"It Takes a Village":
Ending Homelessness Through Effective Collaboration

Jessica Scheiner

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Monterey County has innovative and effective programs that facilitate public and community-based organizations to collaboratively address the needs of persons experiencing homelessness. These programs include a multi-disciplinary team working with the City of Monterey's Police Department, a monthly cross-agency case conferencing meeting that develops shared responses to meeting the needs of persons experiencing homelessness, and a multi-day Navigator University which provides a venue for public and community-based organizations to increase their knowledge of available resources, develop relationships, and strengthen collaborative problem-solving skills. In Santa Cruz County, public and community-based organizations are challenged to meet the increasing complexity of needs of persons experiencing homelessness. It is therefore recommended that the County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department utilize lessons learned from Monterey County's compendium of partnerships to build upon its existing programs and practices to assist government agencies and community-based service organizations to collaboratively address the needs of homeless clients.

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Preface

When John awakes he has once again defecated on himself. Staff of the local homeless shelter where John stays must again clean up both John and the shared space which contains his temporary bed. John has been staying at this Santa Cruz shelter for more than eight months, though the typical stay is just three months, and there are no alternative living situations in sight. John is in his mid-60s, his memory is fading, and he recently moved to the first floor of the shelter because of his decreased mobility. Shelter staff are unsure of what to do – John's needs are beyond the shelter's staffing and services and they are concerned about the resulting unsanitary conditions for other shelter residents. If John is asked to leave the shelter, he will end up on the streets.

Background

John's situation is not unique; public and community-based organizations across Santa Cruz County are challenged to meet the increasing complexity of needs of their homeless clients. According to the *Santa Cruz County 2017 Homeless Census and Survey*, approximately 2,249 persons experienced homelessness in the county on any given day, a 15 percent increase from the previous census conducted in 2015.[1] More than one quarter of the county's homeless population were considered chronically homeless, those persons who have a disabling condition and have been homeless for a significant length of time or multiple times.

Also, according to the *2017 Homeless Census and Survey*, the county's homeless population is getting older. In 2015, 20 percent of the county's homeless population were ages 51–60, and 11 percent were 61 years or older. By 2017 these age groups had increased to 24 and 15 percent, respectively. Furthermore, the county's homeless population is remaining homeless longer, which often correlates with an increased severity of needs. In 2013, 51 percent of the population had been homeless for one or more years. This increased to 56% in 2015 and to 62% in 2017. In 2017, 55 percent of persons experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County reported having one or more disabling health conditions including physical disabilities, chronic substance abuse, and severe mental health conditions.

While it has always served persons experiencing homelessness, five years ago the Santa Cruz County Human Services Department (HSD) increased its provision of housing and support services when it was awarded funding under the State of California's new CalWORKs Housing Support Program. Since then HSD has continued to increase its dedicated homeless housing and service programs through the state's new Bringing Families Home, Housing and Disability Advocacy, and Home Safe programs. Concurrently, HSD increased its participation in local efforts to end homelessness including through the development and implementation of the federally-funded Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project, the local All In Landlord Partnership, and the countywide homeless Coordinated Entry System.

While additional resources from the state and federal government are facilitating homeless

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1. Santa Cruz County 2017 Homeless Census & Survey Comprehensive Report; report produced by Applied Survey Resource (ASR): https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5176dcd7e4b0e5c0dba41ee0/t/596cf5861e5b6cdcc933bf22/1500312982885/2017-SantaCruzCounty+-+Final.pdf

residents to become housed, the dollars alone are insufficient to meet the increasing numbers and needs of the Santa Cruz County's homeless population. To ensure that it is effectively using its resources and coordinating across systems and disciplines, earlier this year the County of Santa Cruz entered into contract with the consultancy agency, Focus Strategies, to review, evaluate, and make recommendations for improving the countywide homeless services system. Goals of the Focus Strategies contract, to be completed by April 2020, include providing recommendations for a county-wide homeless system design and administrative structure, and developing an action plan for the homeless system, including the development of a new governance structure and performance metrics.

Innovative Partnerships in Monterey County

Several years ago, to address the increasingly complex and diverse challenges faced by clients experiencing homelessness, Monterey County's Adult Protective Services (APS) unit began collaborating with other governmental and community-based agencies, including participation in the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT). The HOT was developed by the Monterey Police Department (MPD) to facilitate collaboration across public agencies and homeless service providers to address the needs of persons experiencing homelessness and foster a stronger understanding of community resources. At monthly HOT meetings, staff from the MPD, APS, Monterey County's community hospital, and community-based service providers case conference to identify resources and partnerships that could collectively address the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness.

APS staff also joined with the MPD's Community Action Team (CAT), which focuses on community policing and engagement with Monterey County's homeless community, to build relationships and engage persons experiencing homelessness in participating in services. After seeing this partnership yield positive results, in 2017 APS staff was

provided workspace at the MPD along with community partners from the Monterey County's community hospital, a domestic violence service agency, and a mental health provider.

The collaborations cemented through the HOT and CAT have been instrumental in the outreach, engagement, and eventual provision of housing and services to persons experiencing homelessness who had significant contacts with the MPD. The provision of housing and services reduced clients contacts with police, resulting in the MPD being able to concentrate its resources on other critical safety needs.

In 2016, staff from Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito counties' aging and adult services programs, community-based agencies, advocates, and other public agencies came together to form the Housing Options Meaningful to Elders (HOME) Collaborative, to work toward the prevention of homelessness in the senior and disability communities. In 2017, the HOME Collaborative held a Housing and Homelessness Summit which created several workgroups to develop solutions to some of the counties' greatest barriers to addressing homelessness; Navigator University was born from one of these workgroups.

Navigator University grew from an understanding that Monterey County homeless service providers often work in silos without knowledge of available resources. However, persons experiencing homelessness could have their needs addressed more effectively if service providers worked in collaboration to provide the full menu of opportunities and assistance. In this regard, Navigator University sought to educate staff from community-based and public agencies in Monterey County on available resources, provide guidance on the development of comprehensive housing and service plans, and facilitate partnerships across systems and disciplines.

Developed and implemented by staff from Monterey County's APS and community-based organizations, the first Navigator University in 2017 was held in six half-day sessions with six participants. It was expanded in 2019 to approximately 30 individuals

who participated in four half-day sessions. Navigator University was implemented both years without additional resources, and instead tapped into existing staff, interns, and volunteers.

Participants in the 2019 University included staff from Monterey County's Aging and Adult Services, health care providers including Monterey's community hospital, community-based organizations, and police officers from the cities of Monterey and Salinas. Each of the sessions focused on one of four areas of service: government benefits and services, health, legal, and housing.

Navigator University starts with a discussion of a simple yet comprehensive Navigation Assessment Tool that practitioners can use to systematically identify clients' current situation, resources, and goals; these feed the development of an informed plan to address the client's housing and service needs. To facilitate participants' abilities to collaboratively problem solve around clients' situations, each Navigator University session includes breakout groups in which participants are provided real scenarios of persons experiencing homelessness. Each group is asked to collaboratively develop a plan to address their assigned client's situation utilizing resources and partnerships introduced during Navigator University. The breakout groups are followed by full class debriefs to identify additional options for addressing each scenario.

Recommendations

Monterey County has effective programs, including the HOT and CAT, to facilitate collaboration between public and community-based organizations to address the needs of persons experiencing homelessness. Navigator University supplements these partnerships by providing a unique venue for public and community-based organizations to increase their knowledge of available resources, develop relationships with other service providers, and strengthen their collaborative problem-solving skills. It is recommended that HSD utilize lessons learned from Monterey County's compendium of partnerships to build upon its existing programs and practices.

Navigator University: It is recommended that HSD work with the local homeless Continuum of Care, known as the Homeless Action Partnership (HAP), to develop and implement an annual series of workshops, similar to Navigator University. Should Santa Cruz County choose to implement a Navigator University, the following modifications are recommended:

- **Increase number of participants:** There are hundreds of staff working directly or indirectly to address the housing, service, and related needs of persons experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County. Even the most seasoned and talented of these staff could more effectively serve their clients with expanded knowledge of available resources, increased relationships, and enhanced collaborative problem-solving skills. In this regard, Santa Cruz County should assess the maximum number of persons Navigator University can serve, while not diminishing the value of the event to individual participants nor making implementation unwieldy.

- **Increase number of represented resources:** Over the four days of the 2019 Navigator University, approximately 30 program representatives shared information. Because Santa Cruz County has significantly more than 30 programs that would be of benefit to persons experiencing homelessness, it should assess the maximum number of programs it can include as presenters in its Navigator University. However, an increase in providers presenting will require that either the Navigator University be held over more days or each individual session be longer. Staff should weigh the benefits of providing a more comprehensive menu of resources against the potential loss of participants due to the expanded time commitment.

Housing Workgroup: Staff from HSD's Community Relations group facilitates the Housing Workgroup. While the Housing Workgroup has been around for several years, HSD took over the group's facilitation in October 2018, when it became lead agency for the countywide homeless Coordinated Entry System. Approximately 50 individuals representing public and community-based organizations that work with persons experiencing homelessness throughout the county participate in the twice-monthly Housing Workgroup. Agenda items typically include:

- Coordinated entry updates and problem solving on related issues
- Identification of and problem solving regarding systemwide barriers to addressing the needs of persons experiencing homelessness
- Resource sharing
- Light case conferencing

Based on lessons learned from Monterey County, the following adaptions to implementation of the Housing Workgroup are recommended:

- **Increased Resource Sharing:** Resources available to assist persons experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County are always changing – new programs are added and existing programs are modified or disappear entirely. The advent of a Navigator University in Santa Cruz County would give service providers a baseline of resources to assist their clients. While the Housing Workgroup regularly includes presentations on available resources, staffing is inadequate to identify and outreach additional agencies that provide services that would be of benefit to persons experiencing homelessness. With additional staffing, the Housing Workgroup could provide participants with presentations from a wider variety of providers and timely updates on changes to known programs.

- **Increased Case Conferencing:** The Housing Workgroup meetings sporadically include case conferencing across programs and disciplines on

challenging cases. However, based on the success of Monterey County's HOT, the Housing Workgroup could be better used to collaboratively identify opportunities and partnerships to meet clients' needs. It is anticipated that with additional staffing, HSD could work with participants to incorporate a more robust case management process into the Housing Workgroup meetings.

Police and Sheriff Department Involvement: The benefits from the MPD's collaboration with local hospitals and public and community-based organizations has been significant; persons experiencing homelessness with upwards of 100 police contacts are now housed and no longer utilizing valuable MPD resources. In Santa Cruz County, the Sheriff's Office and local police departments have entered into partnerships with mental health and other service providers to target housing and service assistance to high utilizers of public and private resources. The County Sheriff's Office have co-located County Health Services Agency staff to actively work with incarcerated persons experiencing homelessness to identify services that will prevent them from returning to the streets upon release. Staff from this unit attend the Housing Workgroup and are eager to increase coordination with other agencies to assist shared clients.

Given the potential benefit to both persons experiencing homelessness and the larger community, it is recommended that HSD work with the HAP and county and city departments to identify opportunities for increased collaboration with the local police departments and Sheriff's Office. Based on Monterey County's model, potential opportunities for coordination include:

- Joint outreach and engagement of persons experiencing homelessness to prevent citations or other remedial actions;
- Co-location of service providers in police or sheriff's offices;
- Formal agreements on the provision of mutual aid; and

▪ Regular case conferencing to address the needs of shared clients.

The development of effective and ongoing partnerships between the local police departments and Sheriff's Office, as well as other county and city departments and community-based agencies, will require the leadership of executive staff from HSD and other governmental organizations. Other staff will be needed to help identify potential partnership models, develop policies, processes, and partnership agreements, and oversee implementation of the new multi-department programs.

Additional Staffing Needs: It is anticipated that a new Human Services Analyst would be needed to effectively implement the above recommendations including:

▪ Coordinating the development and implementation of Navigator University;

▪ Developing Housing Workgroup meetings to provide additional resource sharing and case conferencing capabilities; and

▪ Facilitating increased coordination between the criminal justice system and potential partner agencies.

However, as discussed above, the county is working with consultant Focus Strategies to identify opportunities to provide a more effective and coordinated response to homelessness. Any additional staffing to implement the above recommendations would need to align with and support the redesigned county-wide homeless services system developed through Focus Strategies' work. In the meantime, it is recommended that HSD assess the capacity of existing staff to incrementally implement the above recommended enhancements to existing programs.

Acknowledgements