

## Plan to End Homelessness on South Coast Making Progress

Bringing Our Community Home says its plan is on track despite challenging economic forces



Santa Barbara County 3rd District Supervisor Doreen Farr, speaking at Wednesday's news conference, said providing housing and services for the homeless remains a priority. (Lara Cooper / Noozhawk photo)

By Lara Cooper, Noozhawk Staff Writer | Published on 06.17.2009

A group that would like to see an end to chronic homelessness on the South Coast by 2017 met Wednesday to discuss its progress, which has been solid since the plan began two years ago.

It's all part of a large-scale effort by [Bringing Our Community Home](#) called the 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. The problem is exacerbated by the economy, which poses big challenges for the group.

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BOCH contends that only 10 percent of the homeless in the area are chronically homeless, which translates to 945 people. But that relatively small number consumes \$18 million in services and assistance every year, they argue, without seeing any real change.

Still, they've come far, said Executive Director John Buttny, who talked to a group gathered at the [Transition House](#) on Wednesday to hear about the progress. Since the plan began, 108 units of housing for the homeless have been built throughout the county, with nearly 80 percent of those units ending on the South Coast; 109 more are in the pipeline.

Buttny spent a year gathering information from about 55 agencies and put together a database, which can be found through its homeless services locator. One of the things discovered through those meetings was that Santa Barbara has a wealth of resources to assist with the homeless.

Buttny said BOCH decided not to try to re-create what other agencies were doing or compete with funding for existing programs. Instead, he organized a database with the hope that it will become a resource for caseworkers and people working with the homeless.

Buttny then began putting together what he called a Homeless Prevention Resource Guide for the South Coast, pulling information from about 30 agencies that worked on eviction prevention. The guide also will help provide a basis for any stimulus funds received for homeless prevention in the future. The group also is working on a safety program for women and another program that deals with late-night jail releases.

BOCH also paired with Project Healthy Neighbor at Casa Esperanza, which provides services such as [tuberculosis](#) and HIV testing for the homeless. Buttny said funding has been received to fund a staff position at the jail for a "discharge planner."



John Buttny of Bringing Our Community Home has created a Homeless Prevention Resource Guide for the South Coast. (Lara Cooper / Noozhawk photo)

“The idea is ... once they’re in jail, connect them with a case worker and have a place to go other than the street when they’re discharged,” he said. That planner also would coordinate the night transportation of people released from jail during the late hours.

A unified system of recordkeeping between the agencies is also a priority, he said.

“On any given night, particularly in this economic climate, up to a million people are homeless in this country,” said Kathleen Baushke of the Transition House, who said the faces of homelessness could look as different as a young adult who has been phased out of the foster care system to a single mom on disability to a veteran with [post-traumatic stress disorder](#).

First and Third District Supervisors [Salud Carbajal](#) and [Dorreen Farr](#) were present as well as City Councilmember [Helene Schneider](#).

Farr lauded the work of partnerships, including that of [St. Brigid Fellowship](#) in Isla Vista, which is in her district, and may have the largest population of homeless on the South Coast, she said.

Providing housing and services for the homeless was part of the Isla Vista Master Plan, and Farr said it remains a high priority for her.

Tom Thomas of BOCH said he had worked with the [Downtown Organization](#) and the [Chamber of Commerce](#) to talk about the effects of homelessness on local businesses

The group’s message is more germane than ever, with an unstable economy and increasingly violent environment on the streets. Schneider said the city has seen 18 homeless deaths to date, and the year is only halfway through.

“Homeless people have a right not to be assaulted,” she said. “They have a right not to be murdered.”

The city’s 12-point plan addressing homelessness is separate from BOCH’s plan, but they’re still connected, she said. “Without the 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, we could not fulfill those 12 points at all,” she said.

Geoff Banks of the [Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Department](#) was on hand to talk about street violence and the law enforcement side of homelessness.

“We’ve had three very tragic murders in the past two years,” he said. “As we see more services, we can minimize that tragedy.”

Jail overcrowding has been a blight on the county in the past two decades, which homelessness affects significantly. About 10 percent of the jail’s population is homeless.

“I do believe there are better ways,” he said.

Banks said the discharge planning position would make a huge difference. “This is the most optimistic I’ve been in 31 years,” he said.

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