



PHOTO BY AISLINN MCSHANE

Signs outside the BeLoved Asheville headquarters call for better treatment of the homeless population by both police and citizens.

## Solicitation charges highlight homelessness

AISLINN MCSHANE  
Contributor  
dmcsbane@unca.edu

Soliciting charges in Asheville rise, according to local homeless shelters. The homeless population continues to struggle to find safe living arrangements.

“Panhandling is a way to meet basic needs oftentimes when it’s hard to find economic means otherwise, like if the work dries up or something,” said Amy Cantrell, founder of BeLoved Asheville, a homeless support center.

Public records show in February there were 112 soliciting charges in the city of Asheville alone.

“It is a common complaint we get from people downtown, getting panhandled. Part of the reason we do focus on it when we do is because of aggression,” said Asheville Police Sgt. Evan Coward.

Panhandling citations rose 1.2 percent in 2016, reported by to BeLoved Asheville. They tracked the citations received by people in the Asheville shelters during the Housing, Not Handcuffs campaign, a campaign to end the criminalization of homelessness. Cantrell said the trend continued to rise in March 2017.

“Trespass is the biggest charge that we’ve seen by far. Almost

half of the charges were trespassing. Closely behind that were panhandling and public urination,” Cantrell said. “If you have a record, it’s gonna be much more difficult to find jobs, find housing and then people have to turn to panhandling to get the resources that they need, so all this is sort of cyclical in nature.”

Some of these citations may be more serious than people first realize. Officials at Human Rights Watch reported, as of 2007, 13 states had laws wherein someone could be labeled a registered sex offender for public urination.

“Many times over my career I’ve

checked out with some who I suspected was probably panhandling,” Asheville resident Coward said. “You try to talk to them and kind of see what’s going on in their life and you’ll actually run into someone who maybe feels like they don’t belong or maybe wants to hurt themselves or is just in a dark place. As police officers, we come across people a lot of times on the worst day of their life.”

Homeless people still face a lot of stereotypes as well. Many people assume homeless people are all criminals, or all addicted to drugs

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## Opioid crisis endures 30 years after its start

BRAILEY SHERIDAN  
Contributor  
bsherida@unca.edu

Laura Cleveland’s traumatic overdose urged her to confront her opioid drug disorder and find a solution.

“I took an overdose one night of about 14 pills. As I was in the emergency room with my husband and my children came in, the look on their faces, that scared look of ‘Is mom going to be OK?’” Cleveland said.

Cleveland, 46, said her dependence on opioids began when a doctor prescribed her opioids to

relieve the pain from chronic migraines almost 30 years ago.

“After exhausting a lengthy list of actual migraine medicines, my neurologist at the time put me on Percocet. When I first started on this medicine, my life was normal, everyday stuff. I only took it when I had a severe migraine,” said Cleveland, an Iron Station resident.

She said she does not remember when her use of Percocet became a drug disorder. It was only when she overdosed that she became aware of the gravity of her problems and sought help for them, said Cleveland, a daycare provider.

“I decided right there that I was done. I spent a week in a mental hospital. When I came out, I did hold onto my pills for a bit. I did take about six pills within a six month period when I had a bad migraine. After that, I just quit,” Cleveland said.

The opioid crisis began in the early 1990s and involves the misuse and or abuse of prescription painkillers such as heroin and fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioids, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Eric Boyce, assistant vice chancellor for public safety at UNC

Asheville, said many people turned from prescription painkillers to heroin because of the lower price. With an influx of heroin users, makers began using fentanyl as a cutting agent, which increases the potency of the drug.

“The epidemic has come with a number of overdoses and deaths because of the fentanyl. It’s not the heroin, per say, in its pure form or with what it would normally be cut with, but the fentanyl that makes it extremely dangerous,” Boyce said.

The impact of the opioid crisis

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