



September 12, 2016

The following recommendations resulted from discussions taking place within the Southwest Montana Continuum of Care Coalition regarding panhandling and vagrancy problems in uptown Butte; the problems may be, in part, related to homelessness. The recommendations are based on research as well as the knowledge and experience of people working on these issues daily. They are also based on the premise that all people should be treated with dignity and respect, that all of us have a responsibility to support solutions and that we all have a role in the solution. The Coalition is committed to implementing the following activities.

Recommendations for Effective Community Responses to Panhandling and Vagrancy

1. Public Education

One of the key components of an effective strategy is educating citizens and business owners about how to communicate effectively when panhandling and/or vagrancy is occurring around their business.

- *Provide training to business owners* on how to approach and speak with someone without escalating the situation; a trainer from Western Montana Mental Health Center could provide the training.
- *Public education and awareness campaign* on the importance of not giving panhandlers money; use of posters, public service announcements to build this awareness. This would be an on-going public education campaign. The Coalition will provide posters and work on public service announcements.

2. Direct Outreach from the Service/Treatment Community

Another component of an effective community response to this issue is ensuring people engaging in the behaviors have information and access to services they might need to help them overcome contributory problems.

- *Provide intensified outreach*; case managers who know services directly reach out to those engaging in the behaviors, develop trust and help attempt to link them with services. It is important to realize that accepting services is completely voluntary. Action, Inc. will begin more intensive outreach immediately.
- *Provide business owners with small, laminated cards that contain service contact information*; these can be given out by owners to people who are engaging in panhandling or vagrancy around their businesses. Cards would be provided by the Coalition.

3. Law Enforcement Support

Understanding that all people have the same rights, law enforcement is a component of an effective strategy for reducing panhandling and vagrancy.

- *Increase foot patrols in the uptown area*
- *Have case managers accompany officers on foot patrols* to help educate and build trust (Action, Inc. and possible the North American Indian Alliance)

4. Development of Alternative Donation Options for People (to replace direct giving to panhandlers)

The idea is to create options for people to donate if they feel like they want to help. This works in tandem with the public education piece to essentially cut off the flow of money directly to the panhandlers, thereby helping to de-incentivize the activity.

- *The Continuum of Care is exploring concepts for implementation of this kind of concept.*