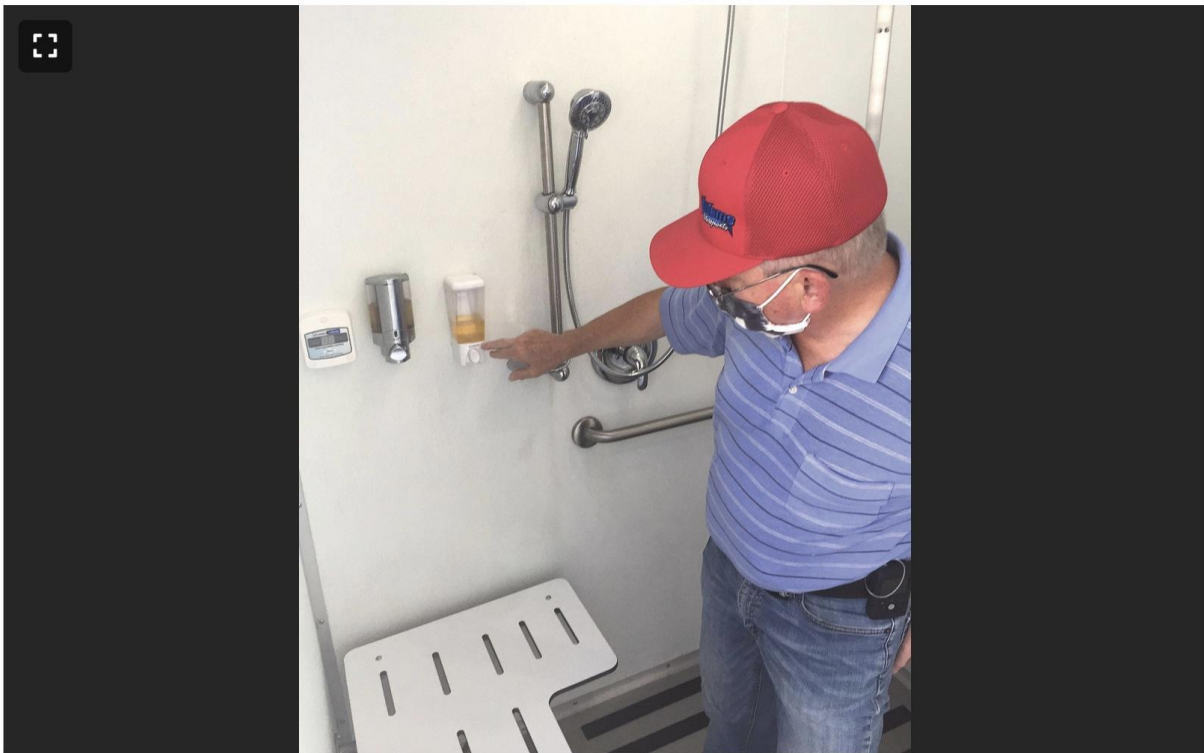


Homeless services group expands its reach

From the Homelessness in Tracy series

By Bob Brownne Jun 26, 2020 0



Peter Claffey, a volunteer with Tracy Community Connections Center, shows off the features of shower stall, which is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, in a shower trailer operated by Tracy Community Connections Center, a local group dedicated to helping homeless people.

Bob Brownne/Tracy Press

A move to El Pescadero Park has expanded the reach of Tracy Community Connections Center, a local organization dedicated to helping homeless people.

This month, the group reopened its mobile shower unit after closing back in March because of the COVID-19 pandemic. After two years of offering showers at local churches, the Tracy Community Connections Center set up the mobile showers at the end of Parker Avenue,

between the South San Joaquin County Fire Authority support services building and Tracy Interfaith Ministries. That puts the showers right next to a large homeless camp at the park.

Melinda Ramirez, one of the case managers with Tracy Community Connections Center, said the move had helped the organization reach more people.

“It’s almost double what we had where we were before,” she said Monday.

Since the first week of June, the group has been at the site two days a week, with 25 to 30 people using the showers each time. On Monday, there was less traffic than usual because that was the day city workers did a park cleanup, which required people to move their tents and other personal property while the workers cut the grass and gathered up trash in the park.

This month is two years since the Tracy Community Connections Center started the shower program. Ramirez noted that before COVID-19 it had been set up at New Heart Community Church on Bessie Avenue on Mondays and Grace Church on Tracy Boulevard on Thursdays.

Peter Claffey, a volunteer with Tracy Community Connections Center, has maintained the trailer since the group acquired it using a grant the group obtained through San Joaquin County.

The trailer has two showers, one of them designed to accommodate a person in a wheelchair. The trailer can function as a self-contained unit with a 100-gallon water tank, propane-fueled on-demand water heaters and a gas-powered electric generator. This week, the group had access to, and took advantage of, a water supply, a sewer hookup and electricity from the nearby fire station.

Those who show up get more than a shower. Ramirez pointed out that a couple of nurses from Sutter Tracy Community Hospital, one of the supporters of the shower program, were on hand to do health screenings. Her own role as a case manager is to see what other services people need, helping them gain a foothold that can lead to temporary or permanent shelter and employment.

“That’s why we’re here. It’s to connect with people,” she said, adding that most people who drop by are folks she’s seen before.

The more people the group can reach, the more likely it is that case managers like Ramirez will find people who just need to know where to start when it comes to finding services.

“Everybody needs a shower if they’re on the street, and everybody knows about it. Every day that I’m here, there might be two to four people that I’ve never met before and we can sign them up for case management,” she said.

“The last time I was here, on Thursday, I placed two people in a motel. One was a 70-year-old woman who was on the streets, which is automatically high risk for COVID, so we have funding

for that. We were able to put her up in a motel and now we're going to sign her up for Social Security," Ramirez said. The other, she added, was a pregnant woman, and the group found and funded a motel room for her as well.

One of the functions of Tracy Community Connections Center is to seek out those kinds of resources — be they local or federal grants, or support from organizations and institutions like the hospital — and put them to good use.

"We do connect people with resources. Lots of resources. Not just housing," she said, adding that her group was helping distribute funding made available because of COVID-19. "We've got a lot of people set up with unemployment benefits."

Leon Farrell, one of the shower attendants working at the park on Monday, credited the program with helping him make progress toward a more stable life. He first came to the program as a client, and is now optimistic that permanent employment and housing are close at hand.

"It's nice that the city allows us an opportunity to stay clean. It gives us dignity to stay clean and presentable to find a job," he said.

"It shows that they care about the homeless community, and trying to make a difference in making those numbers decline," he added.

Farrell has had some success in finding part-time and temporary work, and hopes that finding a room to rent will give him momentum toward a better life.

"This is definitely a step in the right direction. Tracy is extremely expensive to rent," he said. "I'm surprised there's not more homeless because of the cost of living around here. If they lose their jobs, the world will collapse around them. They're living paycheck to paycheck."