

SHOULD HOT TEAMS BE EXPANDED AND FOR WHOM?

SUMMARY

This report focuses on the wide range of services that are available to the chronically homeless population of San Diego County, with a particular emphasis on the Homeless Outreach Teams (HOT). The HOT teams represent a collaborative outreach effort between the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) and the City of San Diego Police Department (SDPD). Issues highlighted in this report include; general characteristics of chronically homeless individuals, the approximate size of this population, and how the HOT teams function. The report commends the compassionate commitment of the HOT team members and recognizes the need for more shelter beds for the homeless as well as expanded outreach and support for homeless juveniles.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to find out how the Homeless Outreach Teams function, how they have helped the chronically homeless, and whether their coverage could be expanded to include the homeless juvenile population.

PROCEDURES

Interviews:

- San Diego Department Homeless Outreach Team Members (SDPD Officers, Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) Human Services Specialist, and Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (P.E.R.T.))
- Deputy Director, Central Region, HHSA
- Administrative Staff, San Diego County HHSA Homeless Services
- Administrative Staff, Community Shelters
- Sheriff's Department, North County Officers
- San Diego City Police Officer, Mounted Division

Sites Visited:

- Various community based private shelters
- Homeless Outreach Team Operations Office, Pacific Beach
- Monarch High School, Polinsky Children's Center

Documents Reviewed:

- San Diego Regional Homeless Task Force, 2003
- March 2003 Funding Study, San Diego Regional Homeless Task Force
- Homeless Outreach Team Literature and PowerPoint Presentation, March 2004

Report 2003/4-07

- The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (PL 100-77)
- A Summary Report on California's Programs to Address Homelessness, Prepared for Governor Gray Davis, March 2002
- Assembly Bill 2034, Chapter 518
- *National Coalition for the Homeless Fact Sheet #3*, September 2002
- Newspaper Articles

Other Activities:

- Ride-A-Longs with the Homeless Outreach Team

DISCUSSION

The members of the San Diego County Grand Jury perform their duties at a downtown location. During our individual commutes to our work location, whether it is by trolley, bus, or private vehicle, many of us have noted what appear to be homeless people on our downtown streets. These are the people we see daily with cardboard signs requesting assistance, some walking our city streets mumbling to themselves, sleeping in storefronts or on our city streets. Moreover, we have learned of and have seen the homeless juveniles that congregate at downtown transit sites and on our street corners. As jurors, we have asked ourselves, how would these individuals access or even learn about what city and county services might be available to get them off the street and onto a path of independent living.

During the study of this topic, we learned of a multi-disciplinary regional (city and county) team that deals specifically with the chronically homeless adult population in the downtown area. These teams are the Homeless Outreach Teams (HOT) and can be seen patrolling city streets in the Homeless Outreach Van.

The homeless within San Diego County represent a challenging population to aid. The county and city provide a variety of services and programs to help these individuals. In addition, there are many private organizations, such as churches, veterans groups, and volunteer groups, who give their time and resources to help these people. Yet, accessing aid, or even knowing it is available, continues to be a significant problem for the homeless. Most programs and funding for services to the homeless are not available in one location. Clients need to access various services through separate points of contact for local, state, and federal service agency programs. Community service providers are required to access funding through different local, state, and federal agencies. According to a report prepared for Governor Davis, the current system is fragmented and needs to be integrated and more accessible¹.

In 1998, the Homeless Outreach Teams were developed in response to the visible homeless on our downtown streets and concerns of business owners and citizens. These

¹ A Summary Report on California's Programs to Address Homelessness, Prepared for Governor Gray Davis, March 2002.

teams are comprised of a San Diego Police officer, a Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (P.E.R.T.) clinician, and a Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) human services specialist. These teams reach out to the chronically homeless one individual at a time and together they attempt to address an individual's reason for being homeless.

The chronically homeless serviced by these teams are individuals who do not have a permanent address and are homeless six or more months per year. Chronically homeless persons are the most visible members of the homeless population and generally the most difficult to help. The chronically homeless typically have any or all of the following: severe mental illness, substance abuse problems, chronic physical health problems or disabilities that prevent them from working. Many of the chronically homeless cycle through short-term crisis programs such as hospital emergency rooms, psychiatric hospitalizations, rehabilitation facilities, emergency shelters, and the criminal justice system, but do not end up in permanent housing². This subgroup of the homeless accounts for 10% of the San Diego County homeless population of more than 15,000 people. However, they consume a disproportionate share of the resources provided by law enforcement and emergency medical treatment. This is simply because the underlying reason(s) for their homelessness has not been addressed³.

How The Homeless Outreach Teams Function

Once team contact is made with a homeless individual, a humanistic team approach, not merely one of law enforcement, is used to assist the individual in deciding whether he/she wants assistance. If assistance is accepted, the County Health & Human Services Agency human services specialist will work to find appropriate resources and connect the person to them. The P.E.R.T. clinician will assess medical and psychiatric needs and provide direction to treatment. The police officer provides safety, a police liaison, and knowledge of homeless laws. Many times, assistance is refused, but team members will make future visits to this person in an attempt to establish a relationship and to let them know that the team is there to help them and not to arrest them. The proactive outreach approach of these teams to identify an individual's needs and to direct them to appropriate services and resources decreases the time consuming and costly recycling of these individuals and over-taxing of programs. The comprehensive field (on-the-street) assessment provided by these HOT teams, increases the likelihood that the contacted homeless individual will be connected to the appropriate resources.

The primary function of the teams is making contact with homeless people. However, they do limited case management.⁴ For example, if they place a mentally ill homeless person in a shelter/hospital that only permits them to stay for 90-days, the team will continue to seek out more permanent placement and services for this individual. With all

² A Summary Report on California's Programs to Address Homelessness, Prepared for Governor Gray Davis, March 2002.

³ PowerPoint Presentation on the Homeless Outreach Teams presented to the Grand Jury's Health & Human Services Committee, March 2004.

⁴ Case management means having one point of contact for an individual to access all resources related to his/her specific needs.

Report 2003/4-07

their contacts, the HOT teams strive to find programs with case management services so that the individual's needs will continue to be monitored and addressed.

During ride-a-longs with the HOT teams, Grand Jurors were able to witness first hand the teams contacting the homeless. The ride-a-longs started at the HOT teams' operational office that is a storefront location in Pacific Beach. There the team assembles each morning before taking off to patrol in their Homeless Outreach Vans. A San Diego City Police Sergeant heads the Homeless Outreach Team unit that consists of four city police officers, two P.E.R.T. clinicians, two County HHS human services specialists, and one part-time County Clerk/Data Entry Technician.

Currently, there are four HOT teams each consisting of one police officer and one P.E.R.T. clinician **OR** one HHS human services specialist. Ideally, and when the team first originated, all three members of the team went together on patrol. However, due to budgetary constraints, they now operate with two-person teams instead of the optimal three-person team. They patrol downtown San Diego, Pacific Beach, and Ocean Beach areas weekdays between the hours of 6 a.m.- 4 p.m. The concentration of the patrols in the downtown area results from the fact that 60-70% of the chronically homeless reside there⁵.

Typically, the homeless encountered by the HOT teams are adults, but they do see juveniles as well. The juvenile homeless population tends to be wary of the police and typically do not stay in the downtown area. The juveniles are more likely to be found along Washington Street and University Avenue, in Hillcrest, and under freeway ramps along Interstate 5 and these areas are not currently covered by the HOT teams.

How the Homeless Outreach Teams Have Helped

Statistically, for the calendar year 2002 the teams contacted 1215 homeless persons and placed 217 of them into appropriate shelter and programs fitting their individual needs. In calendar year 2003, 1004 homeless persons were contacted and 223 of those were placed. Figures available for the month of January 2004 indicate that 202 persons were contacted and 82 were placed⁶. The teams work with all community service providers, and it was easy to see during ride-a-longs how the team members have built relationships throughout the community of providers. For example, one city shelter has eight beds that are reserved specifically for HOT team clients. These eight beds are quickly filled and remain consistently filled. The teams use these eight beds primarily for mentally ill persons, and must constantly look elsewhere for beds.

Funding of the HOT teams now rests with the city and the county. The city provides the funding for the police officers and funding for the two P.E.R.T. clinicians. The county provides the funding for the two human services specialists and the 10-hour per week

⁵ A Summary Report on California's Programs to Address Homelessness, Prepared for Governor Gray Davis, March 2002.

⁶ PowerPoint Presentation on the Homeless Outreach Teams presented to the Grand Jury's Health & Human Services Committee, March 2004.

clerk/data entry technician. During its first-year-pilot-program, the HOT team received some financial support from the Centre City Development Corporation. Following that, the San Diego Downtown Partnership provided some funding. Both of these organizations continue to support and endorse the teams and their work but they no longer provide any permanent financial support.

How Coverage By The Homeless Outreach Teams Could Be Expanded

The funding and continued support of these teams is crucial in continuing this aggressive outreach program to the homeless. Moreover, the juvenile homeless population is not served by such an outreach service, but our investigation revealed they are in need of such a service. With early intervention, these juveniles may be prevented from becoming the chronic type of homeless clients that consume so much of city and county resources. According to the Regional Task Force on the Homeless, there are about 800 chronically homeless youth residing in San Diego County at any given time. As an “invisible population,” they tend to concentrate in urban areas where they easily blend with other youth. A high proportion of homeless juveniles use drugs and/or alcohol, and many sell drugs and/or turn to “survival sex” to meet their basic needs⁷. An increase in Homeless Outreach Teams staff would enable them to serve homeless youth. It would also allow the teams to increase both their hours and their geographical coverage.

The Homeless Outreach Teams spend the majority of their time on the streets; however, they do open their Pacific Beach storefront location twice a week (Wednesday and Thursday) for two hours in the morning for people to drop-in for assistance. These clients are handled the same as those that are encountered on the streets and are offered services appropriate to their specific needs. The vicinity of the storefront’s location is an area where younger homeless persons may gather. Through this opportunity to “drop-in”, the teams hope to attract more youth into their program of assistance. Increased funding and staffing would allow for this component of the teams outreach to be expanded for more “drop-in” time. Juveniles are reluctant to independently seek help and often they do not know where to go to get help. This opportunity to drop-in for assistance may be vital to breaking their cycle of homelessness.

The main goal of outreach is to seek out, identify, and make contact with those who are underserved and to provide needed services. The 800 to 1,700 homeless juveniles within our county appear to be a population in need.

FACTS AND FINDINGS

There are 11 major programs that offer services to the homeless in San Diego County. Services include:

- Mental health
- Transitional shelter

⁷ San Diego Regional Task Force on the Homeless, 2003, San Diego County’s Homeless Profile, Youth On Their Own.

Report 2003/4-07

- Substance abuse treatment and recovery
- Emergency shelter
- Health
- Case management/information and referral
- Employment assistance
- Permanent supportive housing
- Planning/administration and coordination
- Day shelter
- Food assistance.

With all these services being offered by various agencies, it is easy to understand that accessing these or even knowing of their availability would be difficult for anyone. This must certainly be true for the chronically homeless. These people are often isolated from the community's mainstream. According to the September 2002 Fact Sheet #3 by the National Coalition for Homeless, over 20-25% of the homeless suffer from severe mental illness.

The chronically homeless population consumes a disproportionate amount of law enforcement and emergency medical treatment resources. This may be due to the reason for their homelessness not being adequately addressed. Having HOT teams seek out individuals one at a time and addressing their specific needs may lead to better and more appropriate use of limited resources.

The Homeless Outreach Teams' multi-disciplinary make-up allows for comprehensive field assessments. With two or three disciplines (social services, medical, and safety) addressing an individual's needs it is more likely that a break in the cycle of homelessness will occur.

Because of budgetary constraints, the teams now operate with only two professionals on a team in order to make-up more teams and reach more homeless people. With an increase in staff, they would, once again, be able to operate more effectively as they originally did with all three professionals on a team and perhaps expand to serve youth.

The Homeless Outreach Teams only cover the downtown and beach areas. The juvenile homeless in our county do not routinely stay within these areas. They tend to be more visible at night and are found in Hillcrest and under freeway ramps along Interstate 5.

For the calendar year 2003, the Homeless Outreach Teams contacted over 1,000 chronically homeless people. For the month of January 2004, they contacted over 200 chronically homeless people. Having an outreach team to locate and serve these 1,200 people frees up valuable time and resources from other law enforcement units in our downtown area.

Eight shelter beds are designated to Homeless Outreach Team clients. With the number of contacts and placements made by these teams last year, this small amount of shelter space is insufficient to meet their needs.

The Homeless Outreach Team program is a successful collaborative effort by the city and county to address the downtown homeless population. There is a need to expand and enhance this outreach to the homeless juveniles of our county. Early intervention and early identification of their reason for being on the street may prevent them from becoming chronically homeless adults.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury recommends that the San Diego County Board of Supervisors to include the Health and Human Services Agency and the San Diego City Council do the following:

- 04-07-1** Continue collaborative efforts between the County and City of San Diego to support the Homeless Outreach Teams.
- 04-07-2** Develop a strategic plan to expand the Homeless Outreach Teams so that these teams can extend their coverage to include homeless juveniles.
- 04-07-3** Investigate public and private sector funding support to increase the number of shelter beds in San Diego County and designate more shelter beds specifically to the Homeless Outreach Teams for the chronically homeless clients they are serving.

COMMENDATION

The Grand Jury would like to commend all the Homeless Outreach Team members for their dedication to working with this challenging population of citizens.

REQUIREMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS

The California Penal Code §933 (c) requires any public agency which the Grand Jury has reviewed, and about which it has issued a final report, to comment to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the agency. Such comment shall be made *no later than 90 days* after the Grand Jury publishes its report (filed with the Clerk of the Court); except that in the case of a report containing findings and recommendations pertaining to a department or agency headed by an elected County official (e.g. District Attorney, Sheriff, etc.), such comment shall be made *within 60 days* to the Presiding Judge with an information copy sent to the Board of Supervisors.

Furthermore, California Penal Code §933.05(a), (b),(c), details, as follows, the manner in which such comment(s) are to be made:

- (a) As to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
 - (1) The respondent agrees with the finding.
 - (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion

of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.

- (b) As to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:
 - (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
 - (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation.
 - (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.
 - (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.
- (c) If a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department head and the Board of Supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the Board of Supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with the Penal Code §933.05 are required by the date indicated:

<u>RESPONDING AGENCY</u>	<u>RECOMMENDATIONS</u>	<u>DATE</u>
San Diego County Board of Supervisors to include the Health and Human Services Agency	04-07-1 through 04-07-3	08/18/04
San Diego City Council	04-07-1 through 04-07-3	08/18/04