

COMING HOME



Welcome to our third issue!

With the founding two years ago of the organization *Bringing Our Community Home* (BOCH), implementation began on the 10 Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness in Santa Barbara County. Much has been accomplished, with much more still to be done. This summer, our efforts were recognized in a visit by the nation's top official on the issue of homelessness. It is gratifying to have our community recognized as both an innovator and a contributor to the momentum of the nationwide movement to end chronic homelessness.

Coming Home is produced by the BOCH executive director and staff from the Santa Barbara County Department of Social Services. We welcome your feedback. Please feel free to email us at cominghome@sbcsocialserv.org.

—Roger Heroux, Editor

Top US Official Visits, Backs Plan to End Chronic Homelessness

What do homeless people want?

For Philip J. Mangano, it's no idle question. Mangano is Executive Director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, responsible for providing federal leadership for activities to assist homeless families and individuals. And after 25 years working on the problem of homelessness, working up from bread-line volunteer to Presidential appointee, he has an answer:

"They don't want a blanket or a bowl of soup. They don't want a program or a protocol. They want a place. A place to live."

Mangano's comment, made during a July 10 visit to Santa Barbara, seems self-evident: the homeless want a home. But in fact, it represents

a paradigm shift. For 20 years, services for the homeless have focused on "mitigating the problem, not ending the disgrace," according to Mangano. These services work for the majority of homeless people, who use them successfully and exit homelessness promptly. But they don't work for the long-term homeless with disabling physical and/or mental conditions, known as the chronically homeless. The chronically homeless make up only 10-15% of the homeless population, but consume 50-65% of the resources directed toward homeless people—and yet they remain unstable and unhoused with no real hope of change.

Getting the chronically homeless off the street requires new strategies that can get people into permanent affordable housing, with services

Continued on page 2



Signing on to end chronic homelessness, from left: US Interagency Council on Homelessness executive director Philip Mangano, BOCH board chair Jeanette Duncan, Santa Barbara City Councilmembers Helene Schneider and Das Williams, County Supervisor Janet Wolf, Santa Barbara Mayor Marty Blum, and BOCH executive director Roger Heroux, on the site of the new Building Hope mixed-use affordable housing development.

Mangano

Continued from page 1

to sustain that tenancy, without spending more money overall.

A leading proponent of these strategies, Mangano has used the Council to support 340 local jurisdictions, including Santa Barbara County, in developing individual 10 Year Plans to End Chronic Homelessness.

Santa Barbara County's 10 Year Plan, in Mangano's view, "is a common-sense plan rooted in reality." It was developed over several months by over 100 locals, including representatives of local government, business, clergy, service providers, philanthropists, civic leaders, and homeless and formerly homeless individuals. It addresses the root causes of chronic homelessness, which statistics show are poverty, health issues, and the lack of affordable housing. The Plan calls for integration of services among non-traditional partners, focuses on prevention and housing, includes cost-benefit analysis and accountability measures, and incorporates service innovations and best practices. The county's Plan is coordinated by the organization Bringing Our Community Home (BOCH).

An expert's perspective

During his visit, hosted by BOCH, Mangano gave a rousing speech, joined local leaders in signing a resolution, toured local projects that house formerly homeless individuals, and chatted with a variety of people—from business leaders, politicians and nonprofit executives, to homeless and formerly homeless people.

In his hour-long speech, given at a public meeting of the Santa Barbara Homeless Advisory Committee, Mangano contrasted the Plan's approach with past efforts.

Typically, he said, responses to chronic homelessness have had either a compassionate or a punitive cast.

Continued on page 4

Grace Dacheff: Making a Difference in North County

The Santa Maria community offers a network of potentially life-changing resources for homeless individuals. Yet people in need of those services may not know about them, nor how to apply.

Enter Grace Dacheff, a Homeless Outreach Social Worker for the Santa Barbara County Department of Social Services (DSS). Working from a small office adjacent to the Good Samaritan Shelter in Santa Maria, she serves as a bridge between homeless clients and the services they need.

Dacheff helps homeless individuals and families to create plans and set goals on the road to self-sufficiency. Her goals are to help protect and provide for them during their time at the shelter, and to improve their lives when they move on from there. Her work is as varied as her clients' needs, and involves dozens of community agencies and programs.

She might help people with applications for housing or Section 8 vouchers; help them apply for programs such as Medi-Cal, Food Stamps, or General Relief; give them bus tokens to get to appointments; or provide bilingual assistance to those who speak only Spanish. For clients living with permanent mental disabilities, Dacheff helps with the process of obtaining Social Security Income—a maze of applications, paperwork, appointments, and denials that must be appealed. She has helped protect clients in potential danger by connecting them with the county's Victim Witness Program, and helped people facing legal residency issues to secure a suitable attorney.



Among the challenges she encounters, Dacheff says that securing housing for people with prior convictions is especially difficult. "Overcoming a criminal background is an extremely tough obstacle," she observes.

She is also gravely concerned about the local methamphetamine problem, which she has seen affect everyone from teenagers to senior citizens.

Dacheff says the existence of more clean and sober facilities would be immensely helpful. She seeks out and encourages a support network for clients with a history of addiction.

When the work day is over, her work is not: she advocates for the homeless community on her own time, promoting awareness of issues such as the need for more adequate transportation for homeless veterans.

Dacheff is not a newcomer to public service—she has held various jobs in the county's Public Health and Social Services departments, and served an internship in foster care (during which she helped young adults "aging out" of the foster care system to become self-sufficient). Even so, she says, this job has been an eye-opener, giving her a greater appreciation of the obstacles that can prevent homeless individuals from securing jobs and homes. The crises, traumas, illnesses, abuse—the sheer diversity of her clients' stories has affirmed for her the reality that anyone could one day find themselves at such a loss.

"Homelessness doesn't discriminate," she says. "I'll never be able to say, 'This defines who is homeless.' There is no profile."

2-Year Report Card: Accomplishments of the 10 Year Plan So Far

Santa Barbara County's 10 Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness is off to a strong start. Some 50 chronically homeless individuals were placed in permanent homes in the past two years, even as the Plan's implementing organization, Bringing Our Community Home (BOCH), was being built. The goal is to place almost 100 more in the next year. (The total number of chronically homeless individuals in the county was estimated at 1000 in 2006.) An computerized system will be used to track county-wide data for housing placements.

Building the Organization

To get rolling, an organizational structure and funds were needed.

A memorandum of understanding was executed between three emergency homeless shelters – Good Samaritan, Bridge House, and Casa Esperanza – to work together to provide a 501(c)3 umbrella for the Plan organization, and the Casa Esperanza Board of Directors voted to serve as fiscal agent for BOCH. Fundraising was initiated for the organization's first year, securing about \$130,000 in funding from foundations and local governments.

A Governing Board was formed to implement the Plan. Jeanette Duncan, Executive Director of Peoples Self Help Housing, was elected Chair of the Board. The Board hired an Executive Director, former Public Health chief Roger Heroux; and two part-time staff, former county supervisorial assistant John Buttny as coordinator and Elaine Arkin as administrative assistant. A small office was provided by Casa Esperanza at 725 Cacique Street in Santa Barbara. Two editions were published of *Coming Home*, a newsletter to educate and inform the public about the status of the Plan.

Among the Plan's key strategies, three stand out: providing services that meet the chronically homeless "where they are," increasing the supply

of permanent affordable housing, and preventing homelessness from occurring in the first place. Significant progress was made in all three.

Providing Services

To connect with the county's many nonprofits (and to help them connect with one another), an inventory of homeless service providers was initiated (including inter-agency connections).

Connecting with potential clients was equally important. "This is a population that does not trust government, is not comfortable in shelters, and isolates or keeps to itself," says Buttny, "so developing relationships is critical." Street outreach helps develop those relationships. Outreach teams were developed featuring medical, social services and ADMHS staff (ADMHS is the County's alcohol, drug and mental health services agency). 10 Year Plan staff formed a partnership with Saint Brigid Fellowship Homeless Program in Isla Vista, and Casa Esperanza initiated additional street outreach in Isla Vista. Doctors Without Walls was formed to provide medical street outreach in conjunction with Social Services staff (as well as medical services at Casa Esperanza). UCSB students formed a Street Health Outreach Program to assist Doctors Without Walls and Saint Brigid.

Boosting Affordable Housing Supply

A county-wide housing forum identified 10 potential housing projects for the chronically homeless. Three new housing projects were recommended for Mental Health Services Act housing funds: the Mental Health Association "Building Hope" project in Santa Barbara, the Good Samaritan "Rancho Hermosa" project in Santa Maria, and the Transitions Mental Health Association "Homebase on G" project in Lompoc.

Six housing projects opened or were launched in Santa Barbara. The Housing

Authority of the City of Santa Barbara opened El Carrillo, providing 61 units of supportive housing. The Mental Health Association began construction of Building Hope, adding 51 units of affordable and supportive housing. The County Department of Social Services opened La Morada, with 10 units of supportive housing for young adults "aging out" of foster care. Peoples Self Help Housing opened Casas Las Granadas, with supportive housing for two chronically homeless individuals and low-income apartments for 10 workers. Saint Vincent's opened new senior apartments and accepted four seniors who had been living in their vehicles.

Preventing Homelessness

When tenants are evicted, when hospital patients are discharged, when inmates are released, will they have a place to go? BOCH worked to boost the odds that they would.

BOCH met with Sheriff Brown to develop a discharge protocol for homeless persons leaving jail.

Cottage Hospital agreed to participate in a cost study of homeless patients; 10 Year Plan staff joined the Cottage Hospital Homeless Discharge Planning Group; and Cottage and the Saint Francis Foundation funded medical respite beds for homeless individuals being discharged from the hospital.

Future Outlook

Progress may seem imperiled by the slowing economy, which threatens to pit increased demand for services against reduced funding availability. But there are more housing projects still in the pipeline, and \$60,000 in ADMHS funding is set aside to rent dwellings for homeless people in the meantime. Much more can be done if government and corporate financial support to BOCH can be increased.

Mangano

Continued from page 2

Entreaties to compassion often rally initial support, but are “not enough to sustain” an effort—politicians or the public lose interest or suffer compassion fatigue, and the project runs out of steam. Going the other direction, with a punitive approach, doesn’t work either. “The punitive approach has never worked anywhere,” he said. “It’s expensive and demoralizing to everyone involved, and at best it can only hide the problem briefly.”

Business mindset

What *does* work, he said, is to approach the problem with a business mindset. Urging participants to recruit the business community, he spoke of the Plan in the business vernacular. No business would survive, he observed, if it didn’t try to discover and supply what its customers want. So “give the customer what they want: housing!” he thundered. And invest wisely: “Concentrate scarce resources on doing only what the data and research say works.” The “return on investment,” and the “metric by which success is measured,” is the number of people who get off the street and stay off. Under the Plan, those numbers are tracked in accountability reports.

And “the bottom line” is that it is *less* expensive to *solve* the problem of chronic homelessness, than to let it fester. After 65 independent cost studies, Mangano reported, we know that each chronically homeless person “on the sidewalk” costs a community from \$35,000 to \$150,000 per year, because that person is typically cycling through the emergency room, psychiatric health facility, court, jail, and so on—whereas a community can *solve* the problem for \$13,000 to \$25,000 per person per year by providing permanent supportive housing. “You don’t have to be Warren Buffet to figure out the better investment,” he said.

Permanent supportive housing is community-based long-term housing for persons with disabilities. Services

It is less expensive to solve chronic homelessness than to let it fester. Supportive housing, cooperation and jurisdictional leadership are the keys.

linked to the housing provide tenants with the support necessary to remain in permanent housing and not return to homelessness. The Plan stresses this type of housing.

Cooperation & resources required

To achieve success, Mangano said, organizations “can’t afford nostalgia” for the way they used to do things. Public, private and nonprofit participants must “perform the unnatural act” of communicating, cooperating and coordinating with one another.

Local politicians must step up, too, with financial, logistical and political support. Mangano called jurisdictional leadership “the single most important factor” in success. Without it, he said, even the best plan will collect dust on a shelf.

He praised community leaders for getting involved, including Santa Barbara City Council member Helene Schneider, former bank CEO Tom Thomas, and Santa Barbara City Housing Authority CEO Rob Pearson.

After the speech, local politicians (including Schneider, Santa Barbara Mayor Marty Blum, County Supervisors Salud Carbajal and Janet Wolf, and Goleta City Council member Jonny Wallis) joined Mangano in a ceremonial signing of the “America’s Road Home Resolution” endorsing the Plan and related efforts.

Supportive housing in action

The group then toured several local housing projects. Pearson led a tour of El Carrillo, a 61-unit supportive housing facility which opened in 2006. Annmarie Cameron, executive director of the Mental Health Association in Santa Barbara County, led a tour of Building Hope, a 51-unit project opening

soon, which will combine supportive housing and affordable workforce apartments. Jeanette Duncan, executive director of Peoples’ Self-Help Housing, led a tour of Casas de las Granadas, 12 affordable workforce apartments (including two occupied by formerly chronically homeless individuals) which opened in February.

As they toured the sites, Mangano spoke to numerous residents, some of whom had been homeless 25 years.

One woman was arrested 192 times in her years on the streets, as she struggled with addiction. During one hospital stay, she was so far gone that doctors nearly pulled the plug.

One man, a veteran on dialysis, had returned from war struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder, only to lose his family to a car accident.

Another man, while homeless in the college town of Isla Vista, was named “scariest man” in town by the student-run newspaper—yet he had been a successful engineer until he was injured in a severe lab accident.

Another woman’s bipolar symptoms had her bouncing among psychiatric facilities for years.

Today, with supportive housing, they and many others are safe and stable; in recovery from trauma, medical problems and/or addiction; working and/or volunteering; and modeling the way for others. One man, a recovering alcoholic who now works and mentors others, put it simply: “Now I have a place to come home to.”

It goes to show, Mangano observed, that people do not truly “choose” life on the streets. “When offered a key to an apartment,” he said, “homeless people come in.”