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Why no permanent shelter?

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Readability: >12 grade level (Lexile: 1350L)

Will Gresham

Guest columnist

No one questions Loveland's heart; no one doubts the need exists. Why does this city of soon-to-be 70,000 people put off or pass on the responsibility to care for its homeless population?

In the absence of someone donating a more fitting structure, the building that housed the Day Warming Center, an inclement weather day shelter at 137 S. Lincoln Ave., can be acquired and modified to provide day and night shelter for the homeless in Loveland. Why not now?

The July 23 Reporter-Herald reported that a new resource center known as 137 Homeless Connection would replace the DWC. From that story, it appears that the new center is intended to be similar to the Sister Alice Murphy Center for Hope in north Fort Collins, but it will offer fewer services. That it is not a shelter (providing respite from the cold and nourishment for the body) is apparent from the comment that coordinators hope to keep the center open five days a week by the end of next winter. (In December 2009, the DWC was open 28 of 31 days; in February 2010, 27 of 28 days.)

Services afforded by the new center are not new. Personalized case management, connection to resources for improving lives and mental health consultation always have been at hand. Weekly transportation to and from the Murphy Center was scheduled on demand. However, the economic hard times of last winter caused the numbers needing case management to overwhelm the time available to give it.

Moreover, stating that for the transient or chronic homeless, 137 Homeless Connection will not be a home long term, seems to imply that its coordinators intend to point them north to Fort Collins or southwest to Boulder (where "inclement weather shelters will always be open to anyone in need") and ask that they not let the door hit them in the backside on the way out. Saying that "our community cannot support (chronic homeless)" is to aver that Loveland wants to kick the needy to the curb. The evidence says otherwise.

Last winter, Loveland's generosity for its homeless produced 1,897.3 hours of volunteer time (equal to \$38,818.76) at the DWC. Donations from the community included clothing, toiletries, healthy breakfast burritos, donuts to supplement hot coffee, breakfasts for all present, TV sets, computers, recorded movies, furniture, a washer and clothes dryer, materials to build 30 14-cubic-foot storage spaces and outfit the shed that houses them, and 30-plus bicycles for repair and reuse.

Lee Severance, whose efforts in December 2006 were the basis for establishing an inclement weather shelter in Loveland, wrote in the March 4 Reporter-Herald that Loveland did not need a permanent shelter for the homeless. He argued: (1) The Day Warming Center exists; (2) Volunteers handle staffing needs; and (3) Loveland did not need a cozy, long-term homeless hotel that would attract "vagrants." I make reference to Lee's letter both because of the good work he has done and because changed circumstances have invalidated his position. The DWC no longer exists; year-round use of its former home by 137 Homeless Connection has been authorized; the key jobs are now paid positions, not volunteer. His third argument refers to all homeless as "vagrants," which most likely interjects a bias that fatally undermines Lee's preference.

Rather than 137 Homeless Connection decreasing our care for the homeless, let's create separate sleeping quarters and restroom facilities for men and women and use the same temperature criteria for day as for night (or at least raise the nighttime low to 32 degrees) to determine when the shelter is open. Just basing the decision to open on temperature and weather, i.e., it will not always be open, causes Severance's last point, the "vagrant hotel" argument, to disappear altogether. Who can count on the weather in Colorado?

Will Gresham was the Daytime Warming Center's volunteer coordinator.

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New center set up for success
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Gloria Magrum

Guest Columnist

House of Neighborly Service has served Loveland residents for almost 50 years. The Loveland Council of Churches established HNS in 1961 to create one place people could go when in crisis. Also one place where the community could pool ample resources and where there would be accountability, ensuring the truly needy were being served. The concept could not be more insightful or necessary than it is today, as HNS has seen record numbers of people needing assistance in the past two years.

As the community has grown, House of Neighborly Service has grown with it. It has played a vital role in meeting gaps and creating bridges in services when they are identified. In 2009, more than 21,000 people received one or more services at HNS: food, clothing, prescription, utility and transportation assistance, emergency shelter, referrals, advocacy and case management. One need that has increased almost 300 percent is emergency shelter. The majority of these requests come from families with children. Over this past year, 583 nights of motel shelter were provided to 129 homeless families with children. In addition, more than 100 homeless individuals received 91 nights of shelter in the rotating Inclement Weather Shelter, averaging 17 persons each night. The Inclement Weather Day Center, at 137 South Lincoln, was open 93 days and provided a place of refuge from the storm and a place of rest.

For the past three winters, the day center has been manned by volunteers, and they have done an excellent job. Next winter, a trained staff member will be managing the center with the help of volunteers, and it will take on a new name and add a few new elements of service. The new name is 137 Homeless Connection, and the new focus will be to assist individuals who are situationally homeless or chronically homeless by providing a more comprehensive and proactive program. The House of Neighborly Service staff and volunteers have diligently researched homeless issues and visited numerous shelters in neighboring communities in the past three years. We have studied best practices and learned many ways to improve our outreach to homeless, whether the individual is newly homeless or chronically homeless.

Trustful relationships have been established between the shelter workers and the homeless population. Each year, there is greater understanding and greater desire to engage with each individual and help them pursue a return to self-sufficiency.

137 Homeless Connection will continue to provide inclement weather shelter and be the pickup and drop-off site for the rotating night shelter - November through March. It also will be a connection point for transportation to the Murphy Center. 137 Homeless Connection gradually will increase its open hours and provide a variety of supportive services. Just as takes place at the House of Neighborly Service's main office, an HNS case manager will assist in solving the complexities of each situation the homeless individual may be facing. Appropriate connections, resources and support will be offered and greater personal responsibility will be encouraged. To enhance the chances of employment, those who choose to fully engage in case management and pursue an action plan will have greater benefits such as: a mailing address and a phone number for job applications and supervised computer access for job searching. What will a homeless individual gain by engaging in this new program? They will gain partners willing to go the extra mile to offer a way out of homelessness and an opportunity to

become a productive community member.

There are many details yet to be determined, and there are many ways the community can be involved. Contributions may be sent to House of Neighborly Service, 565 N. Cleveland Ave, Loveland, CO 80537. To discuss volunteer opportunities contact the HNS homeless outreach coordinator at 667-4939, ext. 25.

Glorie Magrum is executive director of the House of Neighborly Service.

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