

HOMELESS SOLUTIONS COMMITTEE

HOMELESSNESS SUMMIT LODI GRAPE FESTIVAL, JACKSON HALL 413 EAST LOCKEFORD STREET, LODI THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2015 9:30 A.M. – 3:30 P.M.

A. CALL TO ORDER

The Homelessness Summit of April 16, 2015, was called to order by John Ledbetter, Chairman of the Homeless Solutions Committee (HSC), at 9:30 a.m.

Mr. Ledbetter recognized the members of the HSC, which was formed to address the homeless population.

Homeless Solutions Committee Members – John Ledbetter, Lodi Community Foundation; Russ Hayward, Lodi Community Foundation; Captain Martin Ross, Lodi Salvation Army; Patricia Fehling, Lodi Salvation Army; Karen West, Lodi Salvation Army; David Warner, Lodi Salvation Army; City of Lodi City Manager Stephen Schwabauer; City of Lodi Police Chief Mark Helms; City of Lodi Police Captain Tod Patterson; City of Lodi Police Lieutenant Steve Nelson; City of Lodi Neighborhood Services Manager Joseph Wood; City of Lodi Council Member Doug Kuehne; Vince Yorba, Gravity Church; and June Atwood Aaker, representing downtown merchants.

Mr. Ledbetter explained that two sessions would be held during the summit: 1) a morning session to receive a presentation from Police Chief Mark Helms and to listen to community concerns; and 2) an afternoon session to hear from stakeholders who have solutions and ideas. From the outcome of the summit, the HSC will create short- and long-term goals to present to the community. Specific issues to be identified are: who are those being affected in the community; what is presently being done; what can be done; who should be included in the discussions; and what role should everyone take in this plan.

B. OPEN FORUM

Police Chief Helms provided a PowerPoint presentation on homelessness solutions, which was previously presented to the City Council at its March 17, 2015, Shirtsleeve Session. Specific topics of discussion included aspects of homelessness; homelessness within Lodi; City of Lodi executive work group meeting held on October 2, 2014; meeting outcomes; recent Police action; research; organized feedings in City parks; progression of stakeholder meetings; priorities and goals; what is next; development and implementation of a plan; and items for Council consideration.

Robin Knowlton expressed concerns regarding the Lodi Salvation Army Shelter on Sacramento Street, the impact it has had on the neighborhood, and the potential of consolidating all of the homeless activities into one location. Homeless individuals sleep in the doorways and in cars, and there is often litter and human waste left around the buildings. Ms. Knowlton suggested the shelter would be better located in a non-residential or non-commercial area and that a neighborhood advisory committee be formed to address issues or concerns that arise in the area. She believed there were inadequate resources for homeless individuals with mental health or dependency issues and stated there should be a day shelter to reduce the number of people wandering the streets during the day. Ms. Knowlton further stated that Hutchins Street Square has seen an increase in homelessness, adding that the amphitheater is fast becoming a makeshift homeless overnight shelter.

Cheryl Francis, representing Grace and Mercy Charitable Foundation, stated that the organization, located at 425 and 425 ½ North Sacramento Street, works with the homeless and those in need. Volunteers raised money to purchase and rehabilitate the buildings on Sacramento Street; the group organizes feedings on Mondays and Wednesdays; many who previously participated in the program now help others in the system; and those who receive assistance from the organization are expected to do something in return, such as cleaning streets and the outer area of the building, keeping their areas and clothing unsoiled, and maintaining proper hygiene.

Maria Rufino thanked the Police Chief for improving the community, adding that the drug and crime rate was previously much higher, and stated that Nancy Baker with the Lodi Code Enforcement Division has been responsive to calls regarding trash and code violations.

Kim Jones stated that she has picked up trash at Lawrence Park for two years; however, the Police Department continually ejects her from the park and no one has expressed appreciation for her efforts. She stated she did not appreciate being referred to as homeless, simply because she is less fortunate, and expressed disappointment that the Police Department offers no assistance.

Juanita Huerta, Coordinator for St. Anne's Place, reported that the facility, which opened 18 months ago, is a day center for homeless women and men with children where they can stay while the Lodi Salvation Army is closed. Organizers provide assistance in locating resources and offer a place to rest out of the elements and weather. St. Anne's Place is located at 531 West Lockeford Street.

Mark Armstrong, Executive Director of the Lodi Grape Festival, responded to the comments made by Ms. Jones, stating that she is the root of the problem at Lawrence Park, she is not homeless, she has a vehicle, and she claims to be the caretaker of the park; however, her behavior should result in jail time. Mr. Armstrong commended the Police Department for facing this problem on a daily basis with compassion and caring.

Police Chief Helms introduced Lieutenant Steve Nelson, district commander for the east side of Lodi, and Captain Tod Patterson, who also serves on the Lodi Salvation Army Board. Chief Helms corrected the misunderstanding that the Lodi Salvation Army will turn people away who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, stating that the organization will feed or provide services to anyone during the day; however, the Salvation Army will not accept someone overnight in the shelter who is under the influence. The philosophy of the Salvation Army is to give someone a hand up; not a hand out.

Michael Carouba commended the Lodi Salvation Army, Grace and Mercy Charitable Foundation, and St. Anne's Place for the services they provide and commented that the solution to the homelessness situation is a balanced approach among individuals, the various organizations, government, and the faith community. He stated that businesses should not be prevented from making a living because people leave food for the homeless on their property and that churches should hold their feeding activities at their location instead of at parks so it does not impact the public's use. He suggested that, as this task force formulates, it develop ways to empower individuals and private groups to better serve the homeless population. Mr. Carouba stated that the City's primary role is public safety and that, unfortunately, there are too few officers to provide the necessary services and response to the homeless.

Alex Aliferis stated that he has seen a steady increase in the homeless population in Lodi since he was a child and expressed a concern that many of their activities could turn into property crimes. Mr. Aliferis suggested that greater effort be made to discover these individuals' backgrounds so they can receive proper treatment and assistance and potentially be reunited with their families. Further, Mr. Aliferis recommended that future meetings be held on a weekend or after hours so that those who work can attend.

Steve Schwabauer, City Manager of the City of Lodi, shared the story of a downtown merchant who has had negative experiences with the homeless and how it has affected her business. On a daily basis, downtown merchants, Hutchins Street Square staff, and Police and Fire deal with the after-effects of the homeless, such as litter, needles, and human waste. The City of Lodi demonstrated compassion for the homeless population by committing funds toward the Salvation Army facility and Lodi House and its services, yet he believed that compassion is also necessary for those trying to make a living while dealing with the effects brought about from the homeless.

Suzanne Mangum, Executive Director for Lodi House, stated that her organization helps women and children. Lodi House houses five families at a time; to live there, residents must be employed and have no dependency issues; and 60 to 70 percent of the families ultimately move into homes of their own and give back to this community. Ms. Mangum stated that the homeless issue is not solely a Police problem and that everyone needs to do his or her part to address this matter.

Mr. Ledbetter stated that the HSC is taking an inventory of the various organizations, what each one does, and what areas are lacking in order to better coordinate efforts.

Doug Kuehne, Lodi Council Member, shared his story, stating that he was formerly homeless as a young man and that he relied on many organizations for food, shelter, and work. He stated that the Police Department primarily focuses on the percentage of homeless who are unwilling to change and have chemical dependency issues and suggested that everyone else focus on those homeless individuals who want to change but need assistance in doing so. Mr. Kuehne stated that Captain Ross with the Lodi Salvation Army is confident his facility can handle the number of people and logistics associated with being the primary feeding location and for hosting the Homeless Fair. He expressed support for providing work opportunities for the homeless, such as day labor jobs, as that can propel people to improve out of their situation. Mr. Kuehne suggested that the Homeless Fair include veterinarian services as many of the homeless have pets. He stressed the importance of a collaborative effort as it will have a greater impact on the community.

In response to an unidentified individual, Mr. Ledbetter responded that the Lodi Community Foundation represents 26 non-profit organizations in the community, all with different goals, and the group coordinates their funds, donations, and investments toward their desired interest, whether it is for child or senior welfare, women's issues, adoption agencies, and the like.

Mr. Ledbetter encouraged anyone with ideas or concerns on this subject matter to contact him at john@vinofarms.net so that their input can be considered during this process.

Captain Martin Ross, Lodi Salvation Army, announced that the kick-off for the Homeless Fair Day is tomorrow, April 17, from noon to 4 p.m. The concept is a one-stop shop where homeless individuals and those in need of assistance can receive services and resource information. Activities include showers and haircuts, clothing exchange, Veteran services, Catholic charities, men's and women's case managers, banking institutions, tours of the facility, and resources for mental and physical health. Captain Ross stated that the Lodi Salvation Army has structured programs and a high success rate of recovery. The facility is open for resident breakfasts and an open dinner, as well as an open breakfast on Sundays. A mini Homeless Fair will be held every Friday, and the fourth Friday of the month will include the various agencies and enhanced services. He reported that 95 percent of Salvation Army staff came from a recovery background and have been sober for years. Captain Ross clarified that homeless individuals who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol are not permitted to stay at the facility over night; however, everyone is welcome to attend the dinner meal. The goal of the Lodi Salvation Army is to help individuals better themselves by providing a hand up; not a hand out. Captain Ross stated that the Homeless Fair Day will include staff for crowd control purposes and street clean up.

Pat Patrick, Executive Director of the Lodi District Chamber of Commerce, stated he was pleased to hear that the Homeless Fair Day would include crowd control and street clean up because many of the neighbors in the area are concerned about the impact of this event. He suggested that other communities be contacted to learn what they are doing to address this problem and cited Santa Barbara, which formed a "block walk" group. This group, made up of the business community, police, and citizens, walk areas where the homeless congregate three to four times daily to determine ways to combat homelessness, such as lighting darkened areas, locking dumpsters, removing discarded cardboard, or pulling out benches in areas that attract the homeless to sleep. Mr. Patrick applauded the community for coming together to formulate a plan.

The public forum portion of the meeting ended at 11:14 a.m. Mr. Ledbetter encouraged everyone to return at 1:30 p.m. for the stakeholder meeting.

C. STAKEHOLDER SESSION

At 1:33 p.m., John Ledbetter convened the stakeholder session and reiterated his earlier comments regarding the HSC and its purpose, structure, and goal. Mr. Ledbetter stated the purpose of the afternoon session was to provide agencies an opportunity to discuss their services and offer some solutions.

Esmeralda Salinas, representing the Social Security Administration, stated that the organization has programs for disabled homeless, including assistance in applying for Social Security benefits,

phone interviews for those without transportation, and enhanced assistance for those with mental health issues.

Bill Mendelson, Central Valley Housing, stated that the organization provides permanent supportive housing for those who meet the Federal definition of being disabled and homeless and transitional housing services. Central Valley Housing provides assistance to 340 households and 780 individuals, and he stated that most of the programs are full. Mr. Mendelson believed the first critical step is getting people off of the street and into housing, followed by the need for further assistance to address mental health and substance abuse issues, rent and utility assistance, and household items and furnishings. The organization's share of an individual's housing cost is roughly \$6,000 a year, but there is a greater need for additional assistance that cannot be provided by the organization. In addition, Mr. Mendelson stressed the need for housing, preferably at a single site, stating that Central Valley Housing currently relies on landlords willing to work with the special needs population, which results in scattered housing.

Joseph Wood, City of Lodi Neighborhood Services Manager, pointed out that Mr. Mendelson also represents the San Joaquin County Continuum of Care. Mr. Mendelson explained that the continuum is comprised of organizations interested in homeless issues and that his agency manages a homeless information database of all emergency shelters, housing programs, and street outreach programs.

A discussion ensued amongst the attendees regarding the agency's coverage area, waiting lists for housing, funding for permanent housing, outreach to the homeless, referrals from various agencies, verification of an individual's homelessness and disability, and location of the agency's housing units, which does not currently include Lodi.

Joseph Wood stated that he administers the Community Development Block Grant Program, the funding for which comes from the California Department of Housing and Community Development and is geared toward allowing the community to engage in capital projects and public services that serve the low-income population, minority population, seniors, and the disabled. The program requires a five-year consolidated plan to outline community needs and issues regarding housing, affordability, health, and the homeless. Mr. Wood stated he also serves as the City's representative on the San Joaquin County Emergency Food and Shelter Program board, adding that this Federal funding was reduced by 40 percent at a time when foreclosures were affecting communities. One of the responsibilities for running this program is the requirement to conduct a homeless count every two years. Each time a barbecue was held at which the homeless were given blankets, clothes, food, access to resources, and counted.

Paula Grech, Women's Center of San Joaquin County Youth and Family Services, stated that the non-profit organization serves victims and survivors of domestic abuse and assault, as well as the homeless, and provides free and confidential counseling, temporary restraining order assistance, hospital response, parenting classes, information, and referrals. The Women's Center operates countywide and has four shelters; two for women and children. The organization works closely with Central Valley Housing, Child Protective Services, law enforcement, and case managers to seek safe, stable housing for everyone it helps. A common misconception is that the Center serves only women and children or victims of abuse, but runaway youth are provided assistance as well; however, the major problem it faces is how to effectively handle youth with mental health issues. Many of the referrals are to Lodi House or Hope Harbor, but both are overcrowded and typically have a waiting list.

Kathy and John Ray, managers of the Shady Acres mobile home park, expressed strong concerns regarding the homeless who frequent the area, stating they sort through garbage cans, steal discarded diabetic syringes, break into vehicles, and cause damage. Caltrans cleared the area, but four hours later the homeless returned. Ms. Ray stated she frequently contacts the Police Department but the homeless flee while they are there, only to return once officers leave. Mr. Ray stated that the situation is becoming increasingly more dangerous and asked that representatives visit the area to observe the conditions.

Juanita Huerta, Coordinator for St. Anne's Place, stated that the organization provides a place for the homeless to stay during the day, provides access to resources, offers cold meals, refers people to other agencies, and provides computer and job search assistance. The day shelter is

located at 531 West Lockeford Street and is open Monday through Thursday. There is no age limit, but participants must supervise their children.

Randy Pinnelli, Program Coordinator with Care Link Community Medical Center, stated that the organization provides medical services to the homeless in San Joaquin County. He stated that, unfortunately, the homeless situation is typically addressed as an emergency response, which is not a solution to the problem. Mr. Pinnelli applauded the City of Lodi for recognizing that policing and criminalizing homelessness is ineffective. He stated that the core problem with the homeless is lack of affordable housing, adding there is no place to transition into housing that is affordable. Lodi's housing stock is primarily single-family houses, and individuals who struggle often wind up in emergency shelters. Mr. Pinnelli stated the organization has a number of centers open to the homeless; the group works closely with the Salvation Army, Lodi House, and area hospitals; and the program is expanding to improve outreach to those in need.

Dennis Buettner, Home Outreach Worker with San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Services, stated the organization works with St. Anne's Place, area hospitals, and many other agencies on mental health issues, as well as the factors behind each individual's illness, such as loss of employment, mental health, medical issues, or substance abuse. He stated there is a segment of the homeless population who will not change or work with the system, which creates obstacles when it comes to helping them navigate the system. Mr. Buettner stressed the importance of having a network of resources to help agencies better aid their clients and coordinate their efforts. He stated the organization only has two outreach workers for the entire county and they both make a significant effort to make those living on the street aware of the services they provide.

A discussion ensued amongst the attendees regarding the staff of two handling an entire county, forthcoming additional mobile response units, the difficulties in dealing with mental health issues and maneuvering through the system, and the need to coordinate efforts among all of the agencies.

Rosa Vazquez, Housing Authority of San Joaquin, stated the organization provides housing assistance to low-income families and administers the Housing Choice Voucher Program (formerly known as Section 8 housing) and public housing. Over 4,800 Section 8 vouchers have been given, and there is currently a waiting list of 24,000 families. The waiting list for public housing is open, and the organization receives calls daily from families asking for emergency housing, which the Authority does not have. The organization also offers a Veteran program and works with the VA hospital to bring Veterans who are chronically homeless into permanent housing. Currently, the Veteran program can house 110 Veterans, there is a waiting list, and the Authority is hoping to receive an additional 75 vouchers. Ms. Vazquez stated the Authority offers permanent housing and that, for as long as the individual resides in the unit, they will receive rental assistance. The voucher program can move with the individual anywhere in the United States to a rental location where the owner is willing to rent to a voucher holder. Ms. Vazquez stated the organization is continually seeking additional funding opportunities.

Cheryl Francis with Grace and Mercy Charitable Foundation stated the organization serves lunches on Mondays and Wednesdays, the food bank is open by appointment, it serves 42,000 people a year, encompasses 130 agencies, serves non-English-speaking people, refers individuals to other agencies, and works with many of the hotels to find temporary housing. Ms. Francis stated the organization is privately funded and raised funds to purchase the building on Sacramento Street. In addition, Ms. Francis announced that Grace and Mercy will be presented as United Way's Community Star recipient.

Sharon Berry demonstrated her hand-made accessories that provide cooling and relief from body pain for people and pets, explaining that she would like to start a pilot program that could provide employment for the homeless for their assistance in making the items.

Brandon Michelson, Community Health Outreach Worker with San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Services, extended an offer to the Police Chief to ride along with officers to provide his expertise in dealing with homeless and mental health issues, similar to what was done in Tracy.

A discussion ensued amongst the attendees regarding feeding the homeless and giving money, enabling approaches, money better spent on homeless programs and services than in handouts,

the need for a one-sheet list of resources and referral information, the suggestion of distributing cards as a campaign to educate people on how to best help the homeless including resource numbers, and the need for day labor jobs for the homeless.

Captain Martin Ross, Lodi Salvation Army, stated the organization has a shelter on Sacramento Street and the core community center on Lockeford and Hutchins Streets. Salvation Army provides food distribution, tutoring, mentoring, counseling, and social services, and the shelter has overnight refuge and programs. The facility is open to men, women, and children; it offers transitional housing, rehabilitation programs, Veteran programs, case management; and it holds 86 people with an overflow capacity for 101 people. The culinary arts training program is graduating its 17th class, and 95 percent of graduates are placed in employment. The Salvation Army's goal is to provide a hand up; not a hand out. Anyone can stay overnight, as long as they are not inebriated, and the shelter serves 300 people a day. Captain Ross stated this effort began as a simple conversation with Mr. Ledbetter and has now resulted in a greater collaboration and ultimately a solution. Captain Ross announced that the Homeless Fair Day will be held on April 17 from noon to 4 p.m. and will include many agencies, crowd control, street clean up, showers and haircuts, tours, and food. A mini Fair will occur every Friday, with the fourth Friday serving as the larger event with additional services. He stated the churches will begin to divert their feedings to the Salvation Army location to take the pressure off of public parks. Captain Ross stated that every Friday will also include a Celebrate Recovery event that will include inspirational stories from those who recovered from addiction, as well as music and food. A bus will be available at the K-Mart parking lot at noon, 2 p.m., and 4 p.m. to transport individuals to the Friday events.

Mr. Ledbetter stated that the next step in this process is to develop a strategic plan with short- and long-term goals that is a balanced approach to this issue.

In response to Mr. Ledbetter, Lt. Steve Nelson, who attended the homeless summit in Manteca, stated that Lodi is moving in the right direction and that a grass-roots effort in working toward a common goal is a positive way to start the process.

In response to Captain Ross, Lt. Nelson stated that some communities have a wealth of resources to devote toward the problem, which is not the case for Lodi, adding that it will take private entities working together with government and the public to find a solution.

D. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the summit was adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

ATTEST:

Jennifer M. Ferraiolo
City Clerk