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Giving Options

Issue: A small part of Ashland's response to people living on the street should be giving people options to provide help, and letting people know the various programs that currently help those who want to find a home.

Primary assumptions:

- The vast majority of people want to help those in need, and feel bad about ignoring pleas for help.
- Citizens and visitors need to know the diversity of options available to help people on the street.
- A significant portion of direct giving funds addiction and alternative life styles
- Ashland needs a program to support people who want a hand up, not people who want to opt out.

Proposed actions:

Donation cash boxes. Donation cash boxes, similar to utility payment sites, should be placed at several locations downtown to collect money for homeless assistance. Signboards at each site should urge citizens and visitors to give money here instead of providing money directly to individuals. The money collected could fund a new city program to aid the homeless, fund cleanup of illegal campsites, or could be given to a wide variety of non-governmental organizations already working in Ashland and the Rogue Valley.

Homeless in Ashland white paper. A report on homelessness in Ashland should be developed annually. The objective would be to provide information on services for those in need, remind the general public about the wide variety of services available and how to contribute to those programs, and report on the status of the committee's work and the city's response.

Weekend information booth. During the peak of the tourist season, an information booth should be staffed downtown. Volunteers staffing the booth would provide information with the following objectives: remind citizens and visitors that it is ok not to give directly to individuals; provide information on the various assistance programs available; and promote the donation cash boxes as an alternative way to help.

Outreach on public access television. A short video should be developed and broadcast to promote the donation cash boxes as an alternative to direct giving, and remind the general public about the wide variety of services available and how to contribute to those programs.

Homelessness versus alternative lifestyles. The committee should frame the issue more clearly. There are individuals who are truly in need and who want a helping hand out of homelessness. There are others who simply want to live an alternative lifestyle. Living on the street as a choice was clearly expressed in the testimony at the city council meeting. Separate responses are needed for the issue of homelessness and the choice of life on the street.

Background: Dan Van Dyke, 541-552-9113. I have been a resident of Ashland for six years.

Costs: Unknown