

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort from The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

I want to create a day shelter for people who are homeless. As this is not a popular thing to want to do, let me see if I can explain myself.

I want this center to provide for three basic needs, and then, once those are met, offer connections to pathways out of homelessness.

The first need is to provide a safe place. Any center would need to be somewhere that people could come knowing that it is neutral ground. No weapons, violence, or threats of violence will be tolerated within the walls of the center. No drug or alcohol use allowed on the premises

It would also be safe from the pounding rain and wind which lash at people outside in our region. It would be safe from the hypothermic chill of winter and the direct blazing heat of summer.

In addition, it would be safe from a few of the things that most people don't realize add weight to the burdens borne by those on the streets. It would be safe from the looks of disgust many people give to those on the street. It would be safe from being treated like a waste of skin by those who assume the only reasons people become homeless are mental illness or drug addiction. They're not. They aren't even the most common.

It would be safe from being required to keep moving at all times during the day, not being allowed to either sit or lie down, even after you've been walking for hours. Without a safe space, people develop a bunker mentality, a "me against the world" point of view which directly contributes to a kind of PTSD which keeps people from trusting, keeps people in pain, and reduces their ability to do anything else because they are living in fear.

Safety creates space for people to reflect, to seek change, and to allow help when it is needed.

The second need for this center would be a restroom. Maybe two. Places where people can stop and relieve themselves in privacy and with dignity. If you can't imagine why that would be a critical need, I suggest you drink a liter of water, wait an hour, then go for a walk through our city. You aren't allowed to go anywhere that has a "No Public Restroom" sign and if you stop to relieve yourself outdoors, you will receive a ticket for public indecency. Which is only fair, because it would be both public and indecent, even if it is your only option. There is a point when you've been told yet again you can't go, when you are going to go anyway, even if it ruins your shoes.

Finally, a center like this would require a source of drinkable water. Why? Because, like public restrooms, the number of places to get a drink of cold water have dwindled

to near zero. Even mild dehydration can cause sleepiness, irritability, confusion, and a lack of energy and drive.

Needing to beg for water doesn't inspire people to reach higher, instead it robs them of even the most basic dignity and health of quenching their thirst.

Meeting these needs builds trust and that trust can help lead people who are hurting and lost to take the steps they need to to return to health and normalcy. Is it a certain cure for every person and every ill? No. But if it can even help one-tenth of those who come through the doors, that's going to have a visible and positive impact on our community.

Don't give up, either on our community or on the people who are homeless in our community. Both are worth fighting for, even if they seem to have given up on themselves.

Grace and peace to you. This has been Lt. Roger McCort for today's KINS Community Comment.