

# SAFEPLACE UPDATE | February 2020

**We want to keep our neighbors informed.**

**First: Look for big changes at the Safe Camp site over the next couple of months.**

It's important to remember that Safe Camp is continuing to evolve and change: The way it has operated in the past is not necessarily the way it will operate in the future, as its managers, supporters, residents and neighbors suggest changes and improvements.

Recently, about a half-dozen "microshelters," built to specifications provided by city officials, were moved to the church's property at the south end of the Safe Camp area. These microshelters, about the size of a garden shed, are large enough to sleep an individual or a couple. They are electrically heated and come with locking doors, smoke alarms, carbon dioxide alarms and fire extinguishers; no open flames will be allowed inside. These microshelters will serve as part of the transitional housing available at the Safe Camp site. Other congregations have tentatively agreed to place microshelters on their properties.

For the time being, the microshelters are unoccupied, until the city and county clear the regulatory way for these shelters to be used legally. We encourage both governments to act quickly on this matter.

In the meantime, the Safe Camp site itself is undergoing a major overhaul. As you read this, another fence has been built on the site. Eventually, this "reset" of Safe Camp is scheduled to include the construction of slightly elevated platforms for each camper; we believe this will help keep the site clean.

Because of the people camping illegally in the tree farm to the west of the church, the plan is to erect a locked gate at the Safe Camp site so only camp residents and other authorized people can access the camp. Safe Camp services such as the kitchen area and the charging stations will be accessible only to campers. (Remember that the church does not own the tree farm property.)

Safe Camp employs a part-time camp liaison/manager, who is on the site several hours each day. In addition, volunteers to serve as mentors for each camper have been trained and are working with campers.

We are working to raise funding for case management for campers; we believe this sort of management is essential to break the cycle of homelessness. The idea is to find sustainable funding for case managers, not just at the camp site but also with other locations that might house microshelters.

**Safe Camp continues to have success in moving campers into transitional housing (eight so far.)**

Remember that the initial push for Safe Camp came in the summer of 2019, when the illegal camp in the tree farm area was cleared at the request of the landowner, who seeks to have it annexed into the city and developed. It is a pattern that we have seen for decades in Corvallis: When authorities shut down an illegal

camping site, the residents move to another location, and the cycle continues. There is no place in the county or city where the unhoused legally can camp.

Safe Camp has been structured to break that cycle. The idea is to give the unhoused a safe place; this allows camp managers, mentors, social service agencies and others an opportunity to connect campers with essential services, including transitional housing. We believe consistent access to those services will help move campers into more stable housing, and already we have seen that occur. At this writing, six residents are in Safe Camp.

### **Safe Camp managers continue to refine the screening process for each camper.**

Potential Safe Camp residents must apply to stay in the camp and must agree to follow the code of conduct. (The use of illegal drugs, for example, is forbidden and individual fires are not allowed.) The code of conduct is being revised in light of lessons learned and suggestions from others.

Safe Camp managers screen campers before they're allowed into the facility. Safe Camp managers have access to the ShelterWare database, which allows managers to identify red flags with potential campers – for example, acts of violence.

People with a history of violence, violent sex abuse or preying on children are not allowed in Safe Camp. People with outstanding warrants must demonstrate that they are making progress in clearing those warrants; after 90 days, if no progress has been made, campers run the risk of eviction.

The recent assault reported in the Gazette-Times involved a dispute between a man who was camping illegally in the tree farm and someone who was living in Safe Camp: It was not a random attack. However, because Safe Camp managers determined that the victim of the assault previously had violated the camp's code of conduct, he has been evicted.

### **We're under no illusions that Safe Camp by itself will solve the mid-valley's homelessness crisis.**

The problem is too big, too widespread, for any one solution; there is no "typical" unhoused person, so we need a quilt of solutions. We believe, however, that a managed camp that offers a safe place and which allows mentors and managers to get campers into the pipeline for more stable housing is a key part of that quilt. We look forward to working with the new Home, Opportunity, Planning and Equity (HOPE) initiative, which is just getting off the ground.

### **We welcome questions and comments about Safe Camp.**

Send us an email at [safecamp@corvallisucc.org](mailto:safecamp@corvallisucc.org). We'll try to respond to civil emails as soon as possible.