

KINS COMMUNITY COMMENT – Redwoods Room and Board Scholarship by Marty Coelho

Homelessness in Del Norte and Humboldt Counties is overwhelming. It's a situation that has grown steadily worse over the last several years. What wasn't so obvious was that within this population was a group of College of the Redwoods students.

Research is showing that 35% of community college students are facing housing insecurity. On any given night these students don't know where they are going to sleep. To make matters worse, an additional 15% of community college students are homeless. At College of the Redwoods we have students living in their cars, couch surfing, or camping in the redwood forest behind our college.

The story of these students is one of great resiliency. They are fighting overwhelming challenges to gain an education, and doing so in the face of great hardship. These students are not only facing housing insecurity, but more times than not are also facing food insecurity and don't know where their next meal will come from.

Just this semester, College of the Redwoods asked our students if they were homeless or facing housing insecurity and over 100 students self-identified. Just a few weeks ago 11% of the students who applied for our scholarships, identified themselves this way.

These students are studying by lantern light, placing homework and USB drives in plastic bags so their homework doesn't get ruined, and sometimes walking an hour or more to catch a bus to the College, or even more frightening walking an hour a night in the complete dark to get back to a campsite.

Here we have a group of students living in some of the most challenging situations, who have a proven track record of trying to earn their education. We want to invest in this group and provide them the support they need to finish their schooling.

That's why College of the Redwoods has launched the Redwoods Room and Board Scholarship to provide lodging and meals for eight of the College's homeless students. We are contributing eight beds in our dorms, and fundraising to provide meal plans in our cafeteria. The program is meant to be temporary. We will help our students with building a rental history, job skills, financial literacy and then provide assistance in finding off campus housing.

Now some people would say we are only helping a few students a semester. But this scholarship will not only impact these students, it will impact their entire families, and it will impact those families for generations to come. If we are ever going to see our way out of this mess we need to ensure individuals are not only secure in housing and food, but that they receive the education they need so that they can secure their own housing and food well into the future.

I'd say these students are deserving of our support. If I was a gambling man I'd bet any day on a young lady or young man so determined to gain an education, they would sleep in the woods with bears and mountain lions and do their homework by lantern light.

This holiday season help us change lives on the North Coast. Go to redwoods.edu and click on the support redwoods button and select the Room and Board Scholarship.

College of the Redwoods students are Redwoods Strong. This has been Marty Coelho with Community Comment.