

**Stretched to the Limit:
Non-Profit Social Service Providers in Mendocino County
May 4, 2006**

Summary

As part of an ongoing survey of Mendocino County health and human services and to determine the extent to which homeless and other needy citizens are able to receive assistance, the Grand Jury undertook an assessment of four non-profit agencies. The Ford Street Project, Plowshares, Project Sanctuary, and the Ukiah Community Center/Food Bank serve to provide a safety net for people in need or in crisis in this County. In times of financial cutbacks in Mendocino County, the demand for the services provided by these agencies rises drastically while their funding is cut back.

Background

- The 2005 estimated population of Mendocino County is 90,816.¹
- In a May 2005 point-in-time study, the “2005 Mendocino County Homeless Census reported a count of 1,947.” This included “homeless people on the streets and in emergency shelters, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, domestic violence shelters, voucher motels, hospitals, jails, and rehabilitation facilities.”
- “Survey data regarding the average length of homelessness indicates that the homeless population renews itself approximately 2.74 times every year... This projects to 5,335 persons who were homeless some time during 2005.”²
- 5.87% of Mendocino County's total population was estimated to be homeless at some time during 2005. The percentage of homeless people for the whole State of California is estimated to be between 3% and 4%.³ The percentage of homeless people for the nation as a whole is estimated to be 1% of the total population.⁴
- The Mendocino County Community Health Report 2004 indicated that 22.2% of County residents were on Medi-Cal, 19.2% have no high school diploma, 4.5% are unemployed, 37.9% are not in the work force, and 15.9% are below the poverty line (21.5% of children are below the poverty line).
- By extrapolation, the estimated number of people at risk of hunger in this county is more than the 15,000 with incomes below the poverty line and the 4,000 unemployed.

¹ Based on the 2005 population estimates from the State of California Department of Finance (DOF)

² The 2005 Mendocino County Homeless Census and Survey.

³ Foster, Lisa K., and Patricia Snowdon, Addressing Long-Term Homelessness: Permanent Supportive Housing, California Research Bureau, August 2003.

⁴ National Coalition for the Homeless September 2002.

Methods

The oversight consisted of visits made by members of the Grand Jury to Plowshares and the Ukiah Community Center/Food Bank while their programs were in operation. Visits were also made to Project Sanctuary and the Ford Street Project; the Grand Jury did not observe their programs in operation. Executive Directors, department heads, staff, and volunteers were interviewed; funding reports and financial documents were reviewed.

Findings

Ford Street Project (FSP)

Mission Statement: *The Ford Street Project provides shelter, housing, substance abuse treatment, and employment services to the homeless, addicted, and disabled of Mendocino County.*

1. The Ford Street Project has been in existence for 33 years. It provides the following services: detox, residential treatment, housing, transitional housing, crisis resolution, First Offense (Driving under the Influence) training, employment for persons undergoing treatment for mental health conditions. FSP also manages the Buddy Eller Homeless Shelter that provides an average of 55 persons a night with shelter, showers, and an evening meal.
2. During 2005, FSP provided multiple services for 954 individuals. The daily average was 20 persons in residential treatment, 24 in transitional housing, 30 receiving outpatient treatment, and 30 receiving First Offense training each month. At the time of this survey there were 18 people in permanent housing. Under contract with Caltrans, FSP provides part-time employment for 26 mental health clients.
3. FSP receives funding from Mendocino and Lake Counties, the State of California, and Federal agencies. They also accept private-pay individuals as clients.

Plowshares

Mission Statement: *That no one in our community go hungry.*

4. Plowshares has been preparing and serving meals to the hungry for 23 years. Presently they serve a noon meal in their 64-seat dining room. In January 2006, Plowshares served a daily average of 101 meals to adults and 5 to children. In the same month, their "Meals-on-Wheels" volunteers delivered a total of 1626 meals to the elderly and disabled in the Ukiah area.
5. Plowshares volunteers receive no compensation or mileage for their services.
6. Currently there is a Mental Health Department worker available during most meal times.
7. Plowshares provides shower and laundry facilities on a limited basis. In January, they reported a daily average use of 17 showers and five persons doing laundry.
8. Primary resources for Plowshares come from donations of food, money, and volunteer time. Volunteer cooks prepare and serve the meals; excess food

donations are shared with other agencies. Plowshares is currently sharing a grant with the Buddy Eller Shelter. Other agencies have provided their services at Plowshares as funds permit.

Project Sanctuary (PS)

9. **Mission Statement:** *To end domestic violence and sexual abuse in our community.*
10. Project Sanctuary has been providing crisis intervention, rape prevention education, shelter and counseling to women, children, and men for 27 years. They coordinate with 22 partner agencies that also work toward abuse prevention, including police departments, the District Attorney, hospitals, and social service agencies.
11. In a nine month period, PS served 190 people with crisis intervention, 135 who had been sexually assaulted, and sheltered 450. In this same time period, they provided intervention counseling to 1625, and rape prevention education to 3703 through group presentations.
12. PS has services for women, children, men, and the elderly. Sixteen beds are available on site for sheltering women and children. Men and those they cannot house on-site are placed at the Buddy Eller Shelter. Occasionally, local motels are also used for temporary shelter.
13. PS receives most of its funding from state agencies. They also receive a portion of the fees collected from marriage license applications. As most of this funding is restricted, PS is particularly dependent upon local non-restricted donations.

Ukiah Community Center (UCC) and Food Bank (FB)

Mission Statement: *Provide Community Assistance to meet urgent needs and promote self-sufficiency.*

14. The Ukiah Community Center and Food Bank have been providing food and services to people in Ukiah for 35 years; they now also provide homeless services in Fort Bragg. In addition to providing USDA food boxes, they provide emergency food from the Food Bank in Ukiah and to food pantries in other areas of the county. They supervise the crisis line and also provide housing services, case management, a day shelter with breakfast, life skill classes, limited (\$800 maximum) interest-free housing crisis loans.
15. The FB provides Prescription Food Boxes, the contents of which are defined for the recipient by government-formulated specifications. Supplies for these Boxes come from the Second Harvest and USDA Commodities programs through the Redwood Empire Food Bank in Santa Rosa.
16. Each of the Prescription Food Boxes distributed requires monitoring and registration of compliance to Federal regulations.
17. There are currently 323 Food Bank clients that qualify for food commodities. Recent cutbacks of Federal funds now allow for only 249. FB must choose which 74 clients will no longer receive these commodity foods.
18. Local donations of food and money supply much of the non-Prescription food

that is made available.

19. FB provides food to approximately 3,000 individuals each month.
20. UCC has an average backlog of 110 cases seeking housing at any one time and 25 new cases contacting them for this service each month. Although they are funded to serve only 79 cases, they currently have 180 active cases. Recent cuts in funds have resulted in reducing their housing case managers from four to two.
21. Although the need is great, UCC can accommodate only 15 persons at a time in their day shelter due to fire safety regulations.
22. The crisis line received 1514 calls in the month of January 2006. This is an increase from a monthly average of 1359 in 2005 and 738 in 2004.
23. UCC/FB receives most of their funding from contracts and grants. Local community support comes through donations of volunteer time, food and money.
24. UCC has only enough funds to purchase 90 transportation vouchers from MTA for client emergencies. Insurance restrictions prevent them from transporting clients in their vehicles.

Common Findings

25. It is the policy of these four agencies to treat clients with dignity and respect.
26. A high percentage of clients served are experiencing problems with mental illness, alcohol, and drug addiction. Many have a dual diagnosis (mental illness and substance addiction).
27. All of these agencies make every effort to meet the urgent needs of those seeking assistance and to help each client reach a level of self-sufficiency. This includes one agency picking up essential services when another agency discontinues them.
28. All of these agencies assist clients in obtaining appropriate services from city, County, State, and Federal agencies.
29. These four agencies work diligently and successfully to respond to the concerns of their geographic neighbors.
30. All the agencies are monitored by the County Health Department and meet sanitation standards.
31. These four agencies work together with other non-profits, Mendocino County Health and Social Services, and California State Departments to meet the needs of their clients.
32. All four agencies belong to The Homeless Services Planning Group, an association made up of Social Service departments and non-profit agencies concerned with homelessness for the purpose of coordinating service delivery and avoiding duplication of services.
33. All four agencies receive their funding from multiple sources with different guidelines and regulations.
34. Grants and contracts received by these agencies rarely provide more than 5-

6% for administrative costs and sometimes none. This is far below the actual administrative costs of 10-15%.

35. All agencies acknowledge the need to allocate staff time to apply for grants and short-term financing for long-term needs.
36. The lowest wage paid to an employee of any of these agencies is \$8.39 per hour. Most staff members earned between \$10 and \$17 per hour. Compensation for Executive Directors ranged from \$17.60 to \$26.23 per hour.
37. When possible these agencies provide health benefits to their employees; three provide no retirement benefits to employees, one matches employee contributions to an IRA.
38. All agencies are hampered by income shortfalls and slow delivery of contracts and grant funds. Methods used to meet these shortfalls include reducing salaries, reduction of overtime for holidays, and encouragement of voluntary leaves of absence without pay. Agencies also borrow money to cover slow reimbursement from government contractors, cut staff hours, and even lay off employees. Board members have made personal contributions to carry their agency through a shortfall.
39. All agencies have an all-volunteer Board of Directors; some of the directors are former clients.
40. All agencies wish to increase membership on their Boards and to have memberships more representative of local demographics.
41. The Buddy Eller Shelter is almost one mile from the UCC/FB, two miles from the Plowshares dining room, and two and a half miles from the proposed new dining room. Currently the Mendocino Health Clinic provides limited bus service between UCC and Plowshares.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. contracts made by the County provide sufficient funds for administrative costs. (Finding 33)
2. agencies ensure that funds be allocated for “core” services and publicly announce which services will need to be discontinued until additional funding is received. (Finding 37)
3. the Mendocino County CEO and the Board of Supervisors release funds for approved grants, contracts, or reimbursement requests in a more timely manner. (Findings 33, 37)
4. the BOS create a program to provide for travel vouchers for the elderly, disabled, and needy individuals requiring transportation. (Finding 40)

Comments

The Domino Effect. These four agencies are interdependent and provide complementary services. If one has a shortfall of funds and subsequently cuts back on services, this reduction may adversely impact the other agencies and

the services they provide.

The four non-profit agencies described in this report are among the largest and most visible of many such organizations that care for the needy and distressed members of our community. Their employees, their volunteers and their boards of directors provide assistance that is both deeply compassionate and unarguably necessary. If it were not for them, local government would be expected to bear even more of the burden than it already does.

The quality of life in the county depends in no small measure on the work of these agencies. These financially strapped non-profits help the citizens of our county at a cost far below what a County government agency would require. Moreover, as these agencies have been forced to reduce services, government has not filled the vacuum. With the wholehearted support of the community in the form of money and time, the vital work of these agencies can continue.

Response Required

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors, (Findings 28, 30-34, 38, 41, Recommendations 1, 3, 4)

Response Requested

Director, Ford Street Project (Findings 1-3, 25-41)

Director, Plowshares (Findings 4-9, 25-41)

Director, Project Sanctuary (Findings 10-13, 25-41)

Director, Ukiah Community Center/Food Bank (Findings 15-41)