

A Report on Progress on the 10-Year Strategy to End Homelessness in Ventura County

November, 2009

Introduction

The 10-Year Strategy to End Homelessness in Ventura County was adopted in June, 2007. Now, nearly 2 ½ years later it's time to assess how the twenty-two recommendations of the Strategy are being met. As with any plan, some parts have succeeded far beyond the hopes of the Working Group that created this document, while other parts still have challenges to overcome.

In the Executive Summary of the Strategy report the goal under Recommendations sounds simple at first:

The initial goal is to reduce homelessness within the county by 50% during the first five (5) years (2008-2012) of implementation.

A variety of factors make assessing this initial goal less simple. Economic realities are quite different from June, 2007 when this initial goal sounded reasonable. On the plus side of the equation, various creative and innovative ideas have sprung up in communities throughout the county that could reduce homelessness in many areas.

Some of the best forward moves have been:

1. The creation of seven City Task Forces made up of concerned citizens, members of faith communities, service providers, elected officials and city and county employees actively working on:
 - Educating their communities
 - Developing ideas for homeless prevention,
 - Crafting and moving forward housing elements
 - Expanding services for homeless and at-risk community
2. The passage of California's SB2, which went into effect 1/1/08. This legislation clarifies and strengthens housing element law in ways that facilitate emergency shelters and limits the denial of emergency shelters and transitional housing and supportive housing under the Housing Accountability Act.
3. Faith community involvement in the seven city task forces already in operation. A prime example of such involvement would be a rally in front of Ventura City Hall in May, 2009 to call attention to the lack of a year-round shelter for homeless people, and what organizers termed "inadequate services" for homeless persons and those in danger of

becoming homeless. Over 130 people from at least ten different faith expressions joined together to peacefully call attention to the problems of homelessness.

4. Involvement of one of the county's largest foundations, the Amgen Foundation in providing funds for various projects to end homelessness. Among their contributions are a two-year grant to create the position of Community Educator for the Ventura County Homeless & Housing Coalition, and providing matching funds up to \$150,000 for "The Buck Starts Here", a campaign to raise funds for Ventura County Together.
5. Creation and distribution of HPRP/NSP, two of the federal stimulus funds which have been made available to assist persons in need of housing. The Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program (HPRP) is aimed at stabilizing households in their housing. The Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) is aimed at stabilizing communities that have been impacted by foreclosure. There has been community cooperation within the county around these funds, attempting to maximize the impact of program funds allotted to the county.

Some of the original goals of the 10-Year Strategy may need revising in light of SB 2, changes in the economy and other circumstances that have changed since June, 2007. However the bottom line remains the same; the solution to homelessness is housing. Creating housing opportunities for individuals and families in need will reduce the numbers of homeless people and those in danger of becoming homeless in Ventura County. Whether we can halve that number by 2013 remains to be seen.

I. Progress in Housing Goals

After the writing of the 10-Year Strategy was completed, The Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) adopted the chart below containing all the categorized housing goals within the Strategy broken down by housing category and jurisdiction. The distribution of units is based on the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) allocations.

10 Year Strategy Goals by Jurisdiction

	Permanent Affordable Housing = 300	Permanent Supportive Housing =275	Shelter beds=150	Transitional Housing = 90	Detox =20
Camarillo	38.0	35.0	19.0	12.0	Both East County and West County to have detox beds
Fillmore	11.0	10.0	5.0	3.0	
Moorpark	17.0	16.0	9.0	5.0	
Ojai	5.0	4.0	2.0	1.0	
Oxnard	80.0	73.0	40.0	24.0	
Port Hueneme	2.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	
Santa Paula	24.0	22.0	12.0	7.0	
Simi Valley	39.0	36.0	20.0	12.0	
Thousand Oaks	22.0	20.0	11.0	7.0	
Unincorporated	15.0	14.0	8.0	4.0	
Ventura	47.0	42.0	23.0	14.0	
Total	300.0	274.0	150.0	90.0	

It should be noted that these goals were set for only the first 5 years of the 10 Year Strategy to End Homelessness in Ventura County. In addition, the goal for shelter beds has not been revised to account for SB2 which states that jurisdictions must allow sufficient zoning to accommodate shelter beds according to the most recent homeless count.

As noted above, the goals were set using numbers and projections from 2007. These will probably need some revision in light of the figures contained in the 2009 Homeless Persons Count and the count that will be taken in January, 2010. Numbers of homeless persons counted in 2009 rose 12% compared with 2007. Estimates from service providers suggest that there will not be a reduction in numbers for 2010, due to the increased number of clients seeking services throughout the county.

Looking at the increases and decreases in the number of beds or units by category and how that matches with the goals set in the Strategy:

- Permanent Affordable Housing: **Goal: 300** new units. **Actual:** Since 07, **178 units** have been added. Another 215 are in development.
- Permanent Supportive Housing: **Goal : 275 Actual: Increase of 78** beds.
- Emergency Shelter: **Goal:** 150 new beds. **Actual: Decrease of 14 beds.**
- Transitional Housing: **Goal:** 75 units **Actual: Decrease of 40.** Planned: 90 to 100 beds at Kingdom Center. It must be noted that while these units will meet the numeric goal in the 10-Year Strategy, all the beds will be in the City of Ventura. Other cities need Transitional Housing beds as well. Knowledge gained from the previous two Homeless Counts indicates that people are usually homeless in the same city where they were last housed, and that is the city they call “home”.
- Detox beds: **Goal 20 Actual: 0.** Plans to create Sobering Stations in several areas of the county have yet to go past the planning stage.

II. Progress on Other Recommendations

Seventeen of the recommendations in the 10-Year Strategy focus on areas other than increasing housing units. Part One of this report covers Recommendations 2, 5, and 9-11. Progress on the other seventeen recommendations is as follows:

1. Homeless Prevention Program. Calls for implementation of programs to prevent half of the households who would normally become homeless each year from becoming homeless. This would mean 1,000 less households a year in the cycle of homelessness. Suggestions for making this work in the original Strategy include community education on homelessness, and information on resources available.

Progress: Two city task forces, the Ventura Social Services Task Force (VSSTF) and the Conejo Affordable Housing Work Group have started local prevention funds that provide help to households in danger of becoming homeless. Federal HPRP funds have bolstered these efforts.

2. Permanent Affordable Housing: See Part I.

3. Housing Trust Fund. Calls for creation of a county Housing Trust Fund to serve as a catalyst to develop public and private sources of funding to support production and preservation of affordable housing.

Progress: The Ventura County Housing Trust Fund group is actively working to establish and maintain such a fund. Economic challenges have slowed the progress the group has been able to make. Currently the VCHTF Steering Committee has created a Concept Paper, currently being circulated among leaders in the county. The next step is securing funding to operate the trust fund.

4. Inclusionary Housing Policy. Encourages local jurisdictions to adopt policies that require a percentage of new housing to be affordable to very-low and extremely-low income residents.

Progress: Some cities have adopted inclusionary housing policies.

5. Permanent Supportive Housing: See Part I.
6. Assertive Community Treatment. Calls for expansion of county-wide street outreach to chronically homeless persons. Bringing services to people works better than trying to get people to diverse services in several places.

Progress: The most successful program so far has been The One-Stop, operating on Tuesdays at the Ventura County Public Health Auditorium in Ventura by Kate Mills. For three hours each Tuesday homeless people can access a wide variety of services from health to housing, veteran's affairs and legal services, food and clothing all under one roof. Plans are underway to start a similar program in Simi Valley; balancing East and West county service components remains one of the biggest challenges in many areas.

7. Discharge planning. Calls for a "zero tolerance" plan for discharging clients to the street. Asks for coordination between discharge planning agencies and homeless service providers to decrease discharge into homelessness by at least 10% annually.

Progress: A group encompassing discharge planners from medical, psychiatric, jail and foster youth services is meeting to form plans in hopes to meet the zero tolerance goal for discharging clients to the street.

8. Mainstream resources. Calls for action to ensure that homeless persons and persons at risk of becoming homeless obtain and maintain eligible mainstream resources.

Progress: Efforts on this recommendation continue to improve. One successful plan has been connecting with clients at food pantries to screen for eligibility for other mainstream resources such as Medicaid, SSI or veterans' benefits that they might be eligible for.

9. Shelter beds. See Part I.

10. Transitional Housing. See Part I.

11. Detox beds. See Part I. A 20 bed social model is called for.

12. Homeless Management Information System. Recommendation that 75% of all emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing beds should participate in the County of Ventura Homeless Management Information System by April, 2008.

Progress: The system has been up and running for over two years and efforts are underway to make the system more user friendly, and to continue to increase enrollment among non-HUD funded programs.

13. Community Education Program. Recommends implementation of an education campaign to make the community aware of the findings, guiding principles, goals, and recommendations of the 10-Year Strategy.

Progress: Thanks to a generous grant by the Amgen Foundation, the VCHHC was able to obtain the services of a Community Educator for 20 hours a week for two years beginning October, 2008. The Community Educator has created or expanded many programs to raise public awareness of the recommendations of the 10-Year Strategy, and call attention to the problems of homelessness and solutions to those problems. These include:

- Expanded web presence for the VCHHC
- Speakers' bureau working with community task forces
- Quarterly VCHHC newsletter
- Increased communication between task forces, allowing sharing of best practices

14. Faith-Based Organizations. Calls for enlisting the support of faith-based organizations to help implement the goals and recommendations of the 10-Year Strategy.

Progress: Faith-based organizations are actively engaged in all of the seven community task forces on homelessness and the county's Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH). In Ventura and Simi Valley, which have the largest task forces, Faith Subcommittee groups are working toward ending homelessness in a variety of creative and exciting ways.

15. Private Foundations. Recommends that eligible non-profits apply for funding for programs within the priority areas of private foundations. Recommendations that lend themselves to foundation funding include street outreach, community education and homeless prevention among others.

Progress: Many of the county's largest foundations; the Amgen Foundation, Ventura County Community Foundation (VCCF), First 5, Community Commission for Ventura County (CCVC) and United Way of Ventura County are actively engaged in 10-Year Strategy, funding a variety of programs and contributing trained leaders to assist with Strategy recommendations.

16. Public Agency Grants. Encourages local government departments and non-profit agencies to work together to apply for public agency grants.

Progress: So far government and non-profits have successfully applied for HPRP, NSP and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds aimed at different recommendations in the 10-Year Strategy.

17. Annual Special Event. Encourages local groups to create special events on an annual basis to raise money for community homeless prevention funds.

Progress: Several city task forces have been successful with special event fund-raisers. Of special note so far have been the VSSTF events at street fairs in Ventura, and two movie fund-raisers by the Ojai Valley Task Force, using *Where God Left His Shoes* and *The Soloist* in benefit showings to raise funds and food for local non-profits.

18. Dedicated Sources of Funding. Encourages identifying dedicated sources to fund the recommendations of the 10-Year Strategy. This allows the VCHHC and local task forces to use the majority of their time on things other than fund-raising.

Progress: VCHHC board members and staff are engaged in this task.

19. Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) for Ventura County. The US Interagency Council on Homelessness encourages jurisdictions to create by resolution a local entity that would be charged with coordinating and evaluating policies concerning all of the recommendations and related activities within their 10-Year Strategy.

Progress: The Ventura County ICH has been established and has undertaken discharge planning as first challenge.

20. Ventura County Homeless and Housing Coalition. This recommendation appoints the VCHHC as the advisory body to the VC-ICH and appoints one or more representatives of the VCHHC as standing members of the ICH.

Progress: This recommendation was fulfilled when the ICH was established and continues to be in effect.

21. Homeless 101 Training. Encourages training sessions for law enforcement, business owners and service agency employees who have frequent contact with homeless people in order to instruct them regarding appropriate responses to “minor and criminal behavior” among homeless persons. Recommendation was also suggested as a way to distribute updated service availability and information.

Progress: Efforts in this area have led to conclusion that education efforts in each community are the way to go. In some circumstances a skilled person in a specific group, for example, city

librarians, has been able to contribute insight that can be distributed to all. Updates on service availability have been most successful using printed resources and web pages.

22. Collaborative Justice Courts. This recommendation calls for finding methods to increase awareness of the Ventura County Superior Court system’s “alternative” courts such as “Homeless Court”, “Adult Drug Court” and “Mental Health Court”.

Progress: Alternative courts can increase awareness of solutions that help decriminalize homelessness and provide appropriate solutions to legal problems that allow homeless persons to retain the things they need to reach first steps toward housing. While this is an extremely important program, budget constraints have affected the ability to grow the program at a rate the Working Group that developed the 10-Year Strategy would have liked.

III. Task Force Reports

As part of the preparation for this report, California State University-Channel Islands Sociology students Ana Hurtado and Rachel Tafoya prepared a template for city task forces on homelessness to report on their progress regarding the recommendations of the 10-Year Strategy. Three city task forces submitted their reports below:

Report #1: Task Force to End Homelessness in Santa Paula
Reverend Carolyn Price, Chair

1. What is the work of your committee and which recommendation(s) from the 10YS are you addressing? [Our work is to address the needs of the homeless and at risk of being homeless in the Santa Paula region. Our recommendations are: Homelessness Prevention, Community Education in SP, Detox Services for SP and to increase Faith Based Organizations involvement](#)

2. Who is your target population and how many are served throughout the year?

[Our target pop. is the homeless and at risk of being homeless – roughly 100 people per year, though many more appear to be at risk and impoverished than the counts show.](#)

3. What is your annual budget and what is the source of this money?

[We operate on a donations only basis currently - \\$ comes from the Ministerial Association, private citizens, and churches.](#)

4. What have you accomplished and how do you measure your performance?

We ran a successful summit involving many stakeholders in Santa Paula to identify our goals; we host monthly meetings with the goal of raising involvement; we have worked to increase awareness in the town (through sermons at churches and a community event; another is planned for the spring); and we are involved with the City Council to advocate for the homeless and the at risk of being homeless, to name a few. We measure performance very informally and at a more systemic rather than hands-on level, though currently we are participating in the Steering Committee for a Winter Shelter in Santa Paula.

Thank you for your time and efforts in completing this questionnaire.

Your feedback will make an accurate report possible

Report #2: Simi Valley Task Force on Homelessness
Community Services Specialist Sandra Thompson

1. What is the work of your committee and which recommendation(s) from the 10YS are you addressing?

See attached.

2. Who is your target population and how many are served throughout the year?

The target population is the City of Simi Valley and its citizens, targeting both those in need of services and those who can be part of the solution.

3. What is your annual budget and what is the source of this money?

The City of Simi Valley uses General Fund to support the Task Force on Homelessness, the Alliance to House the Homeless, and the Citizen Advisor position that works directly with organizations that serve the homeless and citizens needing assistance. The City also

funds the publication and distribution of the *Directory of Services for the Homeless and Needy*. Significant CDBG/CDA funds are awarded to non-profit and public agencies serving the homeless, and to fund the Homelessness Prevention Program.

4. What have you accomplished and how do you measure your performance?

The Task Force on Homelessness and the Alliance to House the Homeless measures their accomplishments by effectively addressing City Council approved goals and stated purposes, assisting citizens to effectively help or be helped, and providing for the prevention or reduction of the incidence of homelessness or distress for our citizens. The Alliance to House the Homeless provides a formal documentation of successes by the key homeless service providers who work together in a case management format to assist clients, network on resources, increase knowledge and capacity.

2008/2009 Accomplishments

The following accomplishments were realized in 2008/2009 as a result of the City's commitment to the *Ventura County 10-Year Strategy to End Homelessness*. The City Council/Task Force on Homelessness approved six recommendations which included specific steps that Simi Valley service providers, faith-based organizations, businesses, the City, and the homeless themselves could take to initiate efforts to prevent and reduce the incidence of homelessness in Simi Valley.

1) Recommendation:

The Task Force recommended that Ventura County enforcement and corrections systems explore creative uses of alternative sentencing to ensure that a person's homeless condition does not 1) preclude them from successful completion of the terms of a sentence and, 2) that the terms of the sentence does not force people to remain homeless.

Achievement:

- The above recommendation was added to the final *Ventura County 10-Year Strategy to End Homelessness* document.
- The City of Simi Valley adopted a Parking Citation Alternative Remedies Pilot Program to provide an alternative sentencing program that would allow homeless and those at-risk of homelessness, under certain circumstances, to perform community service in payment for City parking ticket fines.

2) Recommendation:

Adopt a proactive goal of reducing the incidence of homelessness in Simi Valley by 10% annually. With the 2007 homeless count of 163 and subsequent counts, the Task Force will now have the ability to adopt a measurable goal. It is further recommended that this be accomplished by developing an alliance/working group of key homeless service providers, faith-based organizations,

service groups, the Chamber of Commerce, and public agencies to regularly meet and work together to achieve this goal and to provide regular updates on their activities to the Task Force on Homelessness.

Achievement:

- The Alliance to House the Homeless was formed in November 2007 with a representative from three faith-based organizations, 2 non-profit organizations, three County agencies and the City. The Alliance has met monthly to collaborate in a case management format to assist clients, network on resources, and increase knowledge and capacity. In the first year of meeting, the Alliance documented 12-month statistics of homeless persons who obtained housing:
 - In total the Alliance discussed 280 individuals in case management or 162 households
 - At least 97 individuals or 42 households have received financial assistance to maintain their housing
 - 62 individuals have been housed for 6 months or more and met the HUD definition of permanent housing (being housed 6 months or more)
 - An additional 32 homeless are currently still housed (for a combined total of 94 who are still housed or were housed for 6 months or more)
 - An additional 18 were housed at some time during the year, and lost housing

The second year statistics are still pending, but will provide for similar successes.

- Established the Faith Subcommittee that has worked diligently to engage all faith community organizations to address homelessness.

3) Recommendation:

Support the development of eviction/homelessness prevention programs and services in Simi Valley, and forward a recommendation to the City Council that eviction and homelessness prevention services continue to be considered a high priority in the funding of Community Development Block Grants (CDBG).

Achievement:

- Forwarded a letter of support to the CDBG committee.

4) Recommendation:

Encourage City staff to work with local service providers and County agencies to develop and implement the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) model for engaging the homeless to seek, obtain, and remain in existing housing options. The ACT model is a multidisciplinary team approach to street outreach and case management that assertively engages individuals outside of an office setting.

Achievement:

- Behavioral Health representative on the Alliance has access to ACT vouchers and has provided case management to qualify homeless for housing.

- State funding cuts to mental health services eliminated most ACT vouchers, however limited MHSA ACT services are used in Simi Valley.

5) Recommendation:

Direct Community Services staff to work with the Task Force to coordinate the development of a Community Education Program to educate those affected by homelessness, as well as the businesses, faith-based organizations, service providers, community organizations, and community members who could be part of the solution for homelessness.

Achievement:

- TFH meeting provides educational reports/presentations and generates publicity on homeless issues to educate the public.
- Increased TFH membership to include hospital, SVUSD, RSRPD, Youth Council, County Representative and Homeless Representative to engage and inform a wider audience.
- Publish and distribute *Directory of Services for the Homeless and Needy, Resources to Assist the Hungry, Resources for Youth/Teen/Family, and Homeless Resource Card.*
- Developed the Faith Subcommittee with active luncheons, meetings and roundtables to actively engage and inform the entire faith community in working on homeless issues.
- Alliance to House the Homeless formed a collaborative effort to increase capacity with over 200 resources discussed during the last 24 months.
- Developed the *Call to Action* brochures delineating what individuals and organizations can do to address homelessness in Simi Valley, and distributed the brochures to the faith community, organizations, businesses and individuals throughout the community.

6) Recommendation:

Request Community Services staff to conduct a series of roundtable discussion meetings with local non-profit organizations, faith-based organizations, service providers, businesses, community groups, and Task Force members to foster understanding of available services, issues, and needs, to encourage the development of additional services, to strengthen local services, and to address gaps in services. Roundtables would be organized around the following topics: 1) Homelessness Prevention, 2) Substance Abuse, 3) Mental Health and Assertive Community Treatment, 4) Faith-based organizations, 5) Business and 6) Permanent affordable, supportive, and transitional housing.

Achievement:

- Roundtables were held with 1) faith community, 2) Mental Health/substance abuse services, 3) businesses, and 4) housing providers.
- Alliance to House the Homeless collaboration with County, non-profit, City and faith-community representatives on a monthly basis.
- Service providers spoke at the TFH in efforts to build capacity and accountability – Healthcare Agency, VC Dept of Education, etc.

The Ventura Homeless Prevention Fund has kept more than 220 people (103 households) from being evicted from their housing due to a one-time emergency. In 2008 the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness recognized the fund as Innovation Number 1 for addressing homelessness. A "OneFund" Valentine's Weekend event raised over \$10,000.00 for the Fund.

Turning Point Foundation's River Haven tent community has replaced canvas tents with more weatherproof shelters to house 25 adults and their families in transition from homelessness to permanent housing, with professional caseworker support.

Five hundred Cal Lutheran University freshmen, led by Ventura Community Service Manager Peter Brown, and local volunteers, cleaned 7.5 tons of trash from the Santa Clara river bottom in September of 2009 -following up on the removal of 5 tons in 2008.

Ventura's "Safe Parking" project is proceeding toward providing safe, monitored overnight parking for identified homeless people who live in their cars. The Salvation Army is taking the lead on this project and is working in collaboration with the Ventura Police Department to ensure the pilot program is a success.

A collaborative effort of churches is renovating the former City Center Motel on Thompson Blvd. to house about 30 adults and their families who are in transition from homelessness to permanent housing, with professional caseworker support provided by Lutheran Social Services. Presently, 17 rooms and their future guests have been sponsored by Ventura area churches, which have committed financial and personnel support for the project.

The facility known as The Kingdom Center recently held its first community fundraiser, raising over \$10,000 to go towards opening the first 12 rooms. Pending permit approvals the first families can start moving in by Christmas.

Since Operation Embrace's daytime care ministry started some 17 months ago, Harbor Community Church has found permanent employment for 72 homeless persons. In addition, they have found temporary and part-time jobs for many others.

Project Understanding's The SHORE (Supportive Housing in a Residential Environment) has opened. This includes fifteen units of permanent supportive housing for formerly homeless families and individuals.

Ventura County's "One Stop" opened in January of 2008 -open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the spacious Public Health Department auditorium on Loma Vista Road, on the Medical Center campus. Individuals can get a meal, TB test, medical care and food stamps and talk with representatives of mental health, veterans' services, alcohol and drug prevention, housing and other agencies.

On Thanksgiving Day the second annual One City celebration will be held. Last

year's event saw nearly 900 meals served to over 600 people. People of all kinds, from those on the economic fringe to our most prominent politicians and everyone in between, will gather to share a meal and one another's company.

The City of Ventura hired Ken Belden, a retired cop, to help the chronically homeless who live in city parks and panhandle outside businesses reach the services they often desperately need. The City also funded the VSSTF with \$50,000.00 in 2008 and again in 2009 to move forward with implementing the objectives outlined in the 10 Year Strategy.

The VSSTF paired with United Way of Ventura County to hold three "Bridges Out of Poverty Workshops".

The VSSTF held a Ventura Leadership Breakfast on February 2, 2009 for over 40 community leaders to update them on the 10 Year Strategy and the VHPF. "Straight Up Reality Improv" assisted with several skits that communicated well some of what those in poverty face daily.

Seven cities in Ventura County have Homeless Task Forces:

- **Camarillo Work Force Housing Task Force** For information contact Sonia Flores (housefarmworkers@verizon.net)
- **Conejo Affordable Housing Work Group** meets in the Acorn Room of Thousand Oaks City Hall, 2100 Thousand Oaks Blvd. For information contact Alex Russell (alex@many mansions.org)
- **Ojai Valley Homeless Task Force:** Contact Sue Broidy at 640-7340, or sbroidy@ojaimail.com.
- **Oxnard Commission on Homelessness** meets at the Oxnard Library the 251 South A Street, Room B. For more information contact Will Reed (will.reed@ci.oxnard.ca.us)
- **Simi Valley Task Force on Homelessness** meets at City Hall, 2929 Tapo Canyon Rd. For more information call (805) 583-6861
- **Task Force to End Homelessness in Santa Paula** meets at St. Sebastian Church, 235 N. 9th Street, Santa Paula. For information contact Rev. Carolyn Price (uurevclprice@gmail.com)
- **Ventura Social Services Task Force** meets at Family to Family, 303 N. Ventura Avenue, #B. For information and agendas go to www.onecityventura.org.

For more information go to www.vchhc.org.