

# Ending Homelessness

## Setting the Stage

Exasperation. Anger. Fear.

These emotions surfaced at each of the 100 neighborhood meetings Bobby Shriver held during his first City Council campaign. The subject: Homelessness in Santa Monica. Shriver made reducing the number of people living (and dying) on Santa Monica's streets the central goal of his candidacy.

He was elected by a higher percentage of voters than any council candidate in the city's recorded history. Voters were not responding to his sterling personality or even the Kennedy DNA. They were giving him a mandate: Help the homeless and *help us!*

Frustration. Resignation. Trepidation.

These emotions had been kept under the surface for years at Santa Monica City Hall, regarding the subject of homelessness. The problem seemed intractable. Residents kept asking, "What good is all the money the City spends on homelessness doing? We see the same number of people—many of them the *same people*—living on our streets year after year."

City officials had resigned themselves to doing the best they could with existing programs. Homelessness had been such a politicized issue since the early 1990s that councilmembers and city staff kept it in the background. By 2004, as the Council prepared to adopt its annual budget priorities, homelessness was not one of them—even though every public opinion survey in the past 20 years has identified homelessness as Santa Monicans' greatest concern. Not known for shyness, Shriver got that changed immediately after he was elected.

That was the first of many ways he has honored the voters' mandate. Santa Monica has become more effective over the past four years in moving homeless people from the streets into housing. Below is a list of new initiatives taken. Of course Bobby Shriver didn't accomplish all of these by himself, but without his energy and hard work some of what follows would not have happened at all, and the rest of it occurred *faster* because he and six other volunteers working with him kept pushing (everyone, at every opportunity) for results.

*This energy prompted Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky to introduce Shriver to a group of judges, other dignitaries, and reporters as "a megaphone on the homeless issue"—which he and his volunteer team consider a mark of success.*

## 2004-2008: WHAT'S BEEN DONE

### 1. New focus: Supportive housing for the chronically homeless

*Chronically homeless people have been living on the street for at least a year and suffer from a physical or mental disability, including addictions. Because they could not follow the rules to receive help from any city-funded program existing before 2004, they just kept living on the streets, in jail, or in hospitals. These are the most visible of the homeless and the hardest to help. Maintaining them on the streets—in addition to being inhumane—costs a fortune in police, paramedic, hospital, mental hospital, and jail time.*

- Chronically homeless people cannot beat their addictions or stabilize their mental illness while living on the streets. So in 2004 the city's **Chronic Homeless Project** reversed the process. Case managers began to work with people who were identified as having lived on the streets of Santa Monica the longest, placing them into housing and providing supportive services needed for rehabilitation. This method is working in cities across the United States.
- The project expanded to include the **Street to Home Service Registry**, which has compiled personal histories of 261 people found sleeping on the street for three nights in January 2008. The 10 most vulnerable to die are identified, housed, and replaced by the next 10. Veterans have been referred to services at the West LA VA.
- Of the 184 people served through this project, 63 are now permanently housed; 19 are temporarily housed. More than two thirds (127 people) continue to work with case managers, who help them resolve issues that keep them on the street.

### 2. New expectations: More help given; more effort required

*“For many years we’ve created an enabling culture. Now we provide folks either with services or with facing some pretty strong consequences.”—Santa Monica Police Chief Timothy Jackman, quoted on [surfsantamonica.com](http://surfsantamonica.com).\**

- The Santa Monica Police Department's Homeless Liaison Program was expanded in 2006 from four to six. When practical, HLP officers refer minor offenders to homeless services, which could stop the continuous cycling in and out of jail.
- **Serial Inebriate Outreach.** Case managers from CLARE connect people who have been arrested multiple times for public inebriation with treatment programs. Shriver pushed for this intervention immediately after being elected. Over the past three years, half the people arrested for public inebriation have been interviewed in the jail by caseworkers from CLARE, a foundation providing treatment and recovery services for alcoholism and substance abuse. Of these

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\* Chief Jackman is quoted here because the Santa Monica Police Department's perspective is important to know. He has not endorsed Bobby Shriver's candidacy for City Council, nor has he been asked for an endorsement.

1,300 people, 201 received services from CLARE; 90 have followed a recovery program for more than two months, and 8 have been permanently housed.

- **Homeless Community Court.** Many homeless people get caught in a vicious cycle: outstanding citations for crimes associated with homelessness are keeping them from jobs and housing that would allow them to end their homelessness. The judge requires that a rehabilitation plan be completed in order to avoid jail time or to have warrants or citations removed from the record. Santa Monica's Special Representative for Homeless Initiatives Ed Edelman made this court happen in 2006. A year before, Shriver had convinced his Council colleagues to hire the distinguished former LA County Supervisor to serve as Santa Monica's "homeless czar" for two years.

So far, 142 people have come before the court. Case managers worked, or are still working, with all but 9 of them; 62 received substance-abuse or mental health treatment; 62 were housed, 11 of them in permanent housing. Almost half of the participants have "graduated," meaning they fulfilled the judge's requirements for their cases to be adjudicated. For all three of the programs above, city staff reports that more participants would be placed in permanent housing if more of it were available.

- **Indoor feeding programs.** Feeding programs traditionally held outdoors in Santa Monica parks have the unintended consequence of enabling people to remain homeless. In 2006, led by Ed Edelman's efforts, the City persuaded two of the largest feeding programs to move indoors, where clients now receive counseling and service referrals as well as food.

### 3. New resolve: Insisting and working on REGIONAL solutions

*Los Angeles County is the homeless capital of the United States, with 74,000 people homeless on any given night. If each of the county's 88 cities served as many homeless people per capita as Santa Monica does, those 74,000 would be housed.*

- Ed Edelman's most important and difficult job as Santa Monica's "homeless czar" was to **encourage cities in the region to accept their "fair share" of responsibility to end homelessness.** He also worked to strengthen the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, an agency formed to foster cooperation between Los Angeles City and County officials.
- Responding to the fact that 15,000 veterans are homeless in Los Angeles County, Shriver and the City of Santa Monica organized four service providers, who in 2005 presented their **proposal that three unused buildings on the West LA VA campus be rehabilitated to provide homeless veterans with therapeutic supportive housing.** Over the 25 years that the buildings have stood empty, others have tried and failed to gain use of them. After two years and countless phone calls and visits from Shriver, the VA Secretary designated the buildings for homeless housing. A year later the VA solicited expressions of interest from service providers—for one of the buildings only. The responses are being reviewed. Two members of Shriver's homeless volunteer team are attorneys

experienced with government contracts. Without their work, the process would be moving even slower.

- **Project Homecoming** has served 182 homeless people in the past two years. The idea is to help them travel from Santa Monica to their homes, where friends or family have agreed to give them the necessary support. City staff follows up on the participants for four months. So far, at the four-month mark, 67% of the participants have remained housed.

## 5. New measure of success: Reduction in our homeless population

- Success of city-funded programs used to be measured by how many people were served each year. Now it is measured by whether or not Santa Monica's homeless population has been *reduced*. This is an important distinction.
- The 2005 LA County homeless census found about 2,000 homeless people living in Santa Monica. The 2007 census found 1,500. Some of the reduction might be due to a different counting method, but the efforts above played a part and should yield further reductions in years to come.

## 2008-2012: TO DO

1. **Fill all three of those buildings at the West LA VA with homeless vets and supportive services!** Have a huge party when the first homeless vet moves in!
2. Keep moving chronically homeless people into housing through the Chronic Homeless Project, the Homeless Community Court, and Project Homecoming.
3. Strengthen the Serial Inebriate Program.
4. Support Santa Monica's traditional continuum of care programs that reduce our homeless population.
5. Continue encouraging all the other groups that conduct feeding programs in our parks to move inside to help connect their clients to services that will result in housing and mental health services.
6. Work harder with local and state leaders to build consensus for a regional solution to homelessness and "fair share zoning":
  - Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority Executive Director Rebecca Isaacs (a Santa Monica resident)
  - LA County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
  - LA City Councilmember Bill Rosendahl
  - LA Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and his special advisor on homelessness, Torrie Osborn
  - State Senate President Pro Tem Daryl Steinberg, the author of Proposition 63, which provides funding for mental health treatment
  - The League of California Cities and Westside Council of Governments