



## Facts:

### Who are the chronically homeless?

Santa Barbara County's chronically homeless population is composed of single adults and families with children who have

- a disabling condition<sup>a</sup>
- been continuously homeless for a year or more *or* have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years
- been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g. living on the streets) or in an emergency shelter during that time.<sup>b</sup>

It is estimated that the chronically homeless make up only 10% - 15% of the total homeless population, yet they consume 50% or more of local resources spent on homeless services. A trademark characteristic of chronically homeless people is the repeated failure of the traditional system of care to assist them through their need to a more stable place. Most of these individuals have serious mental illnesses; two-thirds of all people with serious mental illness have been homeless or have been at risk of being homeless at some point in their lives.<sup>c</sup>

People with untreated mental illness often lose their housing due to problems with neighbors; because they present a threat to themselves or others; miss rent, utility, or mortgage payments; or neglect their housekeeping.<sup>d</sup> Additionally, many have severe substance addiction issues which can mask symptoms of mental illness, further complicating appropriate treatment and compounding the difficulties of maintaining a stable home.

### How can homelessness be costing tax payers money?

Due to their continued movement through the service system without obtaining the help they need, chronically homeless people consume more than 50% of all the services provided to homeless people. Chronically homeless individuals are also frequent users of other costly public services, such as hospital emergency rooms, psychiatric emergency wards and the criminal justice system. According to an unofficial study completed in January 2006, homelessness costs the City of Santa Barbara between \$600,000 – \$700,000 each year for police, public works, parks and recreation, library and fire services. Although the City would not likely have an annual budget savings of this amount, services could be redirected to other needed areas.

### How can developing supportive housing save money?

Funding that pays for people to be “housed” in high service facilities can be redirected to develop and sustain supportive housing beds. The costs of chronic homelessness can not only be reduced, but, because people are able to achieve true stability and maintain tenancy, chronic homelessness can be eradicated.

### Won't Bringing Our Community Home just bring more homeless to our community?

Although communities are often concerned about developing services and housing because they fear that their community will become a “magnet” for homeless individuals from other areas, pervasive research has shown that homeless people do not move to communities for services and housing. Homeless people move to areas for the same reasons as non-homeless people: to be closer to family, for new jobs, the mild climate, etc. They do not come to an area because of the quality or availability of assistance.



Studies have shown that 75% of people remain in the city where they become homeless.<sup>f</sup> Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara County's coastal neighbor to the north, which shares Santa Barbara County's combination of high-priced housing, coastal amenities and significant number of low-wage jobs, found that more than two-thirds of its homeless population's last permanent home was in Santa Cruz and that more than half of its homeless population had lived in Santa Cruz for over ten years.<sup>g</sup> Service providers in Santa Barbara County can attest to similar statistics for the homeless population they serve. Further, chronically homeless individuals, who by definition have additional disabilities and fewer resources, are even less likely to follow the magnet theory pattern because of the difficulties involved with relocation.

### **Why are we developing housing for the chronically homeless? I can't afford to live here.**

Through research and local experience, Bringing Our Community Home maintains the critical nature of stable, affordable housing as a solution to chronic homelessness. We also recognize that the lack of affordable housing is not just an issue for the severely disadvantaged, but is a reality for many people in our community. What is significant about the chronically homeless population is the amount of resources (tax dollars, emergency room visits, volunteer efforts, etc.) that are required simply to keep them alive on the streets. For many, their exit from homelessness is death. In both humane and fiscal terms, investment in permanent supportive housing for this population is a cost-saving measure that, over time, will pay for itself.

### **Isn't developing a Ten-Year Plan just creating more bureaucracy?**

The Santa Barbara County Region enjoys a diversity and quality of housing and homeless services. However, we have failed to fully coordinate these services and establish a unifying entity with the responsibility of making change. As a result, we have not had as great an impact on reducing homelessness as we would like. Recognizing a need to change the way we respond to the issue of homelessness, local government, businesses, faith, service providers, philanthropists, civic leaders, and homeless and formerly homeless individuals and their advocates joined together and created *Bringing Our Community Home*.

### **What's Different about the Ten-Year Plan?**

One of the striking differences in this effort is the broad range of partners who have invested in it. In addition:

- It calls for broad integration of systems and services among non-traditional partners, including County departments
- It reconfigures the homeless system into a housing system
- It recognizes that, by reducing homelessness and the costs of maintaining our current expensive system, we can reallocate resources to better serve vulnerable populations

### **What Are the Priorities of the Ten-Year Plan?**

#### 1. Prevent homelessness

Work together to make sure an adequate supply of appropriate housing and supportive services are available to help people stay in their homes. These services include rent and utility assistance, job training, employment and education assistance, health care, mental health counseling, foster care and alcohol & drug treatment.

#### 2. Move people rapidly from homelessness to housing

Place homeless people as quickly as possible in permanent housing and then help them to stabilize and function independently by providing them with the supportive services they need to be successful in their homes.

#### 3. Build the public and political will to end homelessness



Expand our community's commitment to ending homelessness by educating the public, tracking our successes and building on them, and establishing steady funding

### **Who is in Charge of Implementing the Plan?**

The Leadership Council of *Bringing Our Community Home* is ultimately charged with implementing the plan and ensuring that its goals and objectives are met. The Committee is comprised of leaders of the business, faith, government and civic communities, as well as providers, formerly homeless individuals, and philanthropists. Currently the Leadership Council is supported by other multi-disciplinary committees who contributed to the Plan's creation: the Finance Development & Implementation Committee, the Transition Committee, the Housing Committee, and the Program Committee.

### **How Much Will It Cost?**

We are beginning the process of identifying what it will cost to fund the housing and supportive services needed to implement *Bringing Our Community Home*. It is important to remember, however, that a large portion of the funds we need are already committed to housing and homelessness programs and will continue to be devoted to these programs. We know we will also need to develop new local, state and federal funding streams, both public and private.

### **Is It Possible?**

Yes, if we can develop and sustain the funding and public and political will to make it happen. The Plan estimates that over ten years we will need to secure from 900 to 1200 permanent affordable units to succeed. Promising Best Practices, such as the "Housing First" model, are demonstrating success. We need to expand such programs countywide. Also, a strong spirit of partnership now exists. We need to sustain and build upon this.

### **How, do you expect to develop that much housing?**

It is important to remember that by "units" we don't necessarily mean individual housing units, such as a studio apartment. Rather we are referring to appropriate housing for a person, which could also mean a single bed in a shared living situation. By partnering with public and private developers, rental assistance programs, and property management agencies, we will pursue many avenues to increase the amount of permanent housing available to the chronically homeless, including master leasing, rehabilitation of existing housing, recruitment of existing rental units and development of new housing.

### **Do we really have the resources to do this?**

We have a lot of the resources, but we will need more. Part of *Bringing Our Community Home* is developing the public will to generate those resources.

### **What is the role of our regional partners?**

This is truly a regional plan. Representatives from across the county participated in developing the *Bringing Our Community Home*. Each of the committees involved in the creation of this Plan had membership representation from throughout the County. The Plan acknowledges that there is no "one size fits all" solution to homelessness, and that we need to address regional differences with appropriately targeted strategies.



### **Aren't there some people you just can't help?**

Actually, it turns out that when you combine intensive services with housing even those who might be viewed as the very most difficult to house respond and are able to stabilize their lives.

### **Does “ending chronic homelessness” mean that there are never any persons without a home?**

Ending chronic homelessness does not mean that there will *never* be a chronically homeless person in the county. It does mean that we identify persons at risk of losing their home and prevent them from becoming homeless. It means that we identify people without housing and quickly provide them safe and appropriate short-term and long-term housing options and that people are given the services necessary to move from short-term solutions to stable long-term housing as quickly as possible.

### **What is permanent supportive housing?**

Supportive housing is a successful, cost-effective combination of affordable housing with services that help people live more stable, productive lives. Supportive housing works well for people who face the most complex challenges—individuals and families who are not only homeless, but who also have very low incomes and serious, persistent issues that may include substance abuse, mental illness, and HIV/AIDS.

### **Why is supportive housing so important?**

Supportive housing is important because it works and it is a key factor in our ability to end chronic homelessness. Studies show the following effects of supportive housing programs across the country<sup>h i j k l</sup>:

- Decreases of more than 50% in tenants' emergency room visits and inpatient days
- Decreases in tenants' use of emergency detoxification services by more than 80%
- Increases of 50% in earned income and 40% in the rate of participant employment when employment services are provided in supportive housing
- Decreases in dependence on entitlements—a \$1,448 decrease per tenant each year
- Increase in successful housing for mentally ill people (83.5% remained housed a year later)
- Increase in tenants' ability to remain sober (90% compared to roughly 55% of residents in half way houses).

### **Does the community already have permanent supportive housing?**

Yes. The Housing Authority's El Carrillo project has just opened and houses 61 formerly homeless persons. They have two full-time case managers on-site to work with residents. In addition, over the years, many homeless have used the New Faulding Hotel as a step off the streets into housing. In recent years, management of the hotel has seen the need for increased supportive services to help their residents retain successful tenancy.

### **What will it mean if the City approves the Ten-Year Plan?**

The Leadership Council has “Adopted” the plan, which means “to take up and practice as one's own” or “to accept formally and put into effect”. The County and cities are being asked to “Approve” the plan, which means “to give formal or official sanction to”. This means that the City acknowledges that chronic homelessness is a real issue in Santa Barbara and that the TYP is a humane, cost effective way to solve the problem. The City will play a small part in the implementation of the TYP, and approving it means that we will address our part. The City is not being asked to commit funds at this time, but they are being asked to keep the plan in mind when making housing and funding decisions.



## (Endnotes)

- a Santa Barbara defines a disabling condition the same way HUD defines it: a “diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of two or more of these conditions”
- b The HUD definition of chronically homeless is identical to the definition Santa Barbara has adopted except HUD’s definition is limited to unaccompanied homeless individuals and does not include families.
- c Tessler, R.C. & Dennis, D.L. *A synthesis of NIMH funded research concerning persons who are homeless and mentally ill*. Rockville, MD: National Institute of Mental Health. 1989.
- d SAMHSA. *Blueprint for Change: Ending Chronic Homelessness for Persons With Mental Illnesses and/or Co-Occurring Substance Use Disorders*. 2003.
- e Heroux, Roger, *A Report on Homelessness Services in the County of Santa Barbara*. Feb 2006. Available at [http://www.sbhomelesservices.org/weblog/docs/homelessness\\_report206.pdf](http://www.sbhomelesservices.org/weblog/docs/homelessness_report206.pdf) (Supportive housing cost provided by Santa Barbara City Housing Authority based on the El Carrillo Apartments).
- f Martha Burt, “What We Know About Helping the Homeless and What it Means For HUD’s Homeless Programs” Testimony presented to the Housing and Community Development Subcommittee of the Banking and Financial Institutions Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives 1. March 5, 1997.
- g Community Action Board of Santa Cruz, Inc. “Housing and Homelessness in Santa Cruz County – 2005.” *available at* <http://www.cabinc.org/Research/housing-and-homelessness-2005-report.htm>
- h CL Caton, RJ Wyatt, A Felix, J Grunberg and B Dominguez. Follow-up of chronically homeless mentally ill men. *Am J Psychiatry* 1993; 150:1639-1642
- i Drake, R. E., Antosca, L., Noordsy, D. L., Bartels, S. J. & Osher, F. C. (1991). Specialized services for the dually diagnosed. In K. Minkoff & R. E. Drake (Eds.), *Dual diagnosis of major mental illness and substance disorder (New Directions in Mental Health; pp. 57-67)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- j Baker, Ph.D. Tenure in Supportive Housing for Homeless Persons With Severe Mental Illness. *Psychiatr Serv* 51:479-486, April 2000
- k Ridgway P, Rapp CA: *The Active Ingredients of Effective Supported Housing: A Research Synthesis*. Lawrence, Kans, University of Kansas, 1997
- l Tsemberis S, Eisenberg RF: Pathways to housing: supported housing for street-dwelling homeless individuals with psychiatric disabilities. *Psychiatric Services* 51:487-493, 2000