's the symptom. People are homeless because of a number of possible reasons;..... loss of a job and can't find work..... or mental illness..... or desired lifestyle..... or drug addiction. If we want to address the homeless situation, we need to resolve the underlying conditions or causes. And, the approaches for dealing with those who are mentally ill or addicted to drugs are not the same approaches for dealing with those who are homeless because of lost jobs and the economy. The solution is not a one size fits all. That makes it more complex and difficult, but, so be it.

I'm not a physician and I don't pretend to know all of the intricacies about mental illness or drug addictions, which are major causes of homelessness, but I do know that the current body of research about addictions classifies addicts as suffering from chronic medical conditions that affect the brain. Dr. Janice Blair, a researcher and specialist in addiction states and I quote, "One of the things we forget is that drug addiction is a brain-based disorder. Diseases that impair the brain, by definition, impair logic, impulse control, good judgment, insight, free will and moral behavior." End quote.

Those who are addicted to drugs and we have a lot of them here, frequently come into contact with law enforcement because of their criminal behavior, a result of their addiction. In order to address the criminal behavior, we must address the addiction which is the underlying issue.

There are treatment programs that work for those suffering from addiction. They're expensive. According to Dr. Blair, "In professions where the stakes are high (doctors and pilots for example), mandatory participation in a program of

recovery is required. Decades of data show that upwards of 90% of those recovering professionals are maintaining sobriety after 5 years compared to less than 20% for those who are not required to participate. “

The dollar cost is high for these medical... model... interventions. But what's the cost to our community for continuing to do what we have been doing which most would agree, isn't working? The revolving door of homeless addicts being tossed into jail and then immediately released to the streets again and again, doesn't address their addiction or make a lot of sense. Let's come together as a community to address the root causes of some of these issues. That's where we can make a difference.

This has been Jon Sapper for Community Comment.