

## County reviewing services to Calistoga's seniors

The Calistoga Family Center says need is soaring

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CALISTOGA — Community members are teaming up with Napa County Health and Human Services to find ways of improving services to Calistoga's large senior population.

Providing services to seniors is likely "the most important social service problem that is going to face Napa County, particularly Calistoga," said Victoria Li, executive director of Calistoga Family Center.

Last month Li called for a meeting that included Randy Snowden, director of the county's health agency, and Alice Hughey, the agency's assistant director, as well as Dawnine Dyer, president of the Family Center's board of directors, and Mayor Chris Canning to discuss concerns about providing senior services.

The county agreed to assign an expert in social services to review the Calistoga Family Center's delivery of services. City officials, Family Center staff and other agencies will be interviewed to assess whether the Family Center is the best solution to the city's growing needs.

"We are optimistic that we may be able to develop strategies and identify even more resources to assist our seniors who reside in a fairly isolated rural community," said Li.

The Family Center was founded in 1999 by local educators and community members to improve services to Calistoga residents. It provides some services on its own and coordinates with other providers.

America's population is aging as baby boomers enter their retirement years. In Calistoga, the 65-and-older population is about 19 percent, according to the 2010 U.S. Census. The seniors living in Calistoga are not wealthy, Li said, and the demand on the nonprofit is sharply increasing.

In the last three years the number of seniors on the active case list grew from about 50 to 250, Li said, with more requests for emergency fund assistance last year than ever before.

"We had to rent a second office because the number of seniors was so great," she noted. "We are the only social services agency here. We have a terrible need for more services."

The city has committed to provide \$20,000 to the Family Center, but that's not enough to cover the needs of the community, and the city's coffers are stretched thin already, officials said.

Seniors living in Rancho de Calistoga in particular are reaching out for help, in part because of rising rents in the mobile home park. Most are on fixed incomes, cannot afford past rent increases and are facing additional increases in the near future, Li said.

When Li first arrived at the Family Center three years ago, she heard stories of people not

buying medication or food in order to pay their rent. Financial problems such as these create stress, depression and feelings of isolation, she said.

Some seniors are shut-ins, and others fear being shut out, she said.

There is the added problem that some don't have health insurance and outside agencies that provide the care these older adults need may come to town once a month at most. Even seniors with health care through agencies such as Kaiser face the challenge of transportation to Santa Rosa where Kaiser facilities are located, Li said.

"Transportation is a huge issue for seniors and for our families, too," Li said.

Li said she hopes the county's analysis will steer the Family Center in the right direction.

"This is one of the hardest issues I've ever confronted or seen," she said. "Luckily, the city wants a solution."