



May 24, 2023

Grace Garner, Mayor
Jeffrey Bernstein, Mayor pro tem
Ron deHarte, Councilmember
Christy Holstege, Councilmember
Lisa Middleton, Councilmember
Scott Stiles, City Manager

Dear Mayor Garner, City Council, City Manager:

A few weeks back I had attended the Harvey Milk Breakfast along with our Board Members. As I listened to the speakers and the support we have in our LGBTQ+ community, I became emotional and could feel the love and support we have for one another. It started to make me think about the clients of Well In The Desert. Do you know we also serve the LGBTQ+ community. Yes that is right, some of our own had a rough time with both mental health and drug addiction. They are living in our washes, in the homeless camps. I often think of DeDe who is Trans and often you will see her walking Palm Canyon with her wig and a smile. Then there is Michael with his wonderful crazy outfits that always winks to anyone around him. The list goes on and on. These clients are also in the washes. It is where they live, where they feel safe. Let's not mention our vets like Jerry who's platoon was shot up in Iraq and the trauma of him not being able to live in housing but a storm drain over by Vons by the camps. He still has nightmares of a grenade going off and he was the only one left with all his body parts. We could tell you these stories of each individual for days.

Now that a few years has passed we hopefully have all learned from what is working and not working with homelessness. The Well was scolded by the council for numbers, more numbers, how many bottles of water did we serve that were unduplicated etc. **We took note.** It was a positive outcome in the respect that the records we now have are 100 percent accurate. We have changed our charts, know the numbers both duplicated and unduplicated including signatures from the clients so we can keep track of who is who.

As the Homeless point-and-time count was performed, I can tell you that there are 445 homeless in Palm Springs not 239. I can tell you in the last 45 days there are 52 new clients we have not seen before. I can tell you the percentage of our clients relate to the LGBTQ+ community. I can tell you how many are living in the camps. I can tell you what each of these names are. I can tell you who is on drugs, who is mental health, how old they are, where they are from etc. So thank you for questioning our past statistics and now we can tell the true story of homeless in Palm Springs. Last year the Well Served over 70,000 meals. Two Saturdays ago the Well gave out 160 food boxes to families that are about to be homeless. So add an average of three per household and that is feeding 480 a week from the food boxes that are not counted in the 70,000 meals. This paints the picture.

We all agree that there is a criminal element with some homeless. We know its not an easy road and agree with Chief Mills. Not all homeless are criminals however. In removing the camps, where is DeDe going to live after her tent is destroyed? She is protected by others in the camp. Think of Travis a few months ago was arrested, his dog was taken away, some beat up old truck came and took his belongings to trash, then threw him in jail for a few days. When he got out, he had nothing! Had to start over and try to fight to get his dog back. With his arrest he still has no intentions of leaving Palm Springs.

We have to realize that homeless are humans and also need our help. We are a rich community and we can all make a difference working together. But it seems decisions are being made without knowing the story of what we see on the street. That is where big mistakes are made. The numbers tell the story. Unfortunately this subject is not going away anytime soon. We can say its a County or State issue, but it is effecting the basic daily lives of everyone that lives here. The Well does what it can to help those that want to leave town. We don't have enough bus passes, we don't offer one way ticket home, but know working with the police department, can be a positive thing for One way ticket home. But right now, the numbers are increasing. Cleaning out the camps is not only illegal (Martin Vs. Boise) but unless there is a temporary place for them to stay or anywhere for that matter, nothing will change, they will just find a different area of town but still in Palm Springs. They will be removed, find a new place, then that place will be removed and so on and so on and millions more spent unnecessarily.

We want more than anything for the City to succeed, be the leader in the nation. But throwing the buck down the street is not going to solve anything. Working with every agency that deals with homeless with open discussion, acting on decisions asap is the only way. Removing the camps will be a bigger disaster for our city. Finding a temporary solution for a place to stay will help you succeed towards your goal of housing.

Its time to learn from past mistakes and disagreements, because now we have a more serious painting of who is coming to town and who is about to be homeless. The numbers don't lie. The situation needs to be acted on now before it is totally out of control and will effect every sector of our community and we don't want to say I told you so...

Sincerely,

J. Matthew Naylor
Vice President
Well In The Desert