



*10-Year Plan to End
Chronic Homelessness in
Santa Barbara County*

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***Bringing Our Community Home* Implements Jail Discharge Planning Program for Homeless Inmates**

Goal is to prevent homeless from being discharged back to the streets, program of 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness in Santa Barbara County

Santa Barbara, CA, December 10, 2009—Bringing Our Community Home, the organization coordinating the *10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness in Santa Barbara County*, has announced the launch of the Homeless Inmate Jail Discharge Planning Program and the hire of the first Discharge Planner. The program is in collaboration with the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department and is designed to prevent homeless people from being sent back to the streets when they are released from the county jail.

Because there are a limited number of beds for homeless people with mental illness, chronic alcoholism and substance abuse, jail has become the largest de facto in-patient psychiatric and detox facility in the county. They serve their time, depending on the offense, and are released back to the streets – most often to the same circumstances that landed them in jail. For many homeless, this is a revolving door that has proven to be unsuccessful – and expensive to the public. The new program offers pre-release intervention to ensure the person has a place to live, a way to get there, and the supportive services needed to address the causes of their homelessness.

“I am optimistic that this program will achieve lasting results,” said Santa Barbara County Sheriff Bill Brown. “I appreciate the partnership we’ve established to solve the problem of chronic homelessness and the impact it’s having on those in our jail.”

Discharge planning is part of Bringing Our Community Home’s Prevention and Intervention strategy and is another form of outreach to the homeless. The 25 hour per week Discharge Planner position, which will serve the whole county, is funded through a \$14,000 grant from the City of Santa Barbara, a \$15,000 grant from the County of Santa Barbara and a \$5,000 grant from the Fund for Santa Barbara.

Tona Wakefield has been selected for the Homeless Inmate Discharge Planner position. Before starting the job in November, Wakefield worked as a Family Advocate for the Mental Health Association in Santa Barbara County. She also serves on the County’s Advisory Board on Drug and Alcohol Problems, and as a member of the Criminal Justice Task Force, and Restorative Policing Task Group.

As Discharge Planner, Wakefield is responsible for identifying and working with homeless inmates to develop case histories and connect them with a past or new case worker to ensure that the effort to develop

relationships of trust so essential to bringing a person in from the streets is maintained. Additionally, she will actively work to help place homeless inmates in permanent housing upon release, with the supportive services they need to maintain residency.

“Discharge planning is a critical step in the implementation phase of the 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness,” said John Buttny, Executive Director of Bringing Our Community Home. “Jail discharge planning was one of the biggest gaps in terms of our outreach to the homeless – second only to the lack of availability of housing – and outreach is the key to success.”

Experience from programs across the county shows that homeless persons, especially those with mental illness, respond best to those people they have developed relationships with. Many, if not all, homeless people who end up in jail, will already have had contact with street outreach workers and case workers. Placing a Homeless Inmate Discharge Planner in the jail will complete the cycle of contact and improve the likelihood of a homeless person accepting the supportive services that are available in the community.

If permanent housing is not available, Wakefield will work to discharge homeless individuals to transitional housing programs, including homeless shelters, residential drug or alcohol treatment programs, one of the more than 30 sober living homes throughout the county, and any other appropriate residential setting. The Jail Discharge Planning Program also will provide transportation for all homeless inmates upon release. Experience has shown that releasing inmates on their own often results in a rapid breakdown of the discharge plan.

Experience from around the county indicates that it takes a minimum three-month stay to break the cycle of living on the streets.

One of the Prevention and Intervention strategies of the 10-Year Plan is to ensure vigilant discharge planning from all of the institutional settings which typically release homeless people back to the streets, including hospitals, jails, detox and other treatment programs, and the foster care system. Discharge planning occurs before an individual leaves an institution and involves creating links between the individual and the services and support the individual will need upon leaving including housing, services, treatment, and benefits/employment.

“It is gratifying to see the work of Bringing Our Community Home and the many individuals and agencies and local foundation support turning the 10 Year Plan into tangible improvements,” said Buttny. “We thank all of those involved in implementing the program.”

In 2008, *Bringing Our Community Home* began the implementation of the 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness in Santa Barbara County, with initial funding including major support from The Fund for Santa Barbara, the Santa Barbara Foundation, the Hutton Foundation, and the St. Francis Foundation. The cities of Santa Barbara, Lompoc and Carpinteria and the County of Santa Barbara, and philanthropists Sara Miller McCune and Chuck Blitz also provided financial support. For more information, visit www.bringsbcohome.org.

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