



*City of Arts & Innovation*

# Housing and Homelessness Committee Memorandum

TO: HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS COMMITTEE MEMBERS DATE: APRIL 26, 2021

FROM: OFFICE OF HOMELESS SOLUTIONS WARDS: ALL

SUBJECT: OFFICE OF HOMELESS SOLUTIONS GAP ANALYSIS OF CITY HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEM

## **ISSUE:**

Receive a presentation from the Office of Homeless Solutions on its gap analysis of the City's homeless response system.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Committee receive and provide feedback on the presentation from the Office of Homeless Solutions on its gap analysis of the City's homeless response system.

## **BACKGROUND:**

The Office of Homeless Solutions (OHS) was established in 2017 to respond to the ongoing challenge of homelessness and its impact on the community. To achieve this goal, the City committed to Housing First as a best practice approach to address homelessness and pairing housing with wrap-around supportive services. The City Council adopted a Housing First Plan in March 2018. OHS is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the City's Housing First Plan, working with various City departments, community partners, and other public agencies on its implementation. Current OHS initiatives and programs include homeless outreach, housing development, workforce development, and a reconfiguration and update of the Hulen Homeless Service campus, among others.

## **DISCUSSION:**

While the Office of Homeless Solutions and Housing Authority have administered several programs and services to assist individuals experiencing homelessness, several gaps exist within the City's homeless response system, including:

### 1. Point-In-Time Count

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as optioned by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Riverside County Continuum of Care (CoC) did not participate in the annual homeless point-in-time count that normally takes place in late January. Rightly, the safety of volunteers, consumers, and providers was the driving motivation for this decision; the absence of an updated point-in-time count leaves unsettled

the total unsheltered population for an additional period of time. As the COVID-19 pandemic begins to subside, we will need to work alongside our partner agencies and organizations to adapt our approach without fully knowing the needs of this population.

## 2. Outreach Staffing Shortage

OHS outreach staff has been significantly challenged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the onset, outreach staff worked to house individuals experiencing homelessness and at risk of exposure as quickly as possible, while working alongside other partner agencies and organizations. As we have progressed through the pandemic, the demands placed on Outreach staff have not diminished, as the team is responding to calls for service throughout the City. It is anticipated that these calls for service will increase as the community begins to reopen and activities resume. As a result, OHS is leveraging its non-profit partner CityNet (who has also at times been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic) as well as the Public Safety and Engagement Team (PSET) to conduct outreach operations. It is critical to OHS operations that options continue to be explored to increase outreach services for prompt responses to calls for service.

## 3. Shelter Bed Needs

The City Council has recently approved the expansion of shelter beds with the establishment of the Riverside Cabin Shelter Village (Pallet Shelters), the Helping Hearts Mental Health Beds, the Mercy House Bridge Housing project, and the Illumination Foundation/IEHP recuperative facility. According to the 2020 point-in-time count, the City has 587 individuals experiencing homelessness. The City is expected to have 174 shelter beds by the end of this year, enough for approximately 30% of the unsheltered population. To better respond to the challenge of homelessness, OHS will need to continue evaluating the provision of shelter services, and explore ways to increase capacity.

**Inventory of Shelter Beds**

Shelter	# of Beds
Path of Life	15
Pallets	56
Helping Hearts	28 (pending development)
Bridge	25 (pending development)
Recuperative Care	50 (pending development)
<b>Total</b>	<b>174</b>

## 4. Need for Data

OHS has contracted with an agency named Outreach Grid in order to populate outreach, case management, high need individuals, and identify hot spot areas in the City to inform programming and support best practice responses. Additionally, the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) mandated software for CoC HUD programs includes gaps in identifying shelter bed availability for outreach teams, matching coordinated entry system housing placements, and monitoring duplication of efforts.

While OHS has expanded several programs and services to meet the growing challenges of addressing homelessness, targeted data collection is needed to review specific trends to inform future programing. For example, staff aspires to review data on duplicate clients served to determine what gaps in programs yield recidivism. Another example of enhanced targeted data is the collection of better client demographics to bring awareness on disproportionate trends relative to racial equity and diversity across the board.

5. Regional Collaboration

The City has initiated and is continuing to facilitate regional collaborative discussions to better address the challenge of homelessness in Western Riverside County. In 2019, the City hosted a Homeless Regional Forum bringing together over 80 elected officials, city managers, chief administrative officers, service organizations, and law enforcement to advance effective solutions. Following the Homeless Forum, in January 2020, the City hosted a convening of City Managers to establish next steps and develop sub-regional efforts and partnerships. In March 2021, the City again convened the group to discuss the progress made by each jurisdiction and in collaboration with other nearby jurisdictions (sub-regional partnerships). While several cities have made considerable progress by initiating efforts or establishing programs, it is clear that there remains much work to do to support the level of programs, services, shelters, and housing needed.

6. Behavioral Health & Substance Abuse Program Capacity

The City's Outreach teams (including CityNet) have reported that clients referred to behavioral health and substance abuse programs return back to the streets quickly and sometimes without any communication and coordination. Specialized residential treatment facilities for acute mental health and detoxification programs are limited in scope to meet current needs. Also, staff experience barriers in coordinating residual services due to HIPPA rules. As has been reported, the County's behavioral health staff is working to address this gap by enacting Laura's Law. This state law provides community based assisted outpatient treatment to individuals who meet strict legal criteria because of mental illness and who are unable to access community mental health services voluntarily.

7. Sustainable Funding for Ongoing Operational Services

In recent years, OHS has benefitted from one-time block grants provided by the state to support local efforts to address homelessness (Housing and Homeless Assistance Prevention funds Round 1 and 2). While the funds have been utilized for several significant capital projects, including the Riverside Cabin Shelter Village, a sustainable funding source is needed to support ongoing operational costs. Absent these resources, OHS will be limited in its ability to operate and support the efforts currently underway.

8. Corrections & Jail System

The City's Public Safety and Engagement Team conducts outreach daily with a multidisciplinary team of individuals that include Riverside Police Officers, Code Enforcement Officers, Parks staff, CityNet outreach workers, and a contractor who supports encampment cleanup activities as needed. A gap identified by this team is the ongoing recidivism of individuals who have touched the criminal justice system and are not connected to their place of origin, not connected to other supportive services and housing, thus contributing to the unsheltered population in the City. Improved coordination and practices are needed to ensure individuals are fully integrated and matched with necessary resource development to effectively serve this population.

9. Youth and Family Services

Currently, the homeless response system has only one youth provider in Operation Safehouse and one family provider in Path of Life Ministries, both of which are good partners to the City. As was noted previously, additional capacity is needed to support youth and family programming, especially as we begin to fully establish a partnership with the two local school districts and programs that can support transitional age youth in workforce development and employment. The Office of Homeless Solutions has a collaborative partnership with the Riverside Unified School District (RUSD) child and family

welfare team and the McKinney Vento school liaison in supporting the navigation and connection to shelter and resources for homeless families, students or those at risk. We are also establishing a similar working relationship with the Alvord Unified School District. Recently, RUSD reported that in Fiscal Year 2020/2021, 31 families lived in motels, 27 families lived in temporary shelters, and 7 families were unsheltered. These statistics underscore the importance of expanding capacity to support youth and family services.

#### 10. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity in Programming

OHS remains committed to addressing homelessness through the lens of equity to ensure best practices for consumers and providers. For example, OHS has strengthened a partnership with UCR Medical Students to provide the “Hulen Campus Health Care Days”. This service integrates health equity through the provision of basic health care, wound care, and referrals for chronic health care conditions, to individuals experiencing homelessness who otherwise would not have access to these resources. OHS intends to expand the presence of diversity, equity, and inclusion by ensuring that former homeless individuals and those with first-hand experience have a voice to shape policy and programming. A gap identified is the need for a more trauma informed care, inclusive of visual aesthetics that provides not only a warm and welcoming environment, but a healing place to motivate and inspire the homeless population towards self-sufficiency.

Since its inception, OHS has administered several programs and services aligned with national best practices to addressing homelessness, including outreach, shelter expansion, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, rental assistance, supportive services, linkages to behavioral, medical, and substance abuse programs. With over 100 street exits from PSET in Fiscal Year 2019/2020, 661 individuals served at Path of Life shelter, 143 individuals served since the inception of the pallet shelter, and over 538 affordable housing units in the pipeline, OHS remains committed to continue a trajectory of success for the unsheltered population in the City, while finding solutions to gaps in the homeless system of care.

#### **FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact related to this report.

Prepared by: Hafsa Kaka, Homeless Solutions Officer  
Approved by: Moises Lopez, Deputy City Manager  
Approved as to form Kristi J. Smith, Interim City Attorney

#### **Attachments:**

1. Presentation
2. OHS Data Snapshot