

APPEAL-DEMOCRAT

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Better Way helping county's most vulnerable

Emergency shelter continues to provide valuable service during pandemic

By David Wilson



Kati Nuckolls received temporary housing and services at Better Way after being homeless and now as a job.

Kati Nuckolls went from being homeless for over five years to getting a job at Walmart and having her own place to live, following a stint living at Better Way – a homeless shelter in Sutter County. Her story is one example of how the program is in place to help people turn their lives around.

Sutter County Public Health opened Better Way in September 2019 as a low barrier, behavior-based homeless shelter that provides 40 individuals with a temporary place to stay, according to Sutter County Program Manager of Community Services John Floe. Better Way works with singles or couples 18 years or older who are Sutter County residents.

While at Better Way, Nuckolls worked with a team of advocates that helped her with self-sufficiency and with transitioning into permanent housing. She was then referred to Sutter County One Stop where she was able to receive services for job readiness and placement.

“She was driven to work and save money and move into her own place and with a small incentive with the Better Way program knew she was ready for the responsibility and having the safety of being in her own place,” Floe said.

Better Way follows a “housing first” model, meaning that housing comes first followed by case management services that address the barriers that led someone to homelessness.

The program provides 24-hour security, one shelter monitor on staff seven days a week, one peer mentor, case management and housing navigation staff.

“The case managers work with participants to attain the goals the participants have set for themselves such as job search, document recovery, establishing them with a primary care doctor, getting their oral health on track,” Floe said. “For many it has been years without routine medical and dental care.”

The housing navigator meets with each Better Way participant to develop a housing plan. “The housing plan includes their budget and what type of housing the participant is looking for, which is sustainable for the participant,” Floe said. “The housing navigator is the liaison between the landlord and the participant.”

Once a participant is housed, the support services continue for up to three months in order to reduce homelessness recidivism.

Newly housed individuals receive home visits and phone calls to make sure they are on track and settling in.

To date, Better Way has provided services to 156 individuals. Of those, 65 were chronically homeless, 10 were veterans and seven were people between 18 to 24. Of the 156, 91 reported previously living in a place not meant for human habitation. Better Way has permanently housed 59 individuals, according to Floe.

He said the average age of a Better Way participant is 49 years old.

Better Way helped a 63-year-old Army veteran obtain housing at Harmony Village in Yuba City in December.

Floe said the veteran asked to remain anonymous. After he was honorably discharged from service at Fort Jackson in South Carolina, the veteran returned to Yuba-Sutter where he suffered an accident that resulted in the partial amputation of his right arm.

“After a series of personal and financial misfortunes I lost my house to foreclosure,” the veteran said. “I’ve lived on the streets and in a motel when I could afford it for two years.”

He came to Better Way and found an apartment with the help of the housing navigator and received financial assistance for move-in costs.

“It was a smooth transition,” the veteran said. “I got an apartment right away.”

Due to COVID-19, the maximum capacity at Better Way was lowered from 40 to 28 individuals.

Floe said it is anticipated to return to maximum capacity of 40 at the end of the pandemic.

He said Better Way tends to run at capacity.

Better Way always accepts donations of new bedding, socks, underwear, personal hygiene products, reusable plates, cups and cutlery. Because of extreme local weather, it is also in need of outdoor chairs, picnic tables and umbrellas.

To donate or to ask about sponsoring a unit at Better Way, call 822-5999.

“Homelessness is a public health problem. People who are homeless tend to have untreated medical problems and often are elderly,” Floe said. “The fragility of clients at Better Way is a constant reminder of how vulnerable unsheltered people can be.”