

## A discussion on homelessness in western Nevada County and its watersheds

News | September 8, 2019

Ashley Quadros and Daniel Belshe  
Special to The Union



Each year, through the Yuba River Cleanup, the western Nevada County community removes tons of trash and recycling from the beaches, banks and trails of streams and rivers in the Yuba watershed.

*Submitted photo*

### LEARN MORE

The mission of [Hospitality House](#) is to bring homeless people in Nevada County into a circle of community caring that offers shelter, sustenance, medical care, advocacy, opportunity, dignity, and hope as we

Editor's note: This is the first in a three-part series produced by nonprofits Hospitality House and South Yuba River Citizens League to discuss issues surrounding homelessness in western Nevada County and its watersheds, as the 22nd annual Yuba River Cleanup approaches on Sept. 21.

Homelessness is on the rise. Across California, cities and counties are seeing increases in homeless populations.

assist them in transitioning from homelessness to housing.

[SYRCL \(South Yuba River Citizens League\)](#), is the leading voice for the protection and restoration of the Yuba River watershed. Founded in 1983 through a rural, grassroots campaign to defend the South Yuba River from proposed hydropower dams, SYRCL has developed into a vibrant community organization with more than 3,500 members and volunteers.

— Ashley Quadros and Daniel Belshe

During SYRCL's annual Yuba River Cleanup we often come across homeless encampments and abandoned camps at sites along Wolf Creek and Deer Creek.

When faced with this reality, volunteers are left questioning: How do these people get here? Where are they coming from? Why are they here? Are these camps worse than last year? How can we fix it?

“ According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a person making minimum wage must work 72 hours per week to afford a one-bed apartment here ...

To better understand the homeless issue in the Yuba and Bear watersheds, SYRCL is partnering with Hospitality House for the 2019 Yuba River Cleanup. In this series, we explore homelessness in Nevada County and how it impacts the Yuba River watershed.

Each year, through the Yuba River Cleanup, our community removes tons of trash and recycling from the beaches, banks and trails of streams and rivers in the Yuba watershed.

The trash we find comes from multiple of sources: beer cans and cigarette butts left by a summer visitor, illegal dumping of car doors and tires by a housed community member, abandoned camping gear, illegal fire rings and refuse from an abandoned homeless camp. Are the abandoned homeless camps that we return to each year during the Yuba River Cleanup, a cleanup issue or a homeless issue?

To understand, we must look at the bigger picture.

### **WHAT'S THE SCOPE OF THE ISSUE?**

In January 2019, the Homeless Resource Council of the Sierras with support from County of Nevada and Hospitality House led a Point-In-Time count, to physically count the number of sheltered and unsheltered homeless residents on one specific

day of the year. This count confirmed there are a minimum of 410 unique homeless individuals in Nevada County.

This is an 11% increase over the last count in 2017. In contrast, Hospitality House provided services to 501 unique homeless individuals throughout 2018, illustrating the shortcoming of relying on one day to count the homeless population.

Nonetheless, confirmation is clear: there are hundreds of homeless people in the community who need help and the numbers are increasing.

But why? And where did they come from?

### **OUR HOMELESS ARE OUR NEIGHBORS**

First and foremost, when we talk about the homeless population, we mean your neighbors. The common stigma in our community is that the homeless are migrating to Nevada City for services. However, this isn't accurate.

The fact is most of our homeless population grew up here and might have even lived right next door to you. Eighty percent of those surveyed in the 2019 count were found to be Nevada County residents for a minimum of one year, with 59 percent originally from Nevada County or with direct family ties.

There are multiple factors that contribute to homelessness and every situation is unique, but mental health and substance use are the most common factors. In Nevada County specifically, the numbers are increasing largely because we are in a serious affordable housing epidemic.

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a person making minimum wage must work 72 hours per week to afford a one-bed apartment here — that's maintaining two full-time jobs and when you factor in life — a car breaking down, a past due bill, an unexpected medical expense, an increase in rent or fire insurance, the downward trajectory can easily be set in motion.

The bottom line is homelessness can happen to anyone. Many residents of Hospitality House are working full time, going to school full time, and volunteering for community initiatives. They never expected to be without a home, and now that they are homeless.

### **HOW CAN THE COMMUNITY HELP?**

Those interested in helping can get informed about the homeless issue in Nevada County by checking out the work of Hospitality House and learning more in the next installment of the series (on Sept. 16), where we will be looking at the steps the Nevada County community is taking to help our homeless citizens.

[Volunteer registration is now open](#) for the Yuba River Cleanup on Sept. 21, when hundreds of people help keep our river safe and clean for our entire community.

*Ashley Quadros is development director at Hospitality House. Daniel Belshe is community engagement manager at SYRCL.*