

Chinook Observer

Join in Peninsula's compassionate response

Five years ago I gave a ride home to a high school student who was helping plan our May Mental Wellness Walk. She gave me directions to what I now think of as the other side of Surfside, where trailers line the road and where it's a long walk to any bus. That was a reminder that even on this tiny Peninsula there are many people who are invisible to me and others.

At each of the first two Project Homeless Connect events the past two years I had a chance to talk with a few of the hundred or more people who came to the Elks Lodge. They had been invisible to most of us volunteers, but when we were face to face their hopes and needs were basic and reasonable. I watched one woman grin and stand tall after getting a really nice haircut. I saw people wait in line happily to get a vision exam. And more than one person went out the door from Project Homeless Connect saying, "I didn't know anyone cared."

On Jan. 4, the Overnight Winter Lodging program began here at three local churches, providing warm places to stay for people who are homeless. OWL started with a small number of guests in its first week. Like other local initiatives, I know it takes time for word of mouth to spread and for people to trust people they don't know. Actually, that's true whether we have a house [and a reverse mortgage for some of us] or a sleeping bag and a tent.

Both Project Homeless Connect and Overnight Winter Lodging are small positive steps to deal with major human problems. I'm grateful that the place I chose to live shows compassion toward people who've had major traumas and losses. An impetus for these efforts has been Peninsula Poverty Response, which began less than four years ago. It is growing in its capacity and impact. Anyone interested can join PPR or volunteer for one of these projects. To find out more, email ppramericorps@gmail.com.

My friend Jim, who has been homeless at times, introduced me to the Facebook site Homeless Sharing Awareness. I saw words on that page that are more powerful than anything I could write. "Homelessness is not the problem. It is the end result of the problem." And Mother Teresa wrote that "being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for is the greatest poverty."

Barbara Bate