

# LTUSD working to help homeless students

By Kathryn Reed

Thanksgiving weekend so often is about gatherings of families in a warm home with an abundance of food.

That isn't the case for 300 Lake Tahoe Unified School District students. They are homeless. Another 44 are in foster families.

The school board this month voted to expand the duties and hours of the foster-homeless student advocate. This person will now be full time and will work in the elementary schools, not just at South Tahoe Middle and High schools.

"The current staffing is insufficient to meet the needs of these students and further does not allow time to service the elementary schools where early intervention would be ideal," the staff report from the Nov. 17 meeting reads. "Additionally, the number of homeless students typically increases by 20-30 throughout the school year as local seasonal employment is gained and lost."

Through the state's McKinney Vento program the district receives \$34 for each student who is identified as homeless or in foster care. Homeless means living in a non-traditional residence like a hotel, car or multiple families in a dwelling designed for one family.

While the money from the state is not much, the district will tap community organizations to help supply the basics – from toiletries to clothes to food. The thinking is that by reaching students sooner they will more likely do well in school at an earlier age.

“A lot of those kids are resilient. They don’t want to stand out. They want to fit in. We try to give them that opportunity,” Superintendent Jim Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News*. “By identifying them early we can continue up through middle school and high school. The hope is they are better prepared.”

The aide helps the child and his or her parent/guardian be acquainted with the social resources that are available. This includes getting vaccinations, dental checkups and other medical care.

The district is able to provide added tutoring and counseling when appropriate, as well as school supplies and backpacks.

When the basics are taken care of students are more likely to attend school as well as perform at a higher level.

While enrollment has been increasing, the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunches remains at about 60 percent, or 2,370 students.

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## **2015, 2016 likely to be hottest on record**

**By Tom Miles, Reuters**

This year will be the hottest on record and 2016 could be even hotter due to the El Niño weather pattern, the World Meteorological Organization said on Wednesday, warning that inaction on climate change could see global average temperatures rise by 6 degrees Celsius or more.

WMO director-general Michel Jarraud said it was still possible

for a global climate summit starting in Paris on Monday to agree steps to could keep the rise within 3.6 Fahrenheit)over pre-industrial times, a target set down in 2010 to try to prevent a dramatic increase in extreme weather.

“But the more we wait for action, the more difficult it will be,” he told a news conference.

**Read the whole story**

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## **Calif. is still cleaning up drug rehab system**

**By Christina Jewett, Reveal**

California prosecutors are brokering plea deals in more than 11 criminal cases as health leaders overhaul the state’s drug rehabilitation care more than two years after a Center for Investigative Reporting and CNN investigation into the system in Southern California.

Rehab Racket found that drug rehab counselors fabricated accounts of therapy sessions and diagnosed teens with addictions they didn’t have. Rehab operators bribed vulnerable people with cash and cigarettes to attend taxpayer-funded drug rehabilitation sessions.

The Center for Investigative Reporting teamed with CNN to expose fraud in California’s taxpayer-funded drug and alcohol counseling program.

Top state officials repeatedly declined to grant an interview over the findings. But after weeks of requests, the Department of Health Care Services jumped into action. Authorities

dispatched audit “strike teams” to Drug Medi-Cal rehabilitation facilities throughout California and eventually cut off funding to more than 200 clinic sites. Auditors forwarded their findings to the state Department of Justice, leading to 11 people being charged and nine convicted.

One doctor who was a focus of the series is still fighting for his right to continue billing the Medi-Cal program. Howard Oliver oversaw care at 19 Los Angeles-area drug rehab clinics – often without seeing clients in person. After the news series, the state began a long process to ban Oliver, which the doctor is appealing.

Additionally, authorities in Southern California have begun putting promised changes in place to overhaul their systems for providing drug rehabilitation for the needy. In August, federal officials approved the five-year statewide pilot project – which already has taken effect in the Bay Area.

Richard Rawson, co-director of the UCLA Integrated Substance Abuse Programs, said that in 2007, his team wrote the basics for the plan, which provides a wide range of evidence-based services for recovering addicts.

Physician Howard Oliver was featured in the original Rehab Racket investigation. Since it aired, the state has banned him from billing the Medi-Cal program.Credit: CNN

Rawson credits the CIR/CNN series – as well as new options to revamp substance abuse care under President Obama’s health care law – with getting the new plan set for implementation in the coming months.

“(Rehab Racket) was kind of like a slap across the face ... which meant that Sacramento couldn’t go on ignoring this,” Rawson said last week. “It has resulted in them putting together what I think is a really good plan.”

Under the new system, clients will have access to intervention

services built into primary health care, up to 90 days of residential care, specialized drug withdrawal treatment and doctor consultations.

The system is being implemented now in Southern California and will be launched in participating counties throughout the state. It will have several layers of accountability reviews on the state and county levels, said Marlies Perez, deputy director of the Department of Health Care Services' Substance Use Disorder Compliance Division.

"We want to be sure it's done right," she said. "We learned a lot here in California and want to make sure we have taken those lessons and built the best system for our beneficiaries."

The Rehab Racket series focused on several service providers who were arrested shortly before or after the stories ran. They include George Ilouno, who collected more than \$1 million in Medi-Cal payments even though he was banned from billing the program. Clients at Ilouno's Long Beach rehab center said they were paid to show up, and counselors said they were urged to forge therapy notes.

Federal authorities also arrested the medical director and 19 staff members of Atlantic Recovery Services, alleging that they perpetrated a \$50 million fraud by falsely diagnosing teens with addictions or documenting services that weren't provided.

A second wave of state Department of Justice arrests began in January and continued through June. During that time, authorities charged 11 people with participating in scams to bilk California's drug rehabilitation system.

The recent arrests include the proprietors of Able Family Support, a rehab center that claimed to see 179 clients on a day in April 2013 when CIR and CNN reporters were counting clients entering the building. The total counted: no more than

30.

The news reports featured an interview with Able Family's executive director Alexander Ferdman, who was one of two program leaders charged in January with grand theft, identity theft and presenting false Medi-Cal and insurance claims. He pleaded guilty to grand theft in September and was sentenced to five years' probation. Ferdman did not return a call to his cellphone seeking comment.

In June, the former operator and medical director of Southland Outpatient Recovery were charged with grand theft, insurance fraud and Medi-Cal fraud. Court records say the state's audit team found that bills for rehab were submitted in the names of children who had no addictions. One young woman told investigators that she attended four sessions at the center, but 53 sessions were billed in her name.

Alexander Ferdman pleaded guilty to grand theft in September after The Center for Investigative Reporting and CNN exposed billing inconsistencies at his Panorama City drug rehabilitation clinic. Credit: CNN

Southland's operator, Sunday Okoro, and its medical director, Dr. Marvin White Jr., are accused of collecting \$1.4 million in unearned government payments. They have pleaded not guilty. Okoro did not respond to calls for comment, and White referred to his attorney, who declined to comment.

Oliver, the doctor who was the focus of the CIR and CNN coverage, is waiting to find out if he will be banned from billing the Medi-Cal program statewide.

CIR and CNN examined Oliver's track record, noting that he held a leadership role at 19 Drug Medi-Cal counseling sites. In an interview with CIR, he conceded that he signed paperwork for rehab clients without meeting them and may have signed off on sham cases. His job, he maintained, was not to be a policeman.

State officials took a closer look at Oliver, records show. After reviewing the files of 30 of his rehab clients, the state filed an accusation seeking the ban in January 2014. The 10 counts against Oliver included failure to provide medical direction, false establishment of medical necessity for rehab services and substandard services.

Oliver fought the case at a June 2014 administrative hearing. An administrative law judge affirmed nine out of the 10 counts against Oliver, saying each was grounds for indefinite suspension from the Medi-Cal program. The judge concluded that Oliver was “rubber stamping” paperwork without making thoughtful medical judgments.

Oliver said in an interview Nov. 2 that the state’s case against him was unfair and an example of bullying by the government. He said the state’s experts were not familiar with the Drug Medi-Cal program.

“They didn’t have any experts whatsoever,” he said. “They called them that. I can call myself an astronaut, too.”

Oliver appealed the administrative court decision, telling Sacramento County Superior Court that he was “wrongly suspended” in a case rife with procedural errors. Last month, the judge filed a tentative ruling reversing some of the administrative law judge’s findings related to Oliver’s client-assessment practices.

The judge is expected to finalize his decision by January. For now, Oliver remains suspended from billing the Medi-Cal program.

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# Reno man dies in Kingsbury Grade crash

A Reno man died Wednesday night in a single-vehicle accident on Kingsbury Grade.

The 52-year-old was driving west about four miles from Foothill Road at 5pm Nov. 25 when the accident occurred.

“He went into the mountain and crashed the Budget rent-a-truck,” Nevada Highway Patrolman Dan Lopez told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He said a medical issue may have led to the crash. There were also chain controls at the time. It has not been determined if weather was a factor.

On Thanksgiving Day the driver in a rollover accident on westbound Spooner Summit walked away without injuries. Lopez said the driver lost control in the slushy conditions.

“Everyone needs to drive slow and take extra time because of the winter weather,” Lopez said.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

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# Money, clout on the line for Calif. teachers union

By Laurel Rosenhall, Calmatters

The California Teachers Association, one of Sacramento’s most powerful interests, is heading into an extraordinary year with

decisions on the ballot, in the Capitol and in the courts holding the potential to impact its clout for many years to come.

Billions of dollars for schools will likely be at stake on the 2016 ballot as well as pivotal campaigns for state Legislature and a question about union pensions. Meanwhile, the Capitol is expecting a robust debate about how schools are evaluated and courts will hear two lawsuits challenging the teachers union.

“It’s a big year for education in California. To the extent we’re part of that, it’s a big year for us,” said union president Eric Heins.

CTA has become a force in Sacramento by pouring millions into influencing ballot measures and electing lawmakers, then millions more lobbying legislators after they take office. The union’s formidable political operation – spending about \$200 million on campaigns and lobbying in the last 15 years – is funded by roughly 300,000 classroom teachers who pay approximately \$1,000 each in annual union dues.

**Read the whole story**

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## **Kings Beach man going to prison for crimes in Truckee**

Frederick Santos-Coy, 24, of Kings Beach was sentenced to three years and eight months in prison for reckless discharge of a firearm and a special allegation of being a felon in possession of a firearm.

On Aug. 26 Truckee police officers found Santos-Coy carrying a

gun in The Meadows area of Glenshire. The suspect started running, and at one point, fired gunshots into the air. At no point were the gunshots directed at police or witnesses in the area. During the arrest process, officers also discovered a small brush fire had started in the area.

On Nov. 17 Santos-Coy pleaded guilty to the charges.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

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## **Man accused in Tahoe crime pleads to charges in SF**

**By Vivian Ho, San Francisco Chronicle**

A man accused of brazenly snatching a toddler from his mother on a San Francisco Muni bus was previously convicted on separate false-imprisonment charges, including one in which he was accused of attempting to kidnap a woman at knifepoint in South Lake Tahoe, authorities said Tuesday.

Sudesh Singh, 45, of Oakland pleaded not guilty in San Francisco Superior Court on Tuesday to felony kidnapping and child endangerment charges in connection with last week's abduction attempt.

Authorities revealed in court that prior to Singh's arrest, he had been detained by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for "acting suspiciously," apparently at the U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services office on Sansome Street. It was not immediately clear why he was let go.

**[Read the whole story](#)**

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# Teen robbed on South Lake Tahoe bike trail



A South Lake Tahoe teenager was robbed Monday while walking on the path behind Motel 6 in South Lake Tahoe.

The 16-year-old told officers an adult male appeared from out of the bushes with his hand in a trench coat pocket, pointing it toward him like a gun. No weapon was actually seen or mentioned. The suspect demanded money from the victim, who promptly surrendered what he had. The suspect left the area on foot.

The victim was unharmed.

The suspect is described a white male, about 50 years old, 6 feet to 6-feet-3, stringy hair, and long bushy beard. He was wearing black sunglasses, black trench coat, grey undershirt, tattered blue jeans, and tattered white shoes.

Anyone with information is asked to contact SLTPD at 530.542.6100 or Lake Tahoe Secret Witness at 530.541.6800.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

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# Tensions grow as Calif. groundwater law takes shape

By Ryan Sabalow, Sacramento Bee

HANFORD – Drive the farm roads of sparsely populated Kings County, and it's hard to miss them: clusters of pipes, cylinders and electrical boxes jutting from the soil every few hundred yards or so, in almost every direction. These are the groundwater pumps that ensure water soaks the vast fields of tomatoes, corn, alfalfa, cherries, almonds and walnuts even when the ditches run dry.

They've helped make agriculture the single largest industry in Kings County, where crop values actually have grown by \$753 million during California's drought.

So maybe it shouldn't have surprised County Supervisor Doug Verboon, who owns a small walnut farm, that he got a hostile reception at a recent gathering after he suggested the county impose restrictions on drilling new wells and selling groundwater to other counties.

The tensions in Kings County offer just a taste of what's expected in cities and towns throughout California's farm belt over the next few years as local officials work to enact the state's first-ever groundwater regulations. They are under orders to begin actively managing underground aquifers that for generations have been treated as a private resource, with property owners empowered to dig wells and extract as much water as they wanted without particular regard for their neighbors or government agencies.

This year alone, farmers across the state lost nearly 9

million acre-feet of surface water from the state and federal water delivery networks, nearly half their usual supply.

**Read the whole story**

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# Retailers losing the war on Thanksgiving

**By Dave Jamieson, Huffington Post**

In the run-up to Thanksgiving this year, TJX, the parent company to discount chains Marshalls and T.J. Maxx, has been airing an advertisement about its decision to keep its stores closed on the holiday. By bucking the national trend of starting sales on Thanksgiving Day, the spot suggests, TJX is taking a stand for family time over the holidays.

“Imagine a world where the holidays were about people again,” a voice in the ad, titled “Bring Back the Holidays,” intones. “Where doorbusters referred to loved ones pouring through the doors.”

So is the backlash against stores opening on Thanksgiving finally bearing fruit? Are retailers ready to give the holiday back to your drunk uncle and the NFL?

Not really. Many of the nation’s biggest retailers – Walmart, Target, Kmart and Best Buy, to name just a few – still want you to skip the apple pie Thursday evening to roam their stores for Black Friday deals. But don’t be surprised if, in the coming years, retailers start reverting back to being closed on Thanksgiving Day and pushing their sales to Friday morning.

**Read the whole story**