

San Joaquin County Grand Jury



Homelessness in San Joaquin County Time for Collaboration, Commitment and Communication

2015-2016 Case No. 1507

Summary

The 2015-2016 Grand Jury initiated an examination of the homeless situation in San Joaquin County. Through the course of its investigation jurors found some consistent themes: witnesses for virtually each entity felt resources were scarce and the issues complex, emotional and multi-faceted. In addition, jurors were told local community leaders must ultimately lead any initiatives. Strategies developed must be based on our County's unique needs. A one-size-fits-all approach will not be effective.

While resources to address this issue may be limited there are many public, private and non-profit agencies attempting to help. Unfortunately, there is little, if any, coordination among the various groups. While resources may be scarce, resourcefulness should not be.



A homeless Lodi couple rests at a Cherokee Lane bus stop.

In addition to the lack of coordination among agencies, there is no overarching strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness.

Among other things, the Grand Jury found:

- San Joaquin County does not have a single clearly defined strategic plan to address homelessness
- Collaboration and communication among County government and private agencies is virtually nonexistent
- There are many governmental, private and non-profit agencies that strive to help the homeless, but there is no leadership to focus all the parties involved

- The lack of leadership, communication and collaboration indicates that addressing homelessness in the County has not been a major priority

As a result, the Grand Jury recommends:

- County officials take the leadership role in creating a single, focused and coherent strategic plan to address homelessness
- This strategic plan needs measureable long- and short-term goals and objectives with an established timeline and an annual evaluation process
- One individual within County government be appointed to oversee all matters related to the homeless
- That individual needs to report directly to the County Administrator and have the authority, resources and respect to bring together the necessary entities to develop the County's Strategic Plan on Homelessness

Background

Many Americans believe in the American Dream of home ownership. But for our homeless population just trying to find a safe and secure place to sleep from one night to the next is a daily challenge.

San Joaquin County has no strategic plan focused solely on addressing the homeless. In fact there are many competing documents and committees that attempt to address this issue in the County. The multitude of well-meaning efforts, both public and private, lacks consistent, effective communication and coordination. No doubt resources to address this issue are limited. To have an effective impact on reducing homelessness efforts need to be better coordinated, with greater collaboration and communication.



A homeless camp under Highway 99 in Lodi.

Issues/Reason for Investigation

Homelessness has adversely affected the quality of life for citizens throughout the County. It is an impediment to a thriving community. As homelessness has become more visible, concerns about it have grown.

While being homeless isn't a crime, the unfortunate byproduct can be criminal behaviors, such as public drug use and drunkenness.

Many behaviors may be unavoidable by the very nature of being homeless, such as trespassing, loitering, panhandling, public urination and defecation. The effect of these behaviors shouldn't be minimized; it reduces property values, creates sanitary issues, and impedes the economic viability of businesses where the homeless congregate.



Tarps are used for protection at a homeless camp under Interstate 5 at Weber Avenue in Stockton.

Method of Investigation

The Grand Jury investigation included:

Materials Reviewed

- A survey of the County and its seven incorporated cities.
- “Homelessness of Lodi; Current Conditions, Challenges and Recommend Strategies” (September 2015).
- San Joaquin County website <http://www.co.san-joaquin.ca.us/>
- Various newspaper reports, columns and editorials
- Homeless plans from other counties and states
- Federal strategic plan to end homelessness

Interviews Conducted (12)

- County (staff)
- City officials (Lodi and Stockton)
- Private citizens

Sites Visited

- Visits to homeless shelters and encampments in Stockton and Lodi

Discussions, Findings, and Recommendations

1.0 San Joaquin Urban County Consolidated Plan 2015-2019/Annual Action Plan, Fiscal Year 2015-16

The Grand Jury requested the County’s plan for addressing the homeless and was given the San Joaquin Urban County Consolidated Plan, but only six of the report’s 191 pages addressed homelessness.

The County hires an outside consultant to prepare the Consolidated Plan. This is a report the County must submit to the federal government to receive funding for various housing programs. The report contains a housing needs assessment and housing market analysis. The primary purpose of this report is to meet federal mandates in order to receive certain federal housing dollars.

The 2015-2019 Consolidated Plan was the successor to the 2010-2015 plan. The San Joaquin Urban County Consolidated Plan 2015-2019 stated “A number of public facilities and infrastructure improvements were completed during the previous Consolidated Plan period, including expanding ... the number of beds available to homeless persons for emergency shelter and transitional housing ...” Table 1 below shows the total number of emergency shelter and transitional housing beds decreased from 2,362 to 1,323 (these figures do not include the number of permanent supportive beds).

**TABLE 1
COMPARISON SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY’S CONSOLIDATED PLAN
2010-2015 vs 2015-2019**

	2010-2015		2015-2019		Difference
Homeless Pop.	2,983		1,657		-44%
Sheltered	2,280		1,116		-51%
Unsheltered	165		541		+220%
Current Inventory (Beds)					
Emergency Shelter	1699	63%*	519	24%*	-69%
Transitional Housing	663	25%*	806	37%*	+22%
Perm. Supportive	339	12%*	852	39%*	+151%
	2,701	100%	2,177	100%	-19%

*Percentage of total beds

These two Consolidated Plans claim to quantify the number of homeless in San Joaquin County. It is impossible to make any comparisons between the two. The Grand Jury learned that the number of homeless is underreported.

The Consolidated Plan cites a “Community Coalition on Homelessness Interagency Council.” However, no one from the County could clearly articulate the purpose of this “Council” and more importantly the County’s role with the “Council.”

Findings

F1.1 The Consolidated Plan does not contain a clearly defined strategic plan to address homelessness. It does reference a “Homeless Prevention Plan.” (see Appendix 1).

F1.2 County staff members responsible for addressing homeless programs were not involved in the creation of the Consolidated Plan and have limited working knowledge of the report. Some statements in the Plan, i.e. expanding of the number of beds available, are not substantiated.

F1.3 No upper management County staff member is involved with the “Community Coalition on Homelessness Interagency Council.”

F1.4 The scope of the problem is compounded by a lack of accurate and comparable data.

Recommendations

R1.1 By Jan. 1, 2017, the County develop and implement a strategic plan to address homelessness in San Joaquin County that includes measureable long- and short-term goals and objectives with an established timeline and an annual evaluation process.



Beds in a day room at the Stockton Shelter for the Homeless.

2.0 Coordination of County departments/agencies

Homelessness is a complex problem requiring coordination, cooperation and communication among multiple departments within the County's organizational structure. These include but are not limited to the Sheriff, District Attorney, Health Care Services, Human Services, Employment and Economic Department, Housing Authority and Community Development. Upper management/department heads need to be the leaders in this effort to improve coordination, cooperation and communication. Through the course of the investigation it became apparent that there was a lack of communication among the various County agencies to address the issue of homelessness; because the issue is everyone's responsibility, it is nobody's responsibility.

The Board of Supervisors has taken some initial steps to form a task force to address homelessness. The process is still in its infancy and at this time there is no overarching leadership within the County. Funding this effort may require reprioritizing and reallocating existing resources.

Findings

F2.1 Departments within the County's organizational structure have no consistent or focused strategies to work together in addressing homelessness.

F2.2 There is no lead County department or agency coordinating efforts directed toward the homeless.

Recommendations

R2.1 By Jan. 1, 2017, the Board of Supervisors should appoint one individual within County government to oversee all matters related to homelessness reporting directly to the County Administrator. That person needs the authority and resources to bring together the necessary entities to develop and implement the County’s Strategic Plan on Homelessness.

R2.2 By Jan. 1, 2017, the Board of Supervisors fund a position to oversee this initiative, even if it requires reprioritizing and reallocating other resources.

3.0 Coordination with Cities and others

Effective coordination, cooperation and communication among the County, cities and all public and non-profit agencies that serve the County’s homeless is critical for any strategy to be successful. The Grand Jury learned that there is no such coordination, either in funding or approach, to address the issue of homelessness within the county. There are no standing committees, no joint powers agreements and no overarching strategies on homelessness. Although the County does receive federal Block Grant money, part of which is used to help the homeless, County officials view their role as acting simply as a “pass-through” agency. For example, the County’s “2010-2015 Consolidated Plan” listed seven “Weaknesses in the Organizational Structure” to address the homeless population in San Joaquin County and actions necessary to eliminate those weaknesses.

They are:

- Coordinate decision making
- Expansion of outreach
- Improve timely implementation of projects
- Expand availability of technical assistance
- Advocate for changes in federal regulations that discourage interagency cooperation
- Partnerships needed
- Expand interagency communication

The County’s “2015-2019 Consolidated Plan” provided no evidence the issues were addressed.

The City of Lodi is the exception. Lodi has been able to bring various public and private stakeholders, including businesses, together to develop a comprehensive approach to address the homeless problem. The City’s plan required some groups to relinquish current programs to make Lodi’s overall approach more effective. When the Grand Jury surveyed the County’s cities, Lodi was the only entity that adequately addressed each of the items requested (see Appendix 2).

In fact, based on the lack of responsiveness from some cities to the survey, it is questionable that officials even read the Grand Jury’s request. The City of Stockton’s response was inadequate and provided no specific information. For example, the Jury asked the City to provide names of individuals who could assist us in addressing our questions regarding the homeless. No names were provided.

Findings

F3.1 The City of Lodi along with private individuals and agencies have taken encouraging steps to address the homeless issue. The success Lodi has achieved can be attributed to the coordinated efforts of public agencies, non-profit groups and churches (see Appendix 2).

F3.2 The County's "2010-2015 Consolidated Plan" listed seven "Weaknesses in Organizational Structure" to address the homeless population and actions necessary to eliminate those weaknesses. The County's "2015-2019 Consolidated Plan" provided no evidenced the issues were addressed.

Recommendations

R3.1 The County should use Lodi's efforts as a framework to start the strategic planning process.

R3.2 By Jan. 1, 2017, the Board of Supervisors formulate a plan to eliminate its self-identified "Weaknesses in the Organizational Structure."

Conclusion

The Grand Jury investigation discovered general agreement among agency administrators and elected officials that more coordination and cooperation is necessary to effectively address the homeless population in San Joaquin County.

The Jury's research revealed some encouraging initial efforts. Many concerned citizens and organizations are committed to addressing the homeless issue. For example, the Stockton Shelter for the Homeless is providing shelter in an effective and humane manner and Lodi's plan provides a blueprint for what is possible.

While many groups are working on the problem, the glaring lack of centralized coordination means efforts are sometimes at cross purposes, needlessly duplicated and wasteful of limited resources.

The problem is exacerbated by a lack of commitment, communication and collaboration from the County of San Joaquin. The County must take a more active role in bringing all stakeholders together if any long-term, coherent strategies are to be developed and implemented. Until recently most county officials have shown little or no interest in taking on this challenge.

The County Administrator, with the backing of the Board of Supervisors, must demonstrate a greater degree of leadership in addressing the needs of the homeless.

Government will not solve this problem alone. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Lessons can be learned from the efforts of others. During the course of the Grand Jury's investigation, a number of ideas to address the homeless issue were expressed. They included:

- Establish a single phone number for all things related to citizens' concerns regarding the homeless. Currently, citizens do not know which agency to call to address problems involving the homeless. It may be a County, City, CalTrans, law

enforcement or mental health issue. A designated point of contact would know which agency has jurisdiction. This could reduce both cost and response time.

- Start a public service advertisement campaign to educate the public about this issue, including strategies to handle panhandlers and trespassers.
- Rather than having the homeless picked up by law enforcement sent to the County Jail, the County could establish detox centers strategically located in the County. This would provide more immediate and appropriate services.

Disclaimers

Grand Jury reports are based on documentary evidence and the testimony of sworn or admonished witnesses, not on conjecture or opinion. However, the Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing such evidence except upon the specific approval of the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court, or another judge appointed by the Presiding Judge (Penal Code sections 911, 924.1 (a) and 929). Similarly, the Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing the identity of witnesses except upon an order of the court for narrowly defined purposes (Penal Code sections 924.2 and 929).

Response Requirements

California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05 require that specific responses to all findings and recommendations contained in this report be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the San Joaquin County Superior Court within 90 days of receipt of the report.

The Board of Supervisors shall respond to each Finding and Recommendation in this report.

Mail or hand deliver a hard copy of the response to:

José L. Alva, Presiding Judge
San Joaquin County Superior Court
PO Box 201022
Stockton, CA 95201

Also, please email the response to Ms. Trisa Martinez, Staff Secretary to the Grand Jury at grandjury@sjcourts.org

Appendices

1. San Joaquin County's "Homeless Prevention Plan"
2. "Homelessness in Lodi; Current Conditions, Challenges and Recommended Strategies; Committee on Homelessness (September 2015)

Appendix 1

HOMELESS PREVENTION:

Primary goals/objectives:

In accordance with the consolidated plans of San Joaquin County and the City of Stockton, and in accordance with the objective stated in the ten year plan to end homelessness included in the annual Continuum of Care submission to HUD to reduce the number of homeless families, the general goals and objectives of the homeless prevention plan are to provide:

- Intervention on behalf of households who are in imminent risk of becoming homeless to prevent people from initially becoming homeless
- Diversion from emergency shelters of working households who have reached the point of contacting shelters
- Rapid re-housing of working households who have become homeless.

Targeted populations:

- Households income forced to vacate rental properties that enter foreclosure, and where there is a reasonable expectation of becoming self-sufficient within six months
- Households at imminent risk of becoming homeless due to factors not related to the activity of one or more household members, where the household has experienced a sudden and substantial loss of income, where such loss is not due to the activity of one or more household members, and where there is a reasonable expectation of becoming self-sufficient within six months
- Households in transitional housing where the household has experienced a sudden and substantial loss of income, where such loss is not due to the activity of one or more household members, and where there is a reasonable expectation of becoming self-sufficient within six months
- Households at imminent risk of becoming homeless due to factors not related to the activity of one or more household members, where the household has experienced a sudden and substantial increase in utility costs where such increase is not due to the activity of one or more household members, and where there is a reasonable expectation of becoming self-sufficient within six months
- Households with forced to vacate rental housing condemned by local housing officials, when condemnation is not a result of the activity of one or more household members, and where there is a reasonable expectation of becoming self-sufficient within six months
- Households at imminent risk of becoming homeless due to factors not related to the activity of one or more household members, where there has been a traumatic life event, such as death of a spouse or primary care giver or recent health crisis that prevented the household from meeting its normal financial responsibilities, and where there is a reasonable expectation of becoming self-sufficient within six months
- Households with at least one adult employed, at imminent risk of becoming homeless due to factors not related to the activity of one or more household members, and where there is a reasonable expectation of becoming self-sufficient within six months
- Households with currently living in an emergency shelter, in locations not meant for human habitation, or are fleeing domestic violence, where there is a reasonable expectation of becoming self-sufficient within six months, and who for whom there is not

If a participant believes that assistance has been terminated unfairly, they may file a grievance in writing, clearly stating the circumstances and why they believe the action was wrong. Their case will be reviewed by a CVLIHC staff team (composed of staff from multiple program areas), and may involve an interview with the review team. If a client believes that the review team has not adequately examined the issues involved, a final appeal may be made to CVLIHC's Executive Director; this appeal must clearly state how or why the review team did not adequately investigate the original grievance.

Appendix 2

HOMELESSNESS IN LODI

**Current Conditions, Challenges and
Recommended Strategies**

Presented by:

Committee on Homelessness

September 2015

II. Methodology/Information Gathering

In order to clearly understand the causes and effects of homelessness, the HSC, with assistance from the Lodi Police Department, set out to gather factual information and public opinion from a number of sources. Lt. Nelson did extensive research on how other communities similar to Lodi have responded to the issue of homelessness; this information was presented as part of the "Homeless Solutions" presentation by Chief Helms to the City Council on March 17th.²

Since it is always instructive to listen and acknowledge the feelings and observations of the general public, the HSC also conducted four public "listening sessions" for three purposes:

- 1) to learn and understand how homelessness is affecting Lodi residents and businesses
- 2) to learn about the specific needs of homeless people directly from the homeless themselves
- 3) to learn about current programs that serve the homeless in our community and in the county

The first "listening session" for the public was held on April 16th between 9 am and 12 noon with nearly 50 people in attendance. On that same day, in the afternoon, a special session was conducted for service providers with about 40 in attendance. In order to accommodate residents and business owners who work during the day, a second "listening session" for the public was held on May 19th from 7 to 9 pm with 55 in attendance. All of the "listening sessions" for the public were widely publicized in the Lodi News Sentinel and through social media. A fourth meeting specifically for homeless individuals was conducted on May 27th at the Salvation Army with about 45 in attendance.³ In all, these meetings provided an opportunity for several distinct constituencies and nearly two hundred individuals in the Lodi community.

III. Homelessness as a Societal Issue

In order to provide a broader context for the discussion of homelessness in Lodi, it is important to know and understand the extent and effects of homelessness as a societal issue throughout the United States.

In the **United States** the Federal definition of a homeless person is: an individual who: 1) lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence and 2) whose primary nighttime residence is a supervised temporary shelter, institution or place not ordinarily used for sleeping.⁴ A chronically homeless person are defined as an individual who has been homeless for a year or more or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years and has a permanent disability. The following is a statistical description of the homeless as of January 2014.⁵

² Chief Helm's complete report in PowerPoint style is in Appendix A.

³ The minutes and notes from the public hearings are contained in Appendix B.

⁴ Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987

⁵ National Alliance to End Homelessness (website: endhomelessness.org)

Total number of homeless: 578,242

Homeless people in families: 216,197

Most homeless families bounce back from their time being homeless, with relatively little public assistance help. With rental assistance, housing placement services, job assistance and other short term services, they escape and avoid long term homelessness.⁶

One in 30 of American children is homeless, approximately 2.5 million. Very often many of these children are unseen, doubling up with their families on friends' couches, sleeping in all night diners or moving from motel to motel. The US Department of Education counts the number of school children without a fixed address which amounts to 1.1 million. It is estimated that about one million children are excluded from the bi-annual "homeless count" conducted through the Department of Housing and Urban Development.⁷

Studies also indicate that children who are homeless are more likely to have health problems, to miss school and have lower academic achievement. Childhood housing instability and homelessness has been identified as an indicator of future homelessness.⁸

There are 49,933 homeless veterans in the U.S.

Since 2009 the Federal Government has made a substantial commitment to end homelessness among veterans. Through "rapid re-housing" and "Housing First" strategies, the number of homeless veterans has decreased 33% in six years.

There are 86,736 chronically homeless in the U.S.

The chronically homeless usually have some kind of permanent physical or mental disability; they often live in shelters; they consume most of the social service resources dedicated to serve the homeless. Studies have also indicated that the chronically homeless tend to have high rates of behavioral health problems, mental illness and substance abuse disorders, physical illness, injury and trauma. In addition they are frequent users of emergency services, crisis response and public safety systems.⁹

The homeless population is not easily described or categorized; instead it is more often stereotyped based on how each of us encounters homeless people. A good many homeless people want a pathway out of homelessness and are involved in programs to help them on their way. Some homeless persons have chronic physical disabilities and/or behavioral health conditions that make it difficult for them to secure housing. There are some homeless people, so afflicted by their disabilities that they have little hope and resist change. And finally there are some individuals who are homeless of their own volition.

⁶ National Alliance to End Homelessness (website: endhomelessness.org)

⁷ Wiltz, Teresa. "Invisible Homeless Kids Challenge States," The Pew Charitable Trusts.

⁸ Burt, Martha R. "Demographics and Geography: Estimating Needs" for the 1998 National Symposium on Homelessness Research.

⁹ National Alliance to End Homelessness (endhomelessness.org) website

Some communities report that their homeless population is growing older and more severely troubled. In San Francisco, over 30% of homeless are over the age of 51.¹⁰

It should be noted that these percentages are approximate and likely vary by community. In San Francisco, where there are approximately 6,000 homeless individuals, about one-third are considered "hard core." Many are picked up, arrested, held for awhile, released, and picked up again. According to the U.S. Interagency on Homelessness and United Way of the Bay Area, each hard core homeless person costs the City of San Francisco approximately \$60,000 each year in police arrests, emergency rides in ambulances, etc.¹¹

In California there were 90,765 homeless individuals in California as of January 2014. That number equals 20% of all the homeless in the U.S. Of that California total of 71,437 or 72.6%, were unsheltered. This percentage of unsheltered individuals, 72.6%, is the highest of all states in the U.S. Between 2007 and 2014, the percentage of unsheltered homeless individuals decreased by 24.5%.¹²

In California there are 1,650 emergency shelters.¹³ The majority of emergency shelters are operated by non-profit organizations and were developed in response to the increase in the homeless population after the State of California began to close the State mental hospitals in the 1970s.

The State of California does not have an active state Interagency Council on Homelessness, and the state ranks 49th in terms of policy and planning for the homeless.¹⁴

In Lodi our local experiences, as both civic leaders and residents, are consistent with how other communities experience homeless persons and their consequences. Indeed homelessness is now often experienced in rural and/or suburban communities, not just urban centers.¹⁵

Every two years the City of Lodi participates with municipalities throughout the country in a national "homeless" count. This bi-annual count includes sheltered and unsheltered homeless; sheltered homeless are counted annually. This "on any given night" count was conducted in accordance to congressional direction given to the federal Housing and Urban Development Department, often referred to as HUD; the count is a contractual obligation on the part of San Joaquin County in order to receive specific funds to assist homeless individuals and families. Unsheltered homeless individuals and families were encouraged to gather at "Homeless Connection" events to access services and to be counted. Those counted and surveyed had to meet the HUD definition of unsheltered homeless, i.e. those who were actively staying in a car, tent, condemned building, under an overpass, or another place otherwise unfit for human habitation on the night before the count. Those staying in homeless

¹⁰ Kevin Fagan and Heather Knight, "Homeless in the City Growing Older and Sicker," San Francisco Chronicle.

¹¹ San Francisco Chronicle, June 5, 2015

¹² The 2014 Annual Assessment Report, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development.

¹³ America's Youngest Outcasts," www.HomelessChildrenAmerica.org

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See the following articles: Kevin Valine, Lodi News Sentinel, August 22, 2015 and Marcos Breton, "Urban Problem Comes to Suburbs," Sacramento Bee, August 23, 2015.

shelters, transitional housing for the homeless, doubled-up with friends or family member are not included in the unsheltered count.¹⁶

The City's Community Services Department conducts the "count" which was recently held during the first week of January 2015. In Lodi there were 87 unsheltered homeless adults and 4 unsheltered homeless children. The total for San Joaquin County was 541. This number compares to 247 in 2011 and 263 in 2013; this increase in numbers may reflect an actual increase in unsheltered homeless, but it is more plausible that the increase reflects a more effective outreach to and response from the homeless population.¹⁷

The majority of these unsheltered homeless, or 78%, are between the ages of 25 and 59. 65% are white, 15% African-American, with the remaining nearly equally spread among American Indian, Asian and multiple races. 60% are male; 40% female.¹⁸

Almost 40% of all adults surveyed in the unsheltered count self-reported that they were dealing with a substance abuse problem, mental health issue or both. It is believed that the number of homeless individuals dealing with these conditions is greater than what is reported, since some individuals refused to answer this question on the survey; it is typical that substance abuse and mental health issues are under-reported when identified by self-reporting.¹⁹

In addition there is no reason to believe that these county-wide statistics do not generally reflect the "picture of homelessness" in Lodi.

It is widely thought and acknowledged that the official "count" total for Lodi is low, with the estimated number of homeless individuals is between 100 to 200 individuals. It is also acknowledged that this number varies by season due to the relatively moderate climate, harvesting season and the transient nature of many homeless individuals.

IV. Findings of the Research and the Public Hearings

- **Homelessness is a divisive issue in our community.** Citizens of our city experience the consequences of homelessness in different ways and from different perspectives. Some primarily view homelessness as a circumstance that negatively impacts businesses and neighborhoods, and there is clear evidence that such is the case; homeless individuals that this report has characterized as "chronic" and who apparently have "chosen" to be homeless are the ones making the most negative impact on areas such as downtown, along the river and now into other neighborhoods. As a result, citizens who share this perspective on the homeless want the

¹⁶ San Joaquin County Continuum of Care, San Joaquin County 2015 Point-in-Time Unsheltered Homeless Count Report, p. 1

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p 2

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3-4

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 5

City to take more direct law enforcement and even extra-legal steps to rid the city of the problem.

Others primarily view homelessness as a situation, that despite posing public health and safety problems, needs to be addressed with kindness, compassion and services that can help homeless individuals and families escape their homeless situation and return to normal and productive lives. This humanitarian and faith-based response is evidenced in the outpouring of human and financial resources local citizens provide independently or through local agencies that serve the homelessness and needy in our community.

- **Law enforcement alone is not an effective method by which to address or remedy the homeless problem.** Research conducted by the Lodi Police Department (LPD) clearly indicates that the enforcement alone approach does not work; there are indeed laws and resulting case law restricting local police from some means of direct action.

For instance, current law equates a "homeless encampment" with private property, which therefore requires a 72 hour notice for eviction from that property. Obviously this makes it impossible for the LPD or any other extra-legal group to remove a homeless encampment without notice. The law also requires that local law enforcement officials catalog and retain all private property and belongings of those evicted from the property for 90 days. Currently the LPD does not have resources to continually implement these operations.

And ultimately this approach does not necessarily "solve" the homelessness problem. While the approach may reduce numbers in the short term, it is likely the "chronic" homeless will move to other areas of the city.

- **The "best practice" strategies to address and reduce homelessness are well documented and working well in a number of communities.** In general they include the following:
 1. Access to physical and behavioral health services, including substance abuse and addiction detox services and respite care.
 2. Job preparation skills.
 3. Jobs, from day labor opportunities to full time employment.
 4. Life skills training.
 5. Transportation to and from services provided outside of the city.
 6. Low-income supported, transitional and permanent housing.

The American journalist and social commentator H.L. Mencken wrote this: "For every social ill or problem there is a simple and single answer that won't work." That is precisely why no single "best practice" strategy on its own will adequately address homelessness. Instead, an

Integrated and multi-disciplinary approach will be the most effective to reduce homelessness. Included in any multi-disciplinary approach are two critical components: housing and employment. Following is a fuller description of “best practice” strategies for housing and employment.

One of the root causes of homelessness is that many people cannot afford a place to live. People who are homeless do not have enough money to pay rent, let alone begin to purchase a home. Rental prices are increasing and inventory is tight. A new report by the Urban Institute finds that there are only 29 affordable units for every 100 extremely low-income households; in Lodi that number is 4.²⁰ And yet, the vast majority of the nation’s homeless, 85% of the estimated 580,000, who are homeless for relatively short periods of time, eventually find a place to live, but generally not without some financial and rental assistance. The remaining 15% (a percentage that varies depending on the community) fill up homeless shelters and/or spend time in jail. The traditional “shelter first” model for dealing with the homeless is designed to prepare for housing by guiding them through drug rehabilitation programs or mental health counseling, etc. This “linear residential treatment” or “continuum of care” model is an effective approach for some homeless people, but doesn’t necessarily work well for the homeless who either reject and/or have a difficult time meeting the requirements to become “ready.” A number of communities, including the state of Utah, have successfully implemented a new model, often referred to as the “Housing First” model. In Utah this new approach, with the full cooperation and assistance of the Church of the Latter Day Saints and the largely conservative Utah state legislature, has proven very successful. Utah found that providing people supportive housing and transitional housing costs the social service system about half as much as leaving the homeless to live on the street.²¹

Another root cause of homelessness is the lack of employment and/or underemployment. Without adequate income, once again people who find themselves homeless cannot afford to pay for housing. Economic growth and community development provide pathways for homeless individuals to find their way out of poverty and into housing. This approach requires the involvement of business leaders and educational institutions. All that being said, it is important to remember that the chronically homeless have a permanent disability that usually prevents them from being able to find and maintain employment.

- **Current local programs serving the homeless, while well intentioned, are generally narrowly focused, sometimes disorganized, lack coordination and are limited in their approach and response.** There are many citizen groups, non-profit organizations, and local faith communities responding to the needs of the homeless in a variety of ways; we want to recognize the good work of The Salvation Army, Lodi House, Grace and Mercy and St. Anne’s Place that do such good work. However, many of the local organizations providing that

²⁰ Affordable Housing On-Line and Lodi’s 2014-2018 Community Development Block Grant Consolidated Plan

²¹ For a full description of the “Housing First” approach in Utah and other communities, see “Room for Improvement” by Scott Carrier, *Mother Jones*, March-April, 2015.

assistance do not know of the others' existence and services; they do not necessarily work together or talk to one another. Organizations often compete with one another in order to fund services and sustain their individual organizations. Public policy does not necessarily provide incentives for coordination and collaboration among service providers.

- **Some private attempts to help the homeless have unintended consequences.** As an example, responding positively to someone "panhandling" by giving them some loose change or a few dollars is only a short term response. That "gift" might help buy a meal or, more likely than not, purchase alcohol or drugs, addictions that contribute to the state of homelessness for most of the chronically homeless. Particular responses from local organizations and faith-based communities often only hurt the very people they are trying to help.²² As noted at the beginning of this report, church-sponsored "feedings" at a local park may often have the unintended consequence of enabling behaviors that contribute to public health and safety concerns.
- **Access to available services for the homeless in Lodi is limited and problematic.** Many of the services available for homeless individuals are provided through San Joaquin County, and therefore are located closer to Stockton. Public transportation is neither readily available nor easily navigated. The County Mental Health Department does have a satellite office in Lodi and generally economic and job development is the responsibility of local government. There is no respite care facility in Lodi nor is there a detox center in either Lodi or the entire county. Certainly accessibility is always dependent on available resources, but the extent to which there is inter-agency cooperation and collaboration remains unknown.
- **Homelessness is a community problem that can be most effectively addressed by a collaborative, centralized and community-based approach.** One overwhelming "take-away" from our community "listening sessions" is that there is considerable interest and desire on the part of our city leaders and citizens to address our city's homelessness issue, balancing the need to protect the public health and safety with the need to help people return to normal lives.

In addition, all the research strongly indicates that success will only be attained through a collaborative, community-based approach. This will require a centralized, coordinated and outcome-focused approach, one that invites all segments of our city to participate in the process and the solutions. The research also suggests that this community problem-solving process will require time (most plans we reviewed were for ten years) and public and private resources.

²² See [When Helping Hurts](#) by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert

- **Lodi's lack of low-income and/or affordable housing stock currently contributes and is likely to continue to contribute the growing number of homeless in the community.** 96% of Lodi's new housing stock has been single detached homes. The last apartment complex was built 30 years ago. The rental vacancy rate was just 3% compared to the normal rate of 5%. And according to one source, between 2005 and 2007 renters "overpaid" based on the relationship of income to rental costs.²³

The State of California mandates that cities develop and adopt a General Plan every four years. General Plans require statements of intent on issues such as land use, water, job growth, transportation and housing. Lodi's last "housing element" in the General Plan was drafted in 2011. The new "housing element" is due to the State on December 2015. The specific content of the new "housing element" will determine, at least in part, Lodi's eligibility for available funds to address housing needs, especially for low-income individuals and families.²⁴

- **Some homeless people deeply distrust social service providers and city officials, law enforcement in general and the general public.** Some feel misunderstood, some feel victimized by circumstances beyond their control, and some feel they have been dismissed or "thrown away" by society. At the same time there are also feelings by other Lodi citizens, residents and institutions that the City and its citizens have made strong and documentable daily and long term efforts, through social service providers, city officials and law enforcement, to provide needed and important services for the homeless in Lodi.

V. Recommended Overall Goal

Our first general recommendation is that the City Council, as the body representing the residents of Lodi, formally adopt a specific and reasonable goal toward which city leaders, community groups, law enforcement, local service providers, and members of our faith communities can work to achieve. That goal is:

Assist homeless individuals and families to secure housing, employment and services so that they may become healthy and productive members of society.

This overall goal recognizes the fact that our society in general and Lodi specifically is not going to "solve" homelessness; however Lodi can do its best to address the needs of homeless people and reduce the negative impact of homelessness on the community. It will be extremely important for our community response to focus on those homeless individuals that want help and/or are ready, with appropriate encourage and support, to receive assistance and better their circumstances.

²³ Lodi General Plan, Housing Element; October 19, 2011.

²⁴ For a more complete of explanation of the process and requirements, see Lodi's General Plan for 2011.

VI. Recommended Strategies and Actions

When we began our research and "listening" segments of this planning process, our committee members were encouraged and even surprised with the number of different approaches to address homelessness that were being taken by non-profit agencies, local faith communities and other community groups. We have also been encouraged by the creativity of these usually independent and largely unknown activities. All of this suggests that no single strategy or approach will begin to solve the issue of homelessness, and that we continue to need to encourage any and all strategies that help the community to achieve our overall goal.

Toward that end, we believe the following recommended strategies to address the homelessness situation should include two critical considerations: 1) the preservation and protection of public health and safety, and 2) our community's continuing commitment to respond with compassion and resources. Our recommendations are based on those considerations and the findings of our research.

A. Short Term Strategies and Actions

The following is a list describing a number of actions that can be implemented relatively quickly and without a large infusion of financial resources. They are in no particular order and are not prioritized. All will require follow-through and oversight, however.

1. The Lodi Police should continue to intervene at the homeless encampment along the Mokelumne River through on-site checks and multi-agency operations on a periodic basis; these multiagency operations include the LPD, Caltrans, San Joaquin Sheriff's Office deputies, San Joaquin County Mental Health, Veteran's Affairs, and The Salvation Army. This action will continue to discourage those homeless individuals from harassing and causing trouble for the residents along the river; it will also address a growing public health problem in the area. In addition, the current interventions should continue to refer homeless persons to existing services that can provide assistance.
2. The City of Lodi and the Lodi Police Department should continue to follow-up on complaints about empty or abandoned buildings which often become places where homeless individuals spend time during the days and evenings. The City of Lodi should also aggressively pursue appropriate legal action against the property owners, property management companies and/or the financial institutions that are responsible for maintaining these empty spaces; such legal action can include abatement orders and fines.
3. Develop a single and comprehensive resource guide for the use of service providers and the homeless. Currently there are a number of "resource guides" that are either incomplete or largely focused on the services of specific agencies. The more comprehensive and local resource guide should be coordinated with the county's 211 information and referral service.

4. Convene and create a permanent "coordinating committee" of the local agencies that are providing services to the homeless. Use the talents and resources of these various groups to coordinate services (especially emergency food and shelter), focus on strengths, share resources and behave collaboratively.
5. Continue the "homeless fairs" conducted every Friday at the Salvation Army's "Hope Harbor" facility; at these "fairs" homeless individuals can improve their personal hygiene with showers, haircuts, etc. On the fourth Friday of each month, representatives of different social service agencies, including medical and mental health services, are available on site to provide information about their services and to schedule follow-up appointments for those seeking assistance. In addition, representatives from local financial institutions, EDD and Job Corps will participate.
6. Consider the implementation of the "Downtown Street Team" program currently working in San Jose. This program employs homeless people to conduct basic maintenance and beautification projects in downtown areas.
7. Develop a resource guide for property owners that defines nuisance behavior and how to respond to such behavior. Develop a corresponding resource guide for homeless individuals which defines legal and illegal behavior.
8. Continue to encourage the cooperation of private community groups to consolidate that mid-day meal at the Salvation Army. Local groups that want to help should be on the same page and agree to provide meals in locations that promote and reward appropriate behavior. We wish to acknowledge Rev. David Hill and members of Grace Presbyterian Church for their understanding, cooperation and leadership in this effort.
9. Secure and/or re-allocate City resources to provide LPD bike patrols for Lodi's downtown area after 4 pm. While homeless persons are certainly present in the downtown area, they are only responsible for approximately 40% of the nuisance behavior; the so-called "drunk 20s" are responsible for the remaining 60%.
10. Encourage local faith communities to "adopt" a homeless individual and/or family, providing housing assistance while the individual finds work, enrolls in school, receives treatment for medical/mental health conditions, etc. We are aware of at least one local church, Bear Creek Community Church under the leadership of Rev. Bill Cummins, has made and implemented this commitment. This strategy is similar to that used after the end of the Vietnam War when refugee families were "sponsored" by faith communities as they assimilated into American society.

11. Initiate an educational campaign to help local community groups, faith communities and others understand how they can channel their compassion for the homeless in ways that effectively contribute to their long term health and safety. As this reports indicates, not all help is helpful, but it is welcomed and appreciated if delivered with more focused intent. Such an educational campaign would also help to dispel some of the misinformation that is expressed about homeless people.
12. To discourage the homeless, as well as others who are not homeless, from hanging out in the downtown area, place signs that discourage "aggressive" and illegal panhandling" from local residents, tourists and business patrons. Consider placing "parking meters" to collect funds from those who would like to help out, but need a mechanism that guarantees funds are received and allocated to agencies that can do the most good.

In addition, place signs that indicate the locations of public restrooms.

13. Organize neighborhood "block walks" that check on and discourage homeless individuals who are sleeping in inappropriate areas and causing a public safety hazard. This effort could be done in conjunction with the "safe neighborhoods" initiative sponsored by the LPD. Provide neighborhood groups with resource guides by which to direct the people they encounter to local resources. Explore how such block walks could be coordinated with National Night Out.
14. Insist on agency collaboration in the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) process to insure that the highest priority needs receive greater consideration than individual agency requests. We would like to see greater agreement and commitment to a more substantial "big picture" objective than the awarding of smaller grants that tend to achieve short term objectives, but do not build long term sustainability.
15. Encourage the LPD and local service providers to sensitively gather information about the homeless people with whom they interact; find out who they are, where they came from, where they intend to go, and how they can receive services to help them. The more we know about this population, which we tend to paint with a very broad brush, the more effectively we can respond.

B. Longer Term Strategies and Actions

The following is a list describing a number of strategies and actions that can be implemented over a longer period of time, probably anywhere between three to five years. Many of them will require a level of cooperation and collaboration with service providers located in Stockton and/or affiliated with the San Joaquin County. The county's Department of Mental Health and the District Attorney's office are now included as members of the leadership group that is shepherding this entire project, which is an excellent sign of commitment to seriously address the homeless issue.

1. Develop a "day center" for the homeless, a place where during the day they can come for service referrals, research job opportunities and job training programs, store personal items, establish a mailing address, apply for Medi-Cal and Social Security, etc. This site could also be used as the "staging area" for a day labor program for individuals who want to work. St. Anne's Place already serves as a model for such a day center, albeit for a limited clientele.
2. Purchase a facility that can provide transitional housing to homeless individuals who are seeking to rebuild their lives. Explore potential funding sources and/or management and partnership opportunities.
3. Advocate for and pursue ordinance changes that would promote the construction and retention of affordable housing.
4. Find ways to make county services more readily available to homeless living in Lodi, either through greater outreach and resources and/or through better transportation, both private and public, to and from Stockton based facilities. Through our research and "listening sessions" we have learned that there a large number of agencies that wish to assist our local efforts, either through new partnerships and/or as resources for our own efforts; included among those agencies are: the Care Link program through Community Medical Centers, Central Valley Housing, Hospice of San Joaquin and the Gospel Rescue Mission.
5. Develop a respite care facility for the medically fragile homeless who need a place to stay while waiting for further medical care. Ensure that veterans are referred to pre-existing and available programs in the area.
6. Create a multi-disciplinary (mental health, substance abuse, health care) Support and Intervention Team, funded through Medi-Cal, to provide support for permanent supportive housing programs.

7. Develop a fundraising process by which individuals, community groups, faith communities and local businesses can contribute toward proven "best practice" approaches to assist homeless people that truly want to escape their homeless circumstances.
8. Provide a bus "ticket home" for those homeless individuals who can verify that they have a place to stay with a family member and/or friend in their home town.

VII. Next Steps

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the architect of the World War II Invasion of Europe, said the following: "All plans are useless; planning is everything." The same goes for this modest report which has described a number of short and long terms strategies and actions that have the potential to provide homeless people with compassion and care, plus preserve and protect public health and safety. What as a community we do with these suggestions, ideas and plans is what will determine if they are useful or useless. The implementation of these recommendations will distinguish this report from so many other well intentioned reports that are too often ignored by city officials and community leaders.²⁵ In brief, here are some next steps to achieve our overall goals.

1. The City Council should adopt this report as a matter of public record and authorize its implementation. Such Council action will be a clear sign to the full community that, as a city, we intend to reduce homeless and its impact on our community.
2. Authorize at least two work groups to research, prioritize and implement the recommendations of this report. One work group would focus on short term strategies; the other on long term strategies. Begin recruiting other residents, business leaders and civic leaders to participate in this community-wide effort.
3. The Council should also authorize the Committee on Homelessness to serve as the convener and coordinator of this effort. The Task Force would include representatives of the two work groups, the Lodi City Council, the Lodi Police Department, the Lodi Community Foundation and a member-at-large. The work of the Homeless Task Force should be reported in writing to the Council on a quarterly basis.

²⁵ For an example of how such a report was ignored in Modesto, see Kevin Valline's column in the Lodi News Sentinel, August 22, 2015.

VIII. Conclusion/Summary

Here are the key points we wish to emphasize as a summary of this report.

- The homeless population is not easily described or categorized; instead it is more often stereotyped based on how each of us encounters homeless people. A good many homeless people want a pathway out of homelessness and are involved in programs to help them on their way. Some homeless persons have chronic physical disabilities and/or behavioral health conditions that make it difficult for them to secure housing. There are some people, so afflicted by their disabilities that they have little hope and resist change. And finally there are some people who choose to remain homeless of their own volition.
- Citizens in our community experience the homeless and the consequences of homelessness in different ways, largely due to type of homeless person with whom they come in contact. As a result, some citizens view homelessness as simply a circumstance that negatively impacts businesses and neighborhoods. Other citizens view homelessness as a situation, despite posing very real public health and safety concerns, needs to be addressed with kindness, compassion and services that can help homeless individuals and families escape their homeless circumstance.
- Homelessness is a societal problem that can be most effectively addressed by a collaborative, community-based approach. This approach will require the efforts of both law enforcement and proven "best practices" by local and regional social service agencies.
- Adopt our recommended overall goal... to assist homeless individuals and families find housing and services so they can become healthy and productive members of society. Our goal is not to "cure" homelessness; that is not within our scope or ability as a single and relatively small community, but it is a noble goal nonetheless, one that reflects the caring and generous spirit of the citizens of Lodi.

IX. Final Thoughts

First we wish to acknowledge the hundreds of individuals who have contributed to this report; we have heard from concerned citizens, faith leaders, business leaders, local non-profit agency leaders, city officials and homeless persons themselves. What we heard was often disturbing, sometimes painful, inspiring, and in the end, hopeful. All of these contributions have created a deeper understanding of all the problems associated with homelessness and ultimately have enriched this report.

And lastly our Committee on Homelessness certainly welcomes the comments and the assistance of Lodi citizens in response to the findings and recommendations of this report. With your help we can begin to address the real needs of homeless people and preserve our community's public health and safety.

John Ledbetter; Chair	Lodi Community Foundation, Chair
June Aaker	Abrahamson Printing
Patricia Fehling	The Salvation Army Advisory Committee
Joe Harrington	Chief Executive Officer, Lodi Health
Russ Hayward	Lodi Community Foundation
Rev. David Hill	Grace Presbyterian Church
Gary Kellan	Grace Presbyterian Church
Doug Kuehne	Lodi City Council
Lt. Steve Nelson	Lodi Police Department
Tod Patterson	Lodi Interim Chief of Police
Captain Martin Ross	The Salvation Army
Steve Schwabauer (ex officio)	Lodi City Manager
Victor Singh	San Joaquin Department of Mental Health
Joseph Wood	Community Development Department, City of Lodi
Vince Yorba	Gravity Church

Note: This report was reviewed for factual accuracy by individuals with extensive knowledge and expertise in the areas of homelessness, housing and social services.