

Placer County Environmental Health Alternative Approved Food Sources for the Homeless and Emergency Sheltering

Abstract of the Program – In response to a growing homeless population Placer County opened a temporary homeless shelter with a limited common area and no food preparation service areas at the Placer County Government Center property in Auburn California. The nonprofit organization Right Hand of Auburn operates the shelter and provides a total of 97 beds. This shelter was considered to be a temporary solution that has been operating for almost two years and is likely to remain the only option for several more years. Almost immediately the problem of ensuring a safe food supply was identified since the shelter facility had no food preparation areas or adequate equipment. The Environmental Health Division proposed a solution to ensure a safe food source was always available by working collaboratively with nonprofit organizations and local faith based organizations. Without the capability for safe food preparation at the homeless shelter food donations were accepted from sources that were well meaning but inadvertently creating a health concern as the food could not be ensured to be from a safe source and adequate temperature controls could not be maintained. In response to these concerns the Environmental Health Division elected to contact numerous faith based and other nonprofit organizations to evaluate the potential of the kitchens at their facilities to evaluate if they meet the standard health and safety code requirements. Environmental Health proposed to conduct evaluations and provide a health permit at no cost. Any kitchen that is in compliance with the health and safety standards would be issued a health permit reflecting the capacity of the facility. Environmental Health staff have also provided food safety training to volunteers and church members who utilize these facilities to provide safe food to the homeless shelter or other nonprofit humanitarian support efforts.




Problem Solving – The Placer County homeless shelter located in Auburn California opened in March of 2015 in an effort to provide suitable temporary housing for those in need. This facility was opened as an emergency operation and was meant to be a temporary facility while a permanent long term solution was developed. The homeless shelter quickly filled up shortly after opening. Partially as a result of the temporary nature of the shelter, and because of the significant infrastructure challenges, food preparation equipment to serve those housed at the facility could not be installed. The surrounding community was very generous and quick to respond providing food donations that unwittingly created a health and safety concern as most of the donated food was from home kitchens and other unknown sources without an adequate way to control the food temperatures or provide storage safely for more than a few hours. Without a safe food source an outbreak of a serious foodborne illness was a likely possibility.

Description of Program – Almost immediately after opening the shelter the non-profit organization Right Hand of Auburn had the problem of providing a safe food source for the residents. The Environmental Health Division evaluated the operation during the first few days of operation and advised that the food provided to the homeless population was coming from a wide variety of sources that included home kitchens and food leftover from events. The shelter did not have adequate facilities for food preparation or storage and those factors are creating serious health and safety concerns. The

Environmental Health Department choose to contact several local religious leaders in an effort to evaluate their “church kitchen” facilities with the goal of offering the potential use of these kitchens for food production for the homeless shelter. Environmental Health staff would perform an evaluation inspection of the kitchen to determine if it was in compliance with health and safety requirements and that it had the capacity to produce a large volume of food safely maintaining proper temperatures and sanitary conditions. Environmental Health staff would also provide safe food handling classes to any volunteers or members of the church to help ensure that the facility remains a safe food supplier for the shelter. At first these efforts were met with some skepticism and the representatives of the facilities contacted seemed fearful of being “inspected” by the County. Management staff then visited each facility to explain the program and ideology behind it to gain approval. Environmental Health staff then evaluated the kitchen and the potential meal production volume that could be safely produced. If the Church agreed to allow food production from their facility as a nonprofit venture, the Environmental Health Division would issue a permit at no cost to the facility. The permit would document that their facility meets health and safety standards for a food production operation. The Church could then utilize their kitchen facility for any other nonprofit support it wanted to. If the Church choose in the future to rent out their facility for use as a profit making venture, the County would issue a standard health permit for that purpose since the facility was already determined to be in compliance with the health and safety requirements. After interviewing the volunteers and representatives of the church facilities that desired to participate, food safety classes were provided at no cost as most of the volunteers possessed little or no knowledge of safe practices when preparing meals for nearly 100 people.

After successfully implementing the program with faith based kitchens the program was expanded to include other nonprofit organizations including the Elks lodge, Moose Lodge, and the Salvation Army. The program was then again expanded to evaluate these facilities for the capacity to provide food for other humanitarian purposes and to provide food during emergency situations involving large scale evacuations. Any facility that meets the health and safety standards of a public retail food facility can provide safe food for the homeless shelter or for large numbers of people that are temporarily displaced due to an evacuation in the event of a large scale emergency incident.

This program has been successful in assisting the Community to ensure food safety in meeting the needs of the homeless shelter and by providing alternative food preparation facilities in the event of an emergency requiring an evacuation and temporary sheltering of large numbers of people. To date the following facilities have been inspected, verified to meet health and safety standards, and issued a permit at no cost:

Facility	Address	Permit type
 Parkside Nazarene Preparation	3885 Richardson Dr., Auburn	Full Prep Community Kitchen
 Seventh-Day Adventist	12225 Rock Creek Rd., Auburn	Full Prep + Community Garden
 St. Lukes	124 Orange St., Auburn	Full Prep Community Kitchen

🍎 Pioneer United Methodist	1338 Lincoln Way, Auburn	Full Prep Community Kitchen
🍎 Salvation Army- Auburn	286 Sutter St., Auburn	Limited Prep Comm. Kitchen
🍎 Salvation Army- Auburn		Mobile Food Unit
🍎 Faith Lutheran Church	1115 Combie Rd., Meadow	Limited Prep Comm. Kitchen
🍎 Sierra Grace	1260 Wesley Ln., Auburn	Limited Prep Comm. Kitchen
🍎 Gold Country Church	using Parkside Nazarene	Full Prep Comm. Kitchen
🍎 Auburn Interfaith Food Closet	12972 Earhart Ave., Auburn	Food Closet/Soup Kitchen
🍎 Elijah's Jar Food Closet	24617 Foresthill Rd., Foresthill	Food Closet/Soup Kitchen
🍎 N. Calif. Conference of Seventh Day Adventists	12225 Rock Creek Rd., Auburn	Food Closet/Soup Kitchen
🍎 Placer Food Bank	8284 Industrial Ave., Roseville	Food Closet/Soup Kitchen
🍎 The Salt Mine	590 Lincoln Blvd., Lincoln	Food Closet/Soup Kitchen
🍎 Salvation Army-Auburn Corps	286 Sutter St., Auburn	Food Closet/Soup Kitchen
🍎 Salvation Army-Colfax	320 S Canyon Way, Colfax	Food Closet/Soup Kitchen
🍎 Salvation Army-Roseville	100 Lincoln St., Roseville	Food Closet/Soup Kitchen
🍎 Sierra Reach Ministries	18015 Applegate Rd., Applegate	Food Closet/Soup Kitchen
🍎 St Vincent de Paul	503 Giuseppe Ct., Roseville	Food Closet/Soup Kitchen
🍎 St Vincent de Paul	105 Bonita St., Roseville	Food Closet/Soup Kitchen



Parkside-Nazarene Full Retail Kitchen

Seventh-day Adventist Community Garden



Salvation Army workers and mobile food truck in response to the Oroville Dam Evacuation incident

All County facilities including the fairgrounds and veteran halls are currently being evaluated. The permits range from large full service commercial grade kitchens to limited preparation used in the distribution of individual portions of prepackaged products, or products produced at a retail facility. Staff have even identified one facility that has a community garden that can supply fresh vegetables. A mobile food vehicle owned and operated by the Salvation Army is has been approved as a mobile food facility that can respond to emergency shelters to supply food to those displaced during a large scale evacuation as well as serve the homeless population at the County shelter. The food closet/soup kitchen facilities were all evaluated for storage and for limited preparation of food for distribution to those in need.

Responding to Economic Downturn – Homeless populations began to increase in the Auburn California area as the downturn in the economy continued for several years. The economic recovery of the last few years did not seem to change the growing population of those in need of shelters as the more impoverished members of the community did not seem to benefit from the improvement in the overall economy. An encampment near the Auburn Airport was considered to be a hazardous place for people to live as it was in the direct flight path and in close proximity of the aircraft and the people were asked to move. As a result a new encampment was formed at the Placer County Government Center in Auburn that continued to grow in size over the following months. Inclement weather in the winter of 2015 made it clear to the elected officials that a shelter was needed to adequately protect the homeless population. The encampment at the government center was also beginning to effect the function of daily business operations and needed to be moved to another location. The shelter was opened in March of 2016 and the need for a safe reliable food supply to provide for the residents of the shelter was almost immediately identified as a problem. The Environmental Health Division designed and implemented this successful program to assist in finding solutions and to protect the health of the homeless population utilizing the Placer County shelter facility.

Cost of the Program - The cost of the program is negligible. The Staff utilized to implement this program are included in the annual food safety inspection and enforcement budget. Evaluation of the kitchens is performed by staff while they are in the field performing their normal daily work or conducted by the Environmental Health Manager. The food safety training classes that are offered to volunteers at no cost is part of the existing curriculum offered to the retail food industry employees. One extra class session has been conducted for the members of the nonprofit organizations that are participating and the volunteers at the homeless shelter. Since then the volunteers have been included as part of the existing training program as space in the regular classes is available.

Results/Success of the Program – Implementation of this program has been completely successful in accomplishing the objective of identifying and ensuring that the community has access to facilities capable of providing food to the homeless shelter that meets all health and safety standards. The Environmental Health Division has also provided safe food handling training to 78 volunteers from the faith based organizations and Right Hand Auburn staff to help ensure the food preparation at these facilities is done in a safe and sanitary manner. Three new permit categories were developed to standardize compliance with this new program. To date the Environmental Health Division has inspected and permitted six full preparation community kitchens that can be used by nonprofit organizations to safely produce large volumes of food for use at the shelter or for emergency incidents. Environmental Health is currently working with the County to upgrade two additional kitchens as full preparation community food facilities. Three limited preparation kitchens have been identified and permitted for simple preparation of food that is served the same day. There are now eleven food closets and soup kitchens that can store and distribute canned foods and offer food that is prepared and served the same day for a specific known amount of people so that storage of processed food is not necessary. A community garden has also been evaluated and is available to provide for the shelter and for those that have difficulty accessing fresh foods as meeting the community garden standards.

The next phase of this program will be to continue to inspect and permit facilities that can be used for nonprofit humanitarian goals as well as for emergency response operations. The Salvation Army, for example, has a mobile food truck that meets compliance standards and has been given a permit to operate in that capacity providing food for the homeless, or supplying food at temporary shelters during an emergency incident. Some of the Veteran's Halls in Placer County are being evaluated to see if they meet standards and can be used by the Red Cross and other volunteer organizations to provide large volumes of prepared food during emergency operations. Environmental Health staff are making arrangements to meet with the Veterans Department staff as we continue to expand this successful and innovative program.

Project Worthiness-

Placer County's commitment to help those in need and those that are homeless is a very worthy project and the support and collaboration from all of the County Government Departments and nonprofit organizations in support of this project is impressive. The Environmental Health Division actively engaging community partners and developing a unique and progressive solution to ensure that food from safe and reliable sources is available to the homeless shelter is an excellent example of the local government working with the community for the greater good. The teamwork and collaboration that was developed as part of this program between County government and our community partners is inspiring. The next phase of this program will enable the community to be better prepared for emergency events that may require opening emergency shelters for evacuees. The program was tested recently when over 180,000 people were evacuated due to the Oroville dam incident. The Salvation Army mobilized their food truck that was permitted as part of this program to respond to the Placer County Fairgrounds to provide food for those that were seeking temporary shelter. The Kitchen facility at the fairgrounds was also utilized by the Salvation Army for food preparation and distribution. It has

been a pleasure to be a part of this successful program and we are proud to submit this project for consideration of an Excellence in Environmental Health award.

The following link is for a brief video overview of the project: [Click here to watch a video about the environmental health program](#)