



Gathering for Women Monterey

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July 18, 2016

The Honorable Mark E. Hood
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
County of Monterey
240 Church Street
Salinas, CA 93901

Dear Judge Hood:

Gathering for Women – Monterey (“GFW”) is a 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit organization, whose vision is that the homeless and hungry should have a place on the Monterey Peninsula where they can access food, clothing, a caring community, and connections to resources and services. Our Day Center, open since April 1, 2014, focuses on homeless women, and has served over 770 women at its weekly gathering, currently held at the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Monterey Peninsula in Carmel.

GFW appreciates the Monterey County Grand Jury’s invitation to respond to Finding 3 and Recommendation 3 in the 2015-2016 Grand Jury Final Report: “Housing Homeless Women?”

F3. Faith-based and non-profit organizations are providing funding and services to house homeless women, but it is insufficient.

GFW agrees that some faith-based and non-profit organizations provide funding and services to house homeless women. GFW also agrees that there is insufficient housing for homeless women on the Monterey Peninsula due to a variety of factors, many of which are identified in the Grand Jury Report.

R3. Faith based and non-profits should focus more funds toward housing the homeless. This would reduce the need for other ancillary services, saving money.

GFW acknowledges that there is a need for housing on the Monterey Peninsula that is currently unmet, and that the housing shortage results in, among other things, heartbreaking stories of homelessness like those contained in the Report. The Grand Jury has done a very good job of documenting the background of the homeless situation in our area. It is imperative that steps be taken to improve that situation and to move an increasing number of homeless women into housing as quickly as possible. However, GFW believes that the most vulnerable of these women (especially the older women) cannot exist with housing alone and that many of them will not survive to see housing if organizations like GFW do not continue to thrive. “Housing First” does not mean “housing only” – vulnerable women must be given support both until housing is available and to maintain that housing once they are housed.

GFW operates a day center for homeless women every Tuesday, and has done so since April 1, 2014. Seventeen women attended on our opening day; currently, the average is about 70 each week. During the first six months of 2016, 280 different women have come to GFW; a total of 2,997 meals have been served. In addition to a hot meal, GFW provides its guests with clothing, personal hygiene items,

shower, laundry, bus, and gas vouchers, and case management services. In 2016, GFW has distributed 578 shower vouchers, 297 laundry vouchers, 86 bus vouchers, and 255 gas vouchers.

GFW also serves as a hub where women can access information regarding service providers in the community, and where those service providers can bring information regarding their services to the women. As noted in the Grand Jury Report, homeless women often remain “in the shadows,” invisible, embarrassed, and afraid. They may be working, they may have family unaware of their situation, or they may simply not want the stigma attached by our society to being homeless. Before GFW, it was difficult for service providers in the community to find homeless women because homeless women so often do not want to be found. Since GFW has opened its doors, service providers know that on Tuesday, homeless women will be at GFW. Nearly every week, one or more of those providers visits GFW to meet with GFW’s guests and provides them with needed services.

Every Tuesday, GFW has case managers available to meet with guests, assess their needs, and provide them with information about available services tailored to a particular guest’s needs. Through its case management program, GFW has linked women with providers of transitional housing, shelters, and low-cost subsidized housing. GFW has also assisted women with, for example, getting onto the Housing Choice (formerly Section 8) voucher list, which many of its guests would have been unable to do without the ready access to a computer and hands-on help that GFW was able to provide. GFW has also been successful in educating women about clinics and other medical resources and treatment options to help keep homeless women out of local emergency rooms.

Half of the population that GFW serves is over 50 years old. Twenty-four percent of the women are over 60. The oldest woman GFW has seen was 93. As the Grand Jury Report notes, these older women have an even more difficult time without housing. It is also more difficult for older women to maintain housing, as they often live on a fixed income and they may have health problems or other issues. Ongoing support for these women is not “ancillary”; it is imperative. It is also cost-effective.

GFW has served 280 women already in 2016. It has served nearly 3,000 meals and has provided thousands of vouchers for transportation and laundry and showers. It has provided case management services for hundreds of women. GFW’s total 2016 budget is \$126,000. In contrast, as noted in the Grand Jury Report, a grant of \$90,000 will allow the Housing Resource Center to assist only five women with permanent housing.

Were an organization like GFW to focus its budget on housing, the number of women that it could assist would plummet from the hundreds to seven. Additionally, the hundreds of women who are currently served by GFW would be left without the resources and services that they so desperately need. No similar organization exists locally.

GFW therefore does not believe that the homeless women in the community would be well-served by putting the sole focus of future funding to non-profits and faith-based organizations on housing. Such focus, to the extent that it removes funding from an organization that provides so-called “ancillary” services, such as those provided by GFW, will mean that during the years that hundreds of women wait

for housing, they will lose much-needed support. Rather than saving money on other services, these women will require more services, as they will lose the support that an organization like GFW provides.

Additionally, a sole focus on funding for housing services will mean that the lucky few who receive housing will have more difficulty maintaining that housing. Without the supportive services offered by an organization like GFW, the homeless and marginally-housed will return to isolation. They will have no community and no single hub where they can discover and access the service providers who may be able to help offer the medical or mental health treatment or the job training that they need. The homeless women will no longer have a place to get a voucher for transportation or for laundry or a shower – things that most of us take for granted, but which for them are vital to maintaining their independence and dignity.

GFW strongly supports the goal of finding housing for the homeless women in our community. It cannot, however, support a recommendation that does not allow for funding for the vital services that an organization like GFW provides. Funding for support to homeless women on their journey out of homelessness and beyond is vital. GFW is proud to stand as a pillar of that support on the Monterey Peninsula.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Grand Jury Final Report.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gathering for Women – Monterey


Carol Greenwald
President