

November 23, 2015

Dear Fort Bragg City Council:

The proposed ban on social service organizations from the downtown district of Fort Bragg strikes me as ill-conceived on two levels:

On one level it is economically counterproductive to the health of the down town area. Parents and Friends alone employs over 135 coastal residents and serves around 90 disabled clients through the department of Developmental Services and the department of Rehabilitation at 306 E. Redwood Avenue. These are employees and clients who eat at the Laurel St. Deli, the Sandwich shop, Taka's, Cucina Verona, Headlands Coffee House, Lee's Chinese, Cowlicks, Bernello's, etc. They also shop at Purity and other downtown stores. These are locally owned businesses that also employ local residents. This does not include other service organizations like Art Explorers and Safe passage and their clients and staff, not to mention others, local or from out of town, who may need to meet with these service organizations or their clients and spend their day using downtown businesses and services.

Parents and Friends now leases about 6,000 sq. ft. of office space which had previously been vacant for multiple years. If Parents and Friends moved back to Cypress St., outside the downtown business district, the convenient retailers would be Safeway, Starbucks, McDonald's and Roundtable Pizza, all corporate franchises. With a population of 7,250 and a median household income of \$35,438, compared to \$60,190 for California as a whole, can Fort Bragg really afford to deny access to the downtown business area to over 250 local residents? That's almost 5% of the total population. Can the downtown business owners be in favor of this?

The second issue with the ban on social service organizations is what it says to the world, and to ourselves, about who we are and what we may become as a community. I have often had people from outside the area ask how we, Parents and Friends, were able to achieve the total acceptance of the community to the disabled we serve. The answer is that we did not accomplish that acceptance, it already existed. It is the historic sense of community that has existed on the coast from the beginning.

In 1955 Lotte Moise, Dodie Scott, and others refused to send their children to institutions even though doctors and educators insisted they must. The community agreed and supported them. The superintendent of schools donated supplies to the school they started, the Paul Bunyan School, because he was restricted from allowing them to go to public school by the State which deemed them to be "unable to learn". Lotte became a national and even international leader and guest speaker, but she didn't talk about what she had accomplished, she talked about what Fort Bragg had accomplished, and how it took a community willing to recognize and accept all its members, and not just those with a voice.

History has shown us what can happen when a society or a community defines, isolates and restricts a segment of its population. Avoidance leads to isolation, isolation leads to mistrust and mistrust leads to fear, which must then be controlled or eradicated. As a nation we are still trying to deal with the aftermath of isolation and segregation which began in the 1700's, led to a

bloody civil war in the mid 1800's and still isn't resolved after almost 300 years. I'm not saying there may not be a problem, but if there is, let's deal with it openly and honestly and find a resolution that does not, accidentally or intentionally, cause more harm than good. We must be sure the cure is not worse than the malady, and that the most fragile members of our community are not the ones who pay the price, because they have no voice. We are coastal residents. That is not us. That may be someone else, but it's not us, not here. And long may this be true.

Rick Moon
Executive Director
Parents and Friends, Inc.