

CASE STUDY: CITY OF SANTA ROSA HOMELESS ENCAMPMENT ASSISTANCE PILOT (HEAP) PROGRAM

In July 2017, the City of Santa Rosa, in collaboration with Catholic Charities' Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST), began the Homeless Encampment Assistance Pilot (HEAP) Program to address the health, safety, and shelter needs of persons experiencing homelessness and living in encampments, as well as to mitigate impacts to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Homelessness is a major and growing concern for the City of Santa Rosa (City) and has been identified as one of the City Council's top priorities. The Homeless Encampment Assistance Pilot (HEAP) Program was launched in response to this homeless crisis to help maximize the City's allocation of time and resources to address encampments and to provide a more strategic outreach model to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness living in encampments.

The HEAP Program task force includes representation from nearly every City Department, including staff from Police, Fire, Housing and Community Services, Transportation and Public Works, Recreation and Parks, Water, offices of the City Attorney and City Manager, and Community Engagement, and HOST. The task force has developed a process and



timeline for homeless encampment resolution that reflects the unique, cross-Departmental perspectives of all of the City Departments that interact with or are impacted by homeless encampments.

DEVELOPING A HOMELESS ENCAMPMENT RESOLUTION PROCESS

Through the efforts of the City in collaboration with HOST, a list was created of 44 encampments identified throughout Santa Rosa in 2017. Many of these encampments were already known to the City and HOST through existing outreach and engagement efforts to assist individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. From this list, an action list, or matrix, was created of those encampments with estimated populations greater than ten, analyzed and prioritized based on the following criteria:

- The number of individuals estimated at the site;
- An assessment of their vulnerability due to living outdoors, based on VI-SPDAT scores;
- Associated health and safety risks, including pest infestation, impacts to creeks and waterways, and risks associated with location (ex: park, under bridges, and near busy roadways);
- Fire risks, including brush in the encampment area, reported emergency fire incidents, known hazardous materials, and the accumulation of flammable materials; and
- Property ownership, examples of which include private, City, County, or multi-jurisdictional, with the initial focus on City-owned properties.

Lesson Learned: Use Data to Assess and Prioritize Homeless Encampments for Resolution

Data helps make the prioritization process transparent for community members and elected officials, and helps ensure that resources are being used to address the encampments with the most vulnerable residents and most significant safety concerns.

Once a site has been selected, the team prepares an action plan that includes a three-phased approach. The first phase analyzes resources needed, including planning, community engagement and communications. The second phase addresses the progressive outreach, engagement and housing placement. The third phase includes the closing of the encampment and re-securing of the site.

PHASE ONE

Resource Analysis: Based on the individuals living in the encampment, the team devises a housing placement plan that includes both temporary and permanent housing options. Ensuring that there are adequate resources is essential to be successful. The timing of adequate placement resources drives the overall timeline of the encampment strategy. Once the analysis has been conducted, an encampment timeline is generated and approved by the HEAP team.



Creation of Encampment Action Plan: Each encampment has an individualized approach and includes the creation of an action plan. This action plan includes the following elements:

- Organizational assignment list (key City departments, partners, and outside contractors identified to participate in the encampment resolution process)
- Timeline
- Participating organization's assignments, roles and contact information
- Safety message (general statement of safety protocol and any site specific safety information)
- Area map
- Communications plan
- Plan for re-securing the site

Communications Strategy: Clear communication to everyone involved including those in the surrounding community of the encampment and those living in the encampment is critical to the overall program's success. Each encampment has a communications strategy that includes an initial press release announcing the timeline as well as a press release and FAQ that informs the public of the anticipated outcomes of the strategy. Additionally, each encampment communications strategy includes an informational meeting about the planned timeline and process.

Providing Official Notice to the Encampment: The Santa Rosa Police Department or appropriate agency assists with providing official notice to the encampment. Notices are given to individuals in advance, and

the timing of issuing notices is determined so that they do not conflict with outreach efforts. Formal enforcement notices provide relevant and clear communication to the individual. In addition, the notice includes a list of resources to provide individuals with information regarding access to housing, outreach, support services and shelter in the area.

The Santa Rosa Police Department or appropriate agency creates a master list of all individuals living in the encampment so that the team can ensure that everyone is provided reasonable attempts to engage in the service provision process.

When notices are given to the individuals, the outreach team accompanies the Santa Rosa Police Department to begin the intensive outreach support.

PHASE TWO

Assessments, Transition Planning and Housing Placement: Street outreach workers provide intensive street outreach and engagement to help individuals find appropriate placements that include both temporary and permanent housing options. This occurs in three ways:

- **Assessment:** Utilizing the VI-SPDAT (Vulnerability Index), outreach workers assess the individual's needs and preferences for housing. Upon consent, the individual is also enrolled into Coordinated Entry which provides shelter and housing access for all programs within the County of Sonoma.
- **Transition Planning:** Once an initial assessment of needs has been conducted, the outreach worker creates a reasonable and realistic transition plan for each individual who is willing. The transition plan includes two options for the individual to transition to, as well as how the outreach team can assist the individual with the options.
- **Housing Placement:** Once an opportunity is available for placement, the outreach team coordinates transportation for the individual, as needed, and could include transportation by the Santa Rosa Police Department, HOST, or others.



Focused Outreach: HOST provides ongoing outreach to the individual regardless of the stage of the assessment and transition planning they are in. Each individual is offered assistance to access community services to assist in moving from living outside and securing better alternatives in advance of any enforcement activities.

Property Storage: In order to ensure that individuals do not lose their personal property, storage is offered through the outreach team for individuals to store their belongings.

Documentation: Based on the list created by the notifying partner, the outreach team creates a cloud-based secure spreadsheet (Smart Sheet). This sheet includes the following data elements:

- Name of individuals in the encampment
- Stage of Assessment
- Transition Plan
- If necessary, documentation of denial of services (include direct conversation with dates and times of denials)
- Final Placement (placed in housing, placed in shelter, placed in hotel, denied all placement opportunities, or other)

For those who have a transition plan and signed release of information, a list is generated for the Santa Rosa Police Department. This list includes those who are working with the outreach team so that enforcement is minimized or not necessary as long as they follow through with their transition plan.

Lesson Learned: Utilize Assertive Outreach and Engagement

The HEAP Program utilizes strategic outreach and engagement to ensure that homeless encampment resolution does not result in the displacement of people experiencing homelessness. Outreach and engagement occur before, during, and after a homeless encampment is resolved. Outreach workers are able to continue engagement in situations where an individual experiencing homelessness may leave the encampment and transition to another encampment or other unsheltered situation.

PHASE THREE

Encampment Closure: On the final day of the notice there is a tightly coordinated encampment closure plan. Additionally, a media strategy is created which includes clearly identified Public Information Officers from the participating organizations. The day begins with a briefing to discuss the outreach strategy, the media strategy, enforcement strategy (if necessary), and any other elements that need to be discussed pertaining to the site. The day ends with a debrief of the operations, including next steps. When enforcement activities are initiated, the outreach staff accompanies enforcement officers at all times to continue to provide supports to individuals who up to that point had not accepted outreach services.

Re-securing the site: In order to ensure that the site is secured the appropriate entity (e.g. Public Works, Recreation and Parks, etc.) creates a plan to re-secure the site which includes an in-depth debris and hazardous materials removal coordinated through the Santa Rosa Fire Department and/or appropriate contract entities. Once the site is clean, then measures such as fencing or landscaping are implemented to ensure that the site does not become an encampment again. Once the site is re-secured, it is turned back over to the appropriate entity to provide ongoing management.



DEDICATED RESOURCES FOR ENCAMPMENT-DRIVEN STRATEGIES

Encampment occupants are relocated following Housing First protocols through comprehensive services plans. Common housing relocation options in Santa Rosa include shelter at the housing-focused Samuel L. Jones Hall Homeless Shelter (owned by the City and operated by Catholic Charities), hotel vouchers, and resources to reconnect with family and support networks or for housing placement. The Homeless Services Center, operated by Catholic Charities, also expanded its hours, with financial support from the City, to help connect encampment occupants to additional services and housing resources.

In order to meet the immediate shelter needs of encampment occupants, the Santa Rosa City

Council dedicated additional resources to repurpose the Samuel L. Jones Hall Homeless Shelter into a housing-focused, low barrier shelter, resulting in a total of 75 beds (out of 213) prioritized for individuals experiencing homelessness identified through the HEAP Program.

In accordance with the Housing First model, the shelter's housing-focused program aims to move participants as quickly as possible from shelter into permanent housing. A number of new positions were created to help within the shelter to support this Housing First effort, including a housing locator, housing navigator, and housing stabilization case manager.

Lesson Learned: Reduce Barriers to Shelter Access and Assistance

The HEAP Program found that a significant number of people residing in homeless encampments had a distrust of the shelter system and its policies. Catholic Charities revised the operating policies at Samuel L. Jones Hall Homeless Shelter to reduce barriers to assistance such as restrictions on pets, partners, possessions, and sobriety. Outreach workers are also working to educate people experiencing homelessness living in encampments about the changes made to the shelter system to be Housing First and low-barrier. Encampment occupants are able to tour the shelter and observe the changes that have been made before entering the shelter system.

RESOLVED ENCAMPMENTS & OUTCOMES

As of May 2018, the HEAP Program has directly worked to resolve three encampments on City-owned property and has supported efforts led by the County of Sonoma to resolve two additional encampments in the Roseland area.

Farmers Lane Extension: In August 2017, the City in partnership with HOST offered services, shelter, and housing to the 50+ occupants of the Farmers Lane extension encampment. Resolution of this encampment was determined to be a priority due to an imminent fire risk and the occurrence of more than 100 calls for service from the neighborhood over the six months prior to resolution. The Fire Department played a key role in addressing public safety issues at this site including identifying fire hazards and hazardous materials and developing a plan for their removal, taking into consideration erosion prevention measures and safety precautions for HEAP partners working at the site as well as impacts to the broader community.

Outcomes of this effort include:

- 70% of occupants placed into services and shelter
- Removal of more than 200 tons of debris, including hazardous materials
- Clearing of brush and weeds and trimming of trees, all of which were deemed a significant fire hazard

Lesson Learned: Collaborate with the Police Department

The Police Department is involved in many aspects of making Santa Rosa's HEAP Program a success, including participating in outreach efforts, connecting people experiencing homelessness to shelter, and providing additional support as needed. The Police Department is also at the table to support Santa Rosa's weekly meetings and encampment resolution planning process.

Highway 101 Underpasses: Starting in September 2017, the City and HOST actively engaged with the occupants of the encampment at the 6th Street Highway 101 Underpass to offer housing options and services to the estimated 40 – 50 people staying there nightly as well as coordinating weekly clean-ups to lessen public health and safety impacts. Initial plans to resolve this encampment were delayed as a result of the October wildfires, resulting in the coordination of additional resources to accommodate an increase in the number of individuals residing at the encampment.

Outreach and engagement efforts to the Highway 101 Underpass encampment were disrupted by advocates and activists working in opposition of the City's encampment resolution efforts, favoring instead a sanctioned encampment strategy. The transportation of encamped individuals away from the Highway 101 Underpass encampment to different encampments by activists impacted the ability of HOST outreach workers to effectively engage encamped individuals during the encampment resolution process. HOST pursued an assertive outreach and engagement campaign beyond the resolution of the Highway 101 Underpass encampment to identify those individuals who had been moved to new encampment locations and connect them to prioritized shelter, housing, and service resources within the homeless system of care.



Outcomes of this effort include:

- 55% of occupants placed into services and shelter
- Cleanup of the site by the City's Transportation and Public Works crews and HOST, including storm drain inlets of accumulated trash and debris.

Lesson Learned: Consider the Role of Advocates and Activists in Your Efforts

Homeless advocates filed a lawsuit in March 2018 in an attempt to block the City of Santa Rosa and Sonoma County from resolving the Roseland homeless encampment. Although the activists were unsuccessful in obtaining a temporary restraining order, advocates continue to resist local encampment resolution efforts. The City of Santa Rosa and the HEAP Program have been working to effectively interact with activists and advocates and to promote housing-focused encampment resolution efforts over sanctioned encampments through frequent communication and meetings to find common ground. The work to bring advocates and activists on board with encampment resolution has been an ongoing effort led primarily by Catholic Charities and is important to prevent mixed messaging to encampment occupants regarding solutions and to decrease interference in the HEAP Program’s outreach and engagement work.

Doyle Community Park: The homeless encampment at Doyle Community Park was identified as a priority for resolution in December 2017, with resolution and clean-up efforts extending into early 2018. The Santa Rosa Recreation & Parks Department and a Creeks Team that had been tasked with addressing encampments along waterways were brought into weekly HEAP meetings to help with outreach, engagement and clean-up efforts related to this encampment.



Lesson Learned: Every Encampment is Different and May Require Different Partners and Approaches

Factors such as where an encampment is located and the characteristics of people encamped may require different partners and approaches for encampment resolution. The Doyle Community Park encampment brought new partners to the table (Creeks Team) and expanded the role of existing partners (Recreation & Parks Department). The timing of outreach and enforcement efforts is critical to avoid displacing individuals to other areas of the community prior to connecting them to services.

Roseland: HEAP acted in an advisory capacity to the Sonoma County Community Development Commission (CDC), which served as the lead agency for the Roseland encampment resolution process. The 130+ person Roseland homeless encampment was identified as a priority for resolution in early 2018, with resolution taking place in April 2018. The encampment was built on land owned by the Sonoma County CDC that is scheduled for housing and commercial development. The Sonoma County CDC operated an on-site navigation center to help quickly connect people experiencing homelessness and living in the encampment to housing and service options. The Roseland encampment provided the opportunity for regional collaboration between the HEAP team and the Sonoma County CDC, as well as Sonoma County Regional Parks, which manages the Joe Rodota Trail directly adjacent to the Roseland encampment.



Lesson Learned: Work with Encampment Leaders

Encampments often have “mayors” or leaders with whom outreach workers can connect to establish rapport. The HEAP Program tries to work with encampment leaders early on and more quickly connect them to shelter and services. This can provide an early success for the encampment resolution effort by building momentum and providing an example for other encampment occupants.

PROGRAM BUDGET

HEAP Program efforts are directly supported by the following programs, operated by Catholic Charities: Homeless Outreach Services Team, Samuel L. Jones Hall Homeless Shelter, and Homeless Services Center. The City budgeted a total of \$2.2 million for operation of these programs during Fiscal Year 2017/2018. These efforts include outreach and engagement to occupants of the encampment and services such as reunification, hotel vouchers, and housing assistance (security deposits and rental payments) plus extended services at the Homeless Services Center as part of the HEAP Program’s comprehensive services plan.

Lesson Learned: Flexible Funding is Key to Quickly Serve People Living in Encampments

Flexible funding has allowed the HEAP Program to provide comprehensive services and a range of housing assistance options, including additional shelter beds and hotel vouchers, to quickly move people out of encampments and into safer, service-rich and housing-focused accommodations until permanent housing can be secured. The Homeless Emergency Declaration, approved by City Council in August 2016, has also provided the City with flexibility to make changes at the Samuel L. Jones Hall Homeless Shelter and Homeless Services Center without going through a lengthy process to revise Conditional Use Permits at these facilities.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For additional information on Santa Rosa’s Homeless Assistance Encampment Pilot (HEAP) Program and other homelessness initiatives, please visit the following resources from the City of Santa Rosa:

- [Homeless Solutions](#)
- [Homeless Encampment Assistance Pilot Program Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#)
- [Homeless Encampment Assistance Pilot Program Fact Sheet](#)
- [Homeless Encampment Pilot Program Media Release](#)
- [Police Homeless Related Incidents Heat Map](#)
- [Fire Department Homeless Related Incidents](#)
- [Open Letter to the Community from Mayor Coursey Regarding Homelessness](#)
- [Housing Action Plan](#)
- [Housing First Strategy and Work Plan](#)
- [Homeless Services](#)
- [Homeless Outreach Services Team \(HOST\)](#)