

A Collaborative Approach to Assisting Homeless Monterey County Residents

BELINDA JACKSON-THOMAS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The issue of homelessness is one of the most critical problems that this country faces, having reached epic proportions in many of our cities, counties and states. Affordable housing is not within the grasp of many residents of our state, and in particular, the Bay Area. While everyone can agree that providing resources and solutions is of the utmost importance, the stark reality is that some government agencies are unable or unwilling to undertake the massive responsibility and financial burden of solving the homeless crisis in our communities. No single agency can or should be expected to resolve such an enormous problem. The key to addressing such a vast and complex issue is for multiple organizations to combine their efforts and collaborate.

Monterey County has partnered with the cities of Salinas, Monterey and Marina, as well as multiple community-based organizations, to address various facets of homelessness and provide an array of services. Their collaborative approach maximizes their logistics, funding, and staffing resources in order to assist their homeless population. This case study focuses on projects they have piloted or implemented, including the overnight parking program and temporary storage facilities. It is essential that partnerships are formed with as many stakeholders as possible, and that creative and “outside of the box” ideas or solutions are explored. Our homeless residents, who are vulnerable, exploited, subjugated, and broken, are counting on us.

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Introduction

Solano County, although similar in size to Monterey County, offers limited resources for their homeless, and overall could be considered resource poor. Monterey County is a medium-sized county of approximately 438,000 located along the Central Coast. The City of Salinas, which is also the county seat, is the largest city in the county with a population of 157,218. The racial makeup of Salinas is largely Hispanic (78%), White (11%), Asian (7%) and Black (1.7%). Salinas has been nicknamed the “salad bowl of the world” due to the dominant agricultural economy. The major employers include agricultural packing companies, county government, healthcare and hospitals, the U.S. Department of Defense and the hospitality industry. The Monterey County Department of Social Services provides some type of public assistance benefits to almost half (49.5%) of their population. Like many counties throughout the state and nation, Monterey County has experienced an exponential growth in their homeless population, increasing by 23% from 2015 to 2017. The city of Salinas experienced the largest growth with an increase of 57% during this same period. Although they have had various resources available for some time, in 2017 they increased funding for their emergency shelter, extended the period of warming shelters, and piloted an overnight parking program.

Point-in-Time Census Data

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of homelessness for individuals and families includes those living in 1) a supervised publicly- or privately-operated

shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements; or 2) a primary nighttime residence that is public or private not intended for human habitation. According to the 2017 Point-in-Time Census for Monterey County, there were 2,837 individuals experiencing homelessness. The majority of these, 1,361, resided in Salinas. HUD defines a chronically homeless individual as someone who has experienced homelessness for a year or longer, or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years, and also has a disability that prevents them from maintaining work or housing. In Monterey County, there were 605 individuals who met this definition in 2017. Other demographic findings include age; 27% are between 41-50 years old, 23% are between 31-40 years, 15% are between 51-60 years, 14% are 25-30 years and 12% are 18-24 years old. The Point-in-Time Census also revealed that the majority of homeless individuals (32%) were living in vehicles, while 25% were on the street, 15% in transitional housing, 11% in emergency shelters, 10% in encampments and 7% in abandoned buildings.

Safe Parking Initiatives

Lapis Road, located north of the City of Marina, had become a popular area for the homeless living in vehicles. This frontage road provided a place for them to park and remain relatively obscure. They were, however, not obscure enough for the residents of the area who voiced complaints to the Board of Supervisors and City Council. The area had become a state of disarray with garbage and waste strewn along the road, rampant drug use, and approximately 70 vehicles in various states of disrepair, which had

taken up residence. In response, the Temporary Permitted Parking Program was implemented, which provided permits to allow those living in these vehicles to legally park from 6 P.M. to 10 A.M. daily. Dumpsters and portable toilets were provided by the contractor who also offered referrals to local homeless services. The program was launched in August 2017; however, the ordinance could not be enforced unless an alternative option was made available, which brought forth the Safe Parking Program pilot. The Director of Monterey County Department of Social Services, Elliott Robinson, requested and received \$150,000 in funding from the Board of Supervisors for this one-year pilot which launched on December 15, 2017. The county then partnered with One Starfish, a non-profit which had already established safe parking programs for women at three church locations. Safe Parking, operated by Orphan Productions of the One Starfish program, provides the same conveniences of the Lapis Road temporary parking: portable toilets, a dumpster, and access to a social worker for referrals to appropriate resources. It allows parking at the Monterey County Coastal Office located in Marina, which houses the 4th District Supervisor, Adult Services, and the Agricultural Commission. This is one of the smaller county facilities and is located in a somewhat isolated area of the county. Up to 15 qualified participants, those with a valid driver's license, vehicle registration, and insurance, may obtain a permit to park in the lot from 7 P.M. to 7 A.M. daily. The lot is also patrolled by monitors to ensure the grounds are cleared before employees or the public arrive each morning. Participation in the Safe Parking program was not initially as robust as anticipated, there was an assumption people would relocate from Lapis Road to the Coastal office. However, due to the conditions which require a registered and insured vehicle, being open to any and all housing, and accepting mental and behavioral health resources, many simply relocated a short distance away to Monte Road. The Coastal office utilization continues to grow, and has now more than doubled from the initial volume as word spreads about this new resource,

which will be available through the end of the pilot period in December 2018. Other county-owned sites are also being explored as alternative options for overnight parking, as well as a site for a fourth emergency shelter.

Chinatown

Almost every major city throughout the nation has a Chinatown neighborhood. Initially formed to house Asian immigrant laborers, they evolved to include other immigrants, people of color, and the low-income population. The six-block Chinatown neighborhood of Salinas was established in 1893 and was once a thriving business community. The area has been deteriorating for several decades as it attracted the homeless, drug addicts, and sex workers. In 2015, there were 250 people camping in Chinatown, transforming it into a virtual tent city, which are now common in almost every city in California. No city or county is immune to the blight that has overtaken neighborhoods. The housing crisis has dealt an extreme blow not only those who were already in poverty, but also to working class individuals and families who have been priced out of affordable housing. Today the number of campers in Chinatown has decreased to about 50, occupying a three-block radius. What is exceptional about this tent city is its proximity to a plethora of resources, literally within walking distance of the encampments.

Dorothy's Place

Located in the heart of Chinatown, tucked in the midst of multiple abandoned buildings and steps away from the homeless encampment, is Dorothy's Place. Named after Dorothy Day, a journalist turned activist and co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement. This community-based organization, which is operated by the Franciscan Workers of Junipero Serra, provides a variety of services to the chronically homeless including a day drop-in center, a health clinic, a kitchen, a women's shelter, and a transitional housing program. The organization has been around since 1982, initially distributing sandwiches to the needy in Chinatown.

The Drop-in-Center is open from 7:30 A.M. to 6 P.M. daily. Some of the services provided include mail pick-up, telephone access, and hygiene services such as showers and washers and dryers. Clothing can be laundered once a week, and weekly health care services are also available. Staff are onsite to help clients obtain verifications needed for applications to programs or services, bus passes, and identification cards. Social workers are available to assist with housing. The center serves approximately 120 people per day.

Dorothy's Kitchen provides hot, restaurant-quality meals twice a day, with their commercial kitchen, full-sized dining room, and outdoor patio. They serve approximately 180 breakfast, and 220 lunch meals per day. Dinner is also provided to those who reside in the center after 7 P.M., when it transitions from the drop in-day center to the Women Alive! overnight shelter for (up to 16) single women.

The House of Peace is a transitional housing residence on the property, which can accommodate up to 12 adults. They receive a client-centered life plan to assist with medical care, employment, financial literacy, and permanent housing. There is a separate location with 24 units. Admittance into the transitional housing is by referral only for those with high barriers to housing. Residents must comply with their plan, which includes sobriety or being actively in treatment. This privately funded resource also places no maximum limit on how long a resident can stay; the average duration is about a year, the longest was three years.

Dorothy's Place has an expansive network of community relationships and partners. The agricultural industry provides the crops used in the daily meals that are served, which always include fresh produce. Many of the staff that assist in the kitchen or drop-in center are volunteers; some are General Assistance recipients working to meet the work requirements of the program.

Health Services Center

Located just a few doors away from Dorothy's Place is the Chinatown Health Center. Funded by

the City of Salinas and private partners, this former Copacabana nightclub was transformed into a multi-use resource for the homeless. The center, which is also operated by Dorothy's Place, serves approximately 120 people per day, coordinates with eight other agencies to provide services which include a mobile health van, mental health and substance abuse services, HIV counseling, a syringe exchange program, 24-hour access to restrooms and showers, a water station, and occasionally an onsite barber. The showering rooms are large enough to allow users to bring in their carts or other personal items, which is important to a population that is already vulnerable and subject to theft or loss of their property when unattended. Eligibility workers from the Department of Social Services are also onsite twice a week to take applications for public assistance programs. Interim Inc., a local non-profit, provides behavioral health outreach. Cal State University Monterey Bay (CSUMB) manages what is called the "suitcase clinic," which is an evening clinic staffed with CSUMB nursing and medical interns. Whole person care services are provided to those eligible through public health nurses and case managers from the Health Department.

Redevelopment

The City of Salinas is in the midst of a revitalization plan which includes development in Chinatown. In July 2015, Taylor Farms, popular maker of salad kits and fresh produce, built their corporate headquarters in Old Town Salinas. Some of the planned redevelopment in Chinatown includes the construction of a 90-unit apartment complex which will house the chronically homeless. It is situated just yards away from Dorothy's Place and the Health Services Center. Other plans for the neighborhood include a 42-unit senior housing complex and 52-unit complex for low-income families that earn 60% or less of the area median income (AMI). In Monterey County, one in six residents is over the age of 60; affordable senior housing is scarce. Mid-Pen Housing, a national non-profit developer of affordable housing, is currently transforming a previously underutilized

site near City Hall in downtown Monterey into a 19-unit complex for seniors. It will include an outdoor courtyard, a community room with a kitchen, and a fitness center. The site is also conveniently located near parks, a library, a major transit center, a large grocery store, restaurants, and retail. This \$7.8 million project was funded through the collaborative efforts of the City of Monterey, the Housing Authority of Monterey County, the California Tax Credit Allocation Committee, Bank of America, and the Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco.

Collaboration is a Must

The populations of Monterey and Solano Counties are similar at 437,000 and 445,000, respectively. Proportionately however, Monterey County's homeless population of 2,837 individuals more than doubles that of Solano County's 1,232 individuals. The partnerships and collaborations that Monterey County has formed and developed, although not sufficient enough to end homelessness, have provided a considerable pool of resources for their homeless population. Their Department of Social Services has a dedicated division, Monterey County Community Action Partnership (MCCAP), which contracts with non-profits and public agencies and collaborates with community stakeholders. They receive funding from various sources including federally-funded Community Service Block Grants, Domestic Violence Trust Fund generated by marriage license taxes, and Homeless Funds generated by hotel taxes. They have partnered with several community-based organizations that have been able to take advantage of securing land or structures through the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) of Fort Ord.

Recommendations

It is clear that not one single agency at the state, county, or city level has the bandwidth to provide all necessary services or resources to their respective homeless populations; partnering and collaborating is the only way to tackle such a huge issue. As indicated by the Point-in-Time Census Survey results,

homelessness continues to increase. This crisis cannot be ignored, nor shoved to the side for someone else to deal with. Solano County needs to develop partnerships with community-based organizations. They could benefit from exploring all possible options with organizations that can provide even one service that is so desperately needed by their homeless residents. Monterey County also piloted a program wherein storage facilities were provided, so that the homeless could lock up their possessions throughout the day and retrieve them in the evening. Traveling light is recommended for this population, who are regularly in transit from one location to another. It is recommended that Solano County examine the potential of utilizing the resources of Solano Community College, as well as some of the major employers in Solano County such as Jelly Belly, Genentech, California Medical Facility, Travis Air Force Base, and Kaiser. While financial resources would be the primary ask, there is a multitude of other types of assistance such as food, clothing, computers, telephones, mail services, laundry services, hygiene services, vehicles, storage facilities/lockers, volunteers/staffing, land, buildings, portable toilets and dumpsters. Is there land or structures available from Travis, Jelly Belly or the prison in Vacaville? A safe parking program would be beneficial in Vallejo and storage services are needed in Fairfield and Vallejo. Solano County does not have a needle exchange program, which is also needed, particularly in Vallejo. It is suggested that the county partner with Kaiser to develop one. By thinking outside of the box, utilizing some untapped resources, and appealing to those holding the purse strings, Solano County can make a difference in the lives of their homeless residents.

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