

EAST COUNTY CITIES' LACK OF RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS

SUMMARY

The 2015 Regional Task Force on the Homeless San Diego (RTFHSD) Point-in-Time Count¹ tallied over 8,000 homeless people in San Diego County. By far the largest number (65%) live in the City of San Diego. Thus it makes sense that the bulk of homeless services, such as shelters and transitional housing, are located in San Diego (mostly downtown). In East County cities, however, few homeless services exist despite San Diego County guidelines that services should be located proportional to need. The 2015/2016 San Diego County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) recommends that East County cities initiate common programs to address homelessness issues by joining the Regional Continuum of Care Council and devoting attention and resources to this under-served group.

INTRODUCTION

The 2009/2010 San Diego County Grand Jury produced a report, "Homeless in San Diego," which focused primarily (though not exclusively) on the City of San Diego. This Grand Jury became interested in the situation in East San Diego County's four incorporated cities: El Cajon, La Mesa, Lemon Grove and Santee.

PROCEDURE

- The Grand Jury surveyed the four cities to determine their homeless incidents and costs and their provision of services
- The Grand Jury interviewed elected officials and homeless service providers
- The Grand Jury examined county homeless statistics, and city and County policies, procedures, and programs for homeless people

DISCUSSION

Homelessness is a highly complex set of issues encompassing, among other factors, housing costs, mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, employment availability, policing practices and city laws. The response to homelessness involves federal, state and local governments, non-profit organizations, police, schools, foundations and individual citizens. In San Diego County, two county-wide organizations, the Regional Task Force on the Homeless and the Regional Continuum of Care Council (RCCC) coordinate stakeholders' efforts to meet the challenges of homelessness collaboratively.

In East County, the response to homelessness lies most heavily on El Cajon, which has the largest homeless population, the only site for emergency and transitional housing (the

¹ www.rtfhsd.org

East County Transitional Living Center [ECTLC]), and a concentration of low-cost motels.

For the past several years, the El Cajon City Council's primary response to its homeless population has been to appropriate Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to ECTLC for emergency shelter (\$75,000 in the 2015-2016 fiscal year, \$100,000 in 2016-2017). At a daily room rate of \$49.50, the grant funds about 1,500 nights of lodging – an average of eight rooms per night – primarily between October and March according to ECTLC. El Cajon's second major response to homelessness has been to provide city-owned space for Crisis House, Inc. at no cost (estimated by the city as a \$91,000 value). El Cajon reports participation in the RCCC, but not as a municipal member².

Of the other three East County cities, Santee appropriated \$2,000 of its Community Development Block Grant to Crisis House this fiscal year; it reports participating in the RCCC, but is not a municipal member. Neither La Mesa nor Lemon Grove appropriates city funds for homelessness issues, nor participates in the RCCC.

The RCCC Governance Board has just two East County members, a faith community member, and a service provider who oversees programs in two southern California counties. There are no East County elected officials on the Board.

Given this meager participation in regional efforts, it is not surprising that no East County city has sought or received U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grants for homelessness programs. In March 2016, HUD released almost \$15,000,000 in homelessness-related grants to San Diego County organizations and cities. Of the fifty-five programs funded, just one is located in East County cities: Crisis House in El Cajon will receive \$192,211 for Domestic Violence Transitional Housing and \$414,891 for its Journey Home program (also focused on domestic violence clients). This compares with ten in North County and three in South Bay.

El Cajon and La Mesa Police Departments responded to a request for information on the number and costs of incidents with homeless people. For 2014, El Cajon Police Department reported 655 arrests and 2,568 calls for service, at an estimated cost of \$411,184; La Mesa, 1,761 incidents at a cost of \$269,134. Neither the San Diego County Sheriff's Department Santee Station nor the Lemon Grove Substation provided data, but the December 14, 2015 San Diego County News Center³ reported that 10% of calls from the Sheriff's Santee Station involved homeless people. To respond to the need, the Sheriff's Department recently added a Homeless Outreach Team to its East County operations.

² Membership requires groups to contribute \$50 per year, commit to the RCCC Mission, and agree to participate in RCCC'S work as evidenced by regular participation in meetings or subgroups.

³<http://www.countynewscenter.com/news/county-homeless-outreach-team-launched-east-county>

In short, homelessness results in serious costs for East County police and sheriffs. The El Cajon Police Department's survey response included this statement: "In order to effectively deal with the homeless population, the El Cajon Police Department believes there is a significant need for on-going, year round housing and support services for the homeless."

FACTS AND FINDINGS

Fact: The RTFHSD Point-in-Time Count 2015 listed these figures for East County cities:

- El Cajon: Emergency Shelter: 202. Supportive Housing: 0. Transitional Housing: 318. Sheltered total: 520. Unsheltered: 191. Total: 711
- Santee: Sheltered: 0. Unsheltered: 30. Total: 30
- La Mesa: Sheltered: 0. Unsheltered: 19. Total: 19
- Lemon Grove: Sheltered: 0. Unsheltered: 11. Total: 11

Fact: The El Cajon City Council appropriated \$75,000 of CDBG funds for the emergency shelter at ECTLC for the 2015-2016 fiscal year and \$100,000 for 2016-2017. The \$49.50 daily rate charged to the city grant provides about 1,500 nights of lodging in fiscal 2015-2016. The ECTLC expends these funds from October through March, for an average of eight rooms per night.

Fact: The shelter programs cited in the RTFHSD report include:

- Center for Community Solutions Project Safehouse and Next Step-East, serving domestic violence clients
- Crisis House, serving domestic violence clients, families with children, and people with disabilities
- ECTLC, through one-year Christian discipleship programs, serving 402 individuals and 54 families (174 children and adults) in 2015, and a Transitional Living program serving 73 families (207 adults and children) in 2015
- Home Start, Inc., Hotel/Motel Voucher Program East, serving families with children
- Interfaith Shelter Network East County, serving approximately twelve people per week for about six months
- Volunteers of America, serving people with disabilities, mentally ill clients and veterans

Fact: According to figures supplied by the El Cajon Police Department, costs for arrests and calls dealing with homeless people are estimated at \$411,000 for 2014. The La Mesa Police Department estimates its homeless-related costs for 2014 at \$269,000.

Fact: The Sheriff's Department estimates that about 10% of all calls for service in Santee relate to homeless people.

Fact: In fall 2015, the Sheriff’s Department and the County of San Diego’s Department of Health and Human Services launched the East Regional Homeless Outreach Team (HOT), based at the Sheriff’s Santee Station.

Finding 01: East County emergency and transitional housing is available only in El Cajon and exists primarily for families with children, victims of domestic violence, veterans, the mentally ill, and those willing to join a one-year Christian discipleship program.

Fact: The Regional Continuum of Care Council has no East County municipal members.

Fact: El Cajon, La Mesa, Lemon Grove, and Santee all reported receiving no county monies for dealing with homeless issues in the current fiscal year.

Fact: The San Diego County Board of Supervisors Comprehensive Homeless Policy states, “The County supports the equitable distribution of facilities and services throughout the Region so that no one jurisdiction or community is impacted by providing more than its fair share of facilities and services.”

Finding 02: East County cities have marginal involvement in homeless issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2015/2016 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends that the Mayors and City Councils of El Cajon, La Mesa, Lemon Grove, and Santee:

16-58: Initiate coordinated homelessness-related efforts to increase prevention, shelter, and transitional housing services in East County.

16-59: Join the Regional Continuum of Care Council and participate in its work.

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 headed by an elected officer, both the 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 from the:

Responding Agency	Recommendations	Date
Mayor, City Council—La Mesa	16-58, 16-59	8/29/16
Mayor, City Council-El Cajon	16-58, 16-59	8/29/16
Mayor, City Council—Lemon Grove	16-58, 16-59	8/29/16
Mayor, City Council—Santee	16-58, 16-59	8/29/16