

BEVERLY HILLS *COURIER*

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LETTERS

Recently, a homeless man who had spent his days on a street corner and nights sleeping behind a dumpster, passed away at a local hospital. He was 55 and had been on the streets of Beverly Hills for the past 21 years. We were deeply saddened by his death but comforted to know he died under the care of a compassionate team which treated him with dignity and respect.

He managed to subsist on the streets from the well-intentioned, yet counterproductive efforts, of the community. From time to time, he swept up around a local business. People occasionally gave him spare change or food. Years passed. While he was among those on the streets who were truly in need, the majority of panhandlers are not homeless and "work" the streets for easy cash. The minority who are mentally ill and destitute are better served by supportive care and services than by handouts. Either way, panhandling is a problem, not a solution.

The City partners with Step Up on Second, a nationally recognized mental health treatment agency, to provide our Changing Lives and Sharing Places Program (CLASP). This offers options to street life for individuals willing to accept assistance.

Many want help but struggle to make a change. It took more than two years for our gentleman to decide whether to stay with his miserable, but known world, or try the alternatives provided by the outreach team. One Monday, he said: "It's time." However, by then he was so ill, went directly to the hospital and died the following

Sunday.

The single most effective way to end panhandling and open doors to alternatives to street life, is stop giving on the street.

Express your generosity and compassion by supporting social service providers, the faith-based community, non-profits and other agencies serving those needing help.

For information, contact the City of Beverly Hills, Community Services Department/Human Services at 310-285-1006.

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