



**COMMISSION ON DISABILITIES
MINUTES
Monday, September 17, 2018
5:30 PM**

*FIFTH FLOOR LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM, CITY HALL,
3900 MAIN STREET, RIVERSIDE, 92522
GENERAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT, 951-826-5427*

MISSION STATEMENT

“The mission of the Commission on Disabilities is to promote greater awareness of, respect for, and the total participation of individuals with disabilities into all aspects of life.”

State law restricts the Commission on Disabilities from taking action on an item unless it has been included on an agenda and posted at least 72 hours in advance of a meeting or unless the matter falls within one of the narrow exceptions. Consequently, any item not listed on this agenda will normally have to be delayed until the item can be made part of a posted agenda.

CALL TO ORDER: 5:30 pm

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

1. Roll Call: Chairperson Sharron Lewis, Gregory Alexander, Albert Davis, Sr., Ryan Nelson, Antonia Quezada, Kimberly Lopez, John Krick.

ABSENT: Tola Perkins (unexcused), Vivian Foust (unexcused)

Also in attendance were General Services Director Carl Carey and ADA Coordinator Monique Gordon.

2. **Introductions and Public Comment Period** - This is the portion of the meeting specifically set aside to invite your comments regarding any matter within the Commission’s jurisdiction. Individual audience participation is limited to 3 minutes.
 - a. Keith Nelson was in attendance in support of Ryan Nelson.
 - b. Ryan Nelson noted that the disability sports festival will be on 10/6/18 at Cal State San Bernardino from 8 to 3:30 and is free to participants of all ages and disabilities. There is a flyer about the event.
 - c. Antonia Quezada provided an update concerning an elderly, blind person who became homeless. His ex-wife is now his caregiver seven days per week. He was seen by Blindness Support Services and he will receive cane training, money management and is living in a senior

community in Moreno Valley. He is also extremely hard of hearing as well as legally blind, with sight perception only. He has become more active in his training.

- d. Gregory Alexander noted that his COD contribution has always been about schools and disabilities surrounding children. He lives in the Alvord Unified School District which has about 20,000 students and typically 10% of the population is disabled. In order for him to be more prolific for serving students with disabilities and all students, he is a candidate for school board for the Alvord Unified School District (AUSD). He requested the support of the COD. There are a lot of changes needed in AUSD. He has been door to door and spoken to over 100 voters in the area and there is a dire need. He has been in communication with the director of special education and she is ready for change. He has been endorsed by the staff union. This position would give him the ability to support the 2,000 students and families with disabilities in AUSD. He wants to bridge the gap between the school districts and City of Riverside so the relationship can be more collaborative and friendly in support of the students.
 - e. Commissioner Davis noted that he would attend the Growing Up Special Legislative Breakfast which will be held at the IEHP office located on Tyler Avenue across from the Tyler Mall. He is particularly interested in the ABLE Act.
 - f. Commissioner Lopez discussed virtual identification for people who have lost identification and the information can be accessed on smart phones. Free smart phones are available to people who are homeless and on Medical and Medicaid.
 - g. Commissioner Krick noted he runs the Riverside Championship Cross Country Course. There are four coaches who have done this for over four years. There is the ability to have a disability type race at the location and Riverside is the most used cross country course in California and at least 8,000 runners and 33 teams will be racing. This is also where the CIF Championships are held and it would be great to add a disability run to one of their races. Cross Country is the most supportive sport in terms of runners supporting runners. The season ends right before Thanksgiving. Also, he reminded everyone this Friday is POW-MIA recognition day and Riverside is home to the National Monument at the Cemetery.
3. Discussion/Approval: Board and Commission Attendance Policy: Tola Perkins (unexcused) and Vivian Foust (unexcused)

Neither Tola Perkins nor Vivian Foust were in attendance for this meeting.

4. Minutes for the meetings of September 17, 2018.

M/S Alexander/Nelson and unanimous to accept the minutes as presented.

AYES – 7 (Lewis, Alexander, Davis, Nelson, Quezada, Lopez, Krick); NOES – 0; ABSTAIN – 0; ABSENT – 2 (Perkins, Foust)

5. Presentation from a Homeless Advocate and Emotional Health Counselor on the increase in homelessness and the effect mental illness has on the people who are homeless

Dr. Mel Palmer is a homeless advocate and an emotional health counselor. A large number of people who are homeless have mental health issues since they were very young, some being undiagnosed and/or untreated.

Dr. Palmer wanted to create an open dialogue about homelessness and mental illness. He does this work because often people who are homeless or have mental illnesses are not invited to the table to participate in the discussion. This population is therefore talked about and there are discussions about their well being but there is no avenue to hear from them what their needs are. This is why he became an advocate for the homeless, and he has an idea of what their needs are and about their experiences are on the street.

In response to a question Dr. Palmer asked a young homeless man who responded that if you are not mentally ill when you are living on the streets, eventually some type of mental illness will develop in the clutch of trying to survive on the street. If homeless individuals are able to link up with others who are homeless, they are more likely to sustain themselves physically and emotionally. There is a lot of partnering, couples, congregating and the Main Library is a central hub for communication. Whatever happens during the evenings and night, the Library is the meeting point. When you become part of that subculture, then the meeting point to take roll call. It may look like the homeless people hanging out at the Library, but this is a sophisticated way of taking roll of who is where, what is going on and what is happening.

In the City of Riverside, there has been a lot of funding provided for the homeless and housing for the homeless. However, in the past, those funds were used to add Police force. The Police was supposed to monitor the homeless but, as related by the homeless, it was a situation where being homeless and on the street, you were ticketed, incarcerated, jailed without having an address, many forms of identification were destroyed, creating a more complex problem for homelessness. You cannot access services without appropriate identification. The other part of that, with the County, is services cannot be accessed without having a mental health diagnosis. A homeless person, who may not have mental illness, must get labeled with a diagnosis.

One of the barriers to this is funding, not enough property, not enough facilities to convert to homes for the mentally ill or homeless. Another problem is that someone with mental illness receives services and is placed on medication. This person returns to the community non-functioning and listless. This creates the stigma of not going to the mental health, because you see what happened to the last person who went. Inside the mental health communities, there is a cultural stigma, particularly in the African American communities. If you have mental health or emotional issues, you are automatically considered crazy, which further limits mental health resources.

If you look around Riverside, there are a lot of vacant parcels. The question is, why can't this space be used to house the homeless and / or the mentally ill. There are several issues surrounding this issue. There have been many meetings discussing homeless and mental illness. The community is becoming charged because they are not seeing any results.

Individuals are being pushed away from downtown Riverside and into the communities. Now there is a community issue which becomes us and them or a community or homeless / mental health issue. These types of issues create a barrier and shape the background of the current situation.

The treatment / advocacy center says that 1/3 of all homeless individuals also have mental illness. Sometimes there is undiagnosed mental illness which sometimes contributes to but does not 100% contribute to the fact that individuals are homeless. What is needed are resources that will help people diagnosed as mentally ill, to sustain their housing. There have been programs that were put in place, however, those programs allocated for homeless and mental illness were discontinued in 2012.

Some of the myths are that people who are homeless or have mental illness diagnosis do not want to be in housing. The fact is if you put someone in an environment where they are already experiencing trauma further traumatizes them. If you do not have someone providing case management, working with these individuals and helping with the transition and day to day tasks we take for granted, causes challenges for them and they go where they can get that support. Remember, support on the street happens at the Library with individuals taking care of each other. If you are in an environment where you are not being taken care of, of course it is a frightening environment that creates trauma that is not being addressed. The individual is seen as resistant to any services being given. If you attempt to reach 311 or the shelter, the people receiving homeless individuals are not friendly. Dr. Palmer took an individual to the shelter to assist in filling out the application. The reception person at the shelter was so rude, the young man would not enter the shelter. Other individuals state they feel safer on the streets than they do in some of the shelter facilities. These are some of the barriers we are faced with.

Unconscious bias is another area to be examined. Most of us are one pay check, mortgage payment, one job away from being homeless and two nights on the street from being mentally ill because we cannot take the situation. Unconscious bias sets us apart from those needing our help and add the drugs and alcohol, then there is a moral issue to contend with. So when that person in need is seen, those unconscious bias' come into play and allows us to help that person or not. These are some of the barriers, ideas and myths carried within ourselves as to why we cannot solve the problem.

There are several diagnosis that individuals have. Some of the acute ones are schizophrenia psychosis. Sometimes individuals are misdiagnosed or over-medicated based on the misdiagnosis. How do you get a dialogue to assess the needs of these individuals and get them to trust you to a point? It cannot happen by riding by in a white van and them being counted. The approach is important and we are not approaching this population so if there are resources, individuals who are homeless are not accessing them because we cannot create the dialogue or bridge the gap between individuals and the street. There are social workers going around with police officers, but that is usually when the individual is in trouble and is combative. This is not a proactive approach to reach where the needs really are in our community. The need is to access what homeless needs are before they are in trouble, not after they get in trouble because now, if they do get a job, there are all kinds of legal fees attached and the cycle is perpetuated, individuals who are homeless cannot get out of the cycle and end up on the street again.

Dr. Palmer stressed that an open and honest dialogue was needed concerning homelessness and mental illness. Nobody wants to be one-on-one, even those who have the job, they don't want to do it due to their unconscious bias, their view of the population and the stigmas attached to it. Being on the street causes individuals to become dirty but it does not change the character of the individual.

Commissioner Lopez disagreed, noting that people who are homeless become defensive because no one will effectively help them and they must protect themselves. Dr. Palmer noted that being defensive does not change a person's character. Defensive means they are protecting themselves. You must be able to penetrate their defenses to let them know you are not the one who is going to hurt them, in order to get past the defenses. A core value still exists in those who are homeless.

Commissioner Alexander noted that Dr. Palmer's information was very valuable and from an empathetic perspective, as someone with experience working with individuals who are homeless. How can the COD be of assistance to you? When the COD needs to help someone, the COD needs to be more connected with Dr. Palmer's work and his circle so he can be contacted as needed and a collaboration can be established. At the same time, how can the COD assist Dr. Palmer and his associates to advocate for the actual needs of homeless individuals. The COD agenda items can be shared with City Council so they understand what City staff need in order to really help people without homes and who may have mental health disabilities. The COD wants to support Dr. Palmer's work and advocate for the support of this underserved portion of the population in the City of Riverside.

Resident Keith Nelson related a scenario where a business had proposed to open on a site where a number of homeless people were staying. Due to the amount of punitive actions that were necessary to remove the homeless individuals, the business owner backed out. Chairperson Lewis noted that a problem for the homeless is as they attempt to reenter the workplace and receive help with housing, there are usually fines to pay from some of the punitive actions levied on them. Dr. Palmer noted that decreasing the number of punitive actions levied on people who are homeless may be a good place to start in the process.

Chairperson Lewis noted that there is a growing number of young and elderly people becoming homeless; both groups have different needs. Dr. Palmer noted that if the homeless individuals could show they are integrating back into the community, maybe some of the fines incurred while on the streets could be waived in order to give them a fresh start. Educating City government and businesses about deterrents to their profitability.

Published resources are often not effective because of rude people answering phones, connected to answering machines, continuously ring unanswered or are outdated. Making sure the phone numbers are valid and there is someone who answers the phones or returns phone calls is important.

What are the next steps? Dr. Palmer responded that there are discussions going on all over the City at various times about what is the best approach to deal with mental health and homelessness in the City and County. The next steps are to identify some core resources that are legitimate and able to help individuals. Once these core resources are identified, leverage

and develop a relationship so that when a crisis comes, we know who to call and what to do to cover the crisis situation and assess what the individual's core needs are.

In response to a question about what the City's plans are for funding concerning homelessness, Dr. Palmer noted that the City was planning to revamp Hulen Place into an elaborate homeless complex, which fell through. Then housing was proposed to be built on March Air Base, now downtown property refurbishments are being discussed for providing low income and homeless housing for veterans. Funding has been allocated but you have to know where and how to access those funds.

Commissioner Alexander suggest a compilation of speakers who have made presentations to the COD, work on forming relationships with them and have them network with each other, then share that information with City Council. Emilio is the homeless coordinator for the City. There needs to be action items attached to the discussions that are happening on this topic.

6. Discuss Domestic Violence Awareness Month through a play titled Nowhere to Run

Chairperson Lewis noted that there is a problem in the Inland Empire with sex trafficking and domestic violence. There is a play titled Nowhere to Run dealing focused on the topics of sex trafficking and domestic violence. This play surrounds sex trafficking and dysfunctional families in particular, because this is the concern of many young people. The play will run from October 12-14 at The Box Theatre, in Riverside, CA.

7. Discuss and provide input on the video feature on Increasing Employment Opportunities for residents with disabilities in the City of Riverside

The COD reviewed the existing video and discussed the possibility of producing another one with a focus on homelessness and mental health. A list will be developed of past speakers on the topic of mental health for the possible inclusion in the next video.

8. Discuss development of a comprehensive community resource directory to coordinate the resolution of crisis situations for senior and disabled residents

Commissioner Quezada presented information from the Inland Empire Disabilities Collaborative (IEDC). Connect IE is being developed to make sure resource phone numbers are correct, the information the resource is providing is correct and training is available. You can search for specific resources and your location and information about the resources comes up for use. IEHP is filtering all of the resources to make sure the information is current. Eddie Rameriz will be available to make a presentation to the COD on this system. This project is funded by an IEHP grant and open to non-profit organizations.

Commissioner Lopez reported that she contacted the Veteran's Administration. The Volunteers for Veterans Foundation referred her to Betty Volk, who is able to provide information to aid veterans with housing, paying rent, utility bills and other day-to-day living expenses to help them get back on their feet.

9. 2019 Commission on Disabilities Meeting Schedule

Noted by the COD.

10. Items for future Commission on Disabilities consideration

- a. Homeless Services: Kimberly and Antonia will compile a Services Directory
- b. Department on Aging Speaker: How do you deal with disabled seniors and seniors with insecure housing
- c. Volunteers for Veterans (Kimberly Lopez' Item)
- d. Veterans Affairs Speaker
- e. Chaffey Community College HR Statistics, Employment Tracking
- f. Rolling Start – Independent Living – Riverside County (Antonia, San Bernardino – physical disabilities)... CA Adaptive Technology vendor for the IE
- g. Community Clergy from various Denominations – delay until after resources are in place. Commissioner Alexander will invit

11. Riverside's Model Deaf Community Committee (MDCC), fourth Monday of the month (September 24, 2018) at 4:03 pm in the 7th Floor, Mayor's Ceremonial Room.

12. The Transportation Board meets monthly at 5:30 p.m. the first Wednesday of every month (October 3, 2018) in the Art Pick Council Chamber, City Hall, 3900 Main Street.

13. Respite Event: A Night of Hope and Joy, Janet Goeske Center, October 9, 2018, between 6-8 pm (2nd Tuesday each month).

14. Mayor's Commission on Aging meets 1:00 p.m. the second Thursday of each month (October 11, 2018) in the Mayor's Ceremonial Room.

15. Inland Empire Disabilities Collaborative meets the 3rd Tuesday of every month (October 16, 2018) from 9:30am - 11:30am, at San Bernardino Valley College, 701 Mt. Vernon Avenue, Bldg 100, Parking lot 9, 10, 11 San Bernardino, CA 92410.

13. Commission on Disabilities Report to City Council June 25, 2019

ADJOURNMENT: 7:15 pm

The next regularly scheduled meeting will be November 5, 2018.