



The State of Homelessness in Downtown Long Beach

September 28, 2011

Executive Summary

Like most large urban cities in America, Long Beach has significant homelessness to address. When most residents of Long Beach think of homelessness in their city, they think of the downtown Long Beach neighborhood since homelessness is so pervasive there. Many of the city's leaders have pointed to the lack of homeless services throughout the region and in surrounding cities as the hypothesis for why Long Beach bears much of the responsibility for what is a regional homeless issue.

Many stakeholders would like to see the reduction of street homelessness without a significant increase in new homeless services in Long Beach. City leaders also welcome the regional homeless initiative created by the Gateway Cities Council of Governments as a positive step toward increasing service capacity to address homelessness in other parts of the region.

In this environment, Long Beach Connections was created to implement a model of permanently housing homeless persons with the goal of reducing the number of people on the streets of downtown Long Beach. The underlying objective in this geographically-focused initiative was that if homelessness could be reduced in downtown Long Beach other parts of the city and region would implement similar efforts to permanently house their most vulnerable homeless neighbors.

Community leaders that represent homeless agencies, elected offices, law enforcement, emergency services, health care, faith groups, schools, businesses, and residents joined together to implement an intensive survey of homeless persons in downtown Long Beach in July 2009 in order to find who was living on the streets and how this initiative could prioritize the most vulnerable to house them.

In a span of two years after the survey, **over 80 people surveyed were permanently housed**, entered long-term care programs, or were assisted in moving back to their home cities where they could be housed successfully with the addition of family support networks.

Two years later in July 2011, Long Beach Connections performed the same survey in the same geographic area in order to assess whether this effort actually reduced homelessness. The results were encouraging:

- **The number of homeless persons congregating in downtown Long Beach decreased by 12 percent.** In 2009, there were 345 persons living on the streets. In 2011, the number was 303.
- **The cost of healthcare for homeless persons residing in downtown Long Beach dramatically decreased by 68 percent,** saving the healthcare system up to \$1.4 million in Emergency Room costs and up to \$500,000 in Emergency Medical Services costs.
- **Permanently housing the most chronic vulnerable homeless persons is possible.** Of the 345 persons originally surveyed in 2009, more than 23 percent were permanently housed. Many of those housed had been on the streets for an average of five years.
- **There are fewer homeless veterans on the streets than two years ago.** In 2009, there were 76 homeless veterans in downtown Long Beach. This year, there were 46 veterans living on the streets.
- **More than a million dollars per year of new (non-city) resources were committed to addressing homelessness** in downtown Long Beach.

The conclusion from these results shows that the current Long Beach Homeless Service System (continuum) is working, and that an emphasis on permanently housing the most vulnerable homeless persons in the downtown neighborhood has resulted in a reduction of street homelessness.

What is Long Beach Connections?

Long Beach Connections began as an informal collaboration of community stakeholders to address homelessness in the downtown neighborhood of Long Beach. The three groups that formed the shared leadership of this effort were: PATH (People Assisting The Homeless), Mental Health America of Long Beach, and the City of Long Beach's Homeless Services Division.

Along with the leaders, the group expanded this collaboration adding groups that historically encountered homelessness on a regular basis -- police, fire, homeless agencies, hospitals, schools, faith groups, business, and residents.

Some of the action items of this effort were the following:

- Find out **who is on the streets** in order to address their needs, barriers and residency to better understand the population and assist them into housing.
- **Prioritize the most vulnerable persons** living on the streets since people who have been on the streets for a long time typically are the most sick and at risk of dying on the streets, and are in need of housing the most.
- **Emphasize permanent housing** since the end-goal of ending a person's homelessness is getting her or him back into a permanent living situation.
- **Survey again two years later** to measure progress.

Who Funded Long Beach Connections?

The Mayor of Long Beach, The Honorable Bob Foster, supported this project by allocating the first seed funding for this effort. Since the initiative was completely volunteer-driven, the initial \$30,000 investment from the *Mayor's Fund for the Homeless* was used for move-in assistance, survey incentives and logistics, and direct assistance to those being housed.

Other significant funders joined this effort quickly, including: Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe (\$600,000 for two years), City of Long Beach Health Department Homeless Services Division (\$360,000 per year), and the Hilton Foundation (\$300,000 for three years).

The Geographic Boundaries of Long Beach Connections

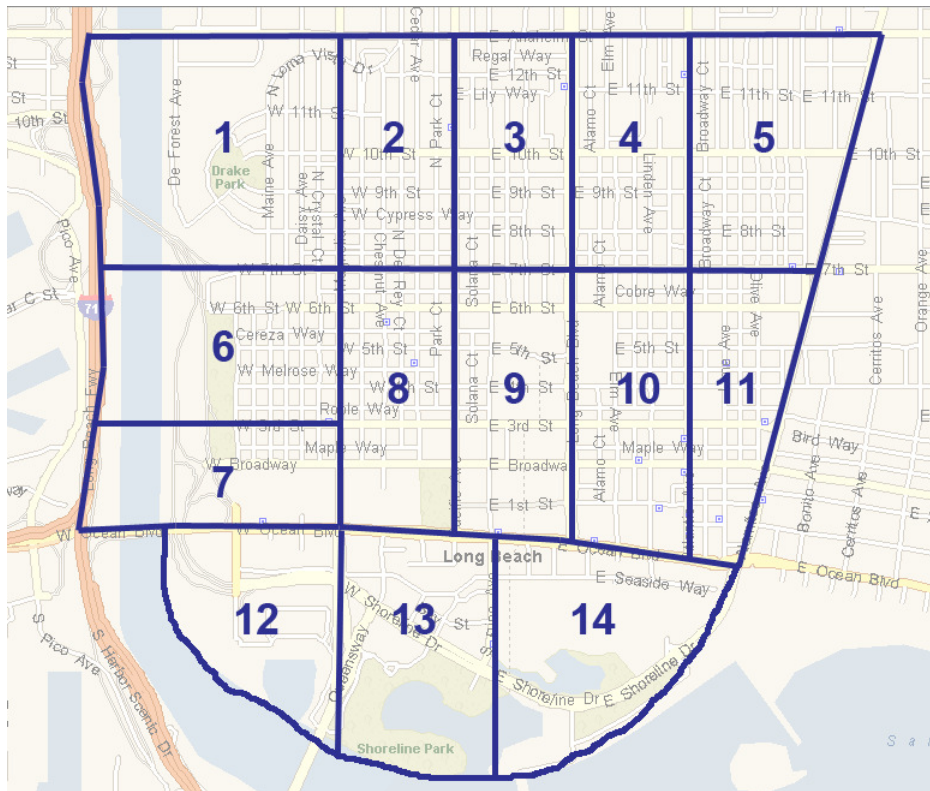
In order to implement a new approach to addressing homelessness where results could be tested after two years, Long Beach Connections created specific geographic boundaries and implemented surveys during the same month and time.

Geographic boundaries: The boundaries for the survey and for prioritizing housing were based on people living on the streets in the following section of Long Beach:

- Northern boundary: Anaheim Street
- Southern boundary: Shoreline/Marina
- Western boundary: Los Angeles River
- Eastern boundary: Alamitos Avenue

This geographic area was divided into 14 different sectors. For both the 2009 and 2011 surveys, 14 volunteer teams surveyed one sector. Although teams consisted of community volunteers, the team leaders were experienced homeless services outreach workers.

Below is the map of the 14 sectors:



Days and Time of Surveys:

First Survey: July 21-23, 2009 (Tuesday through Thursday); from 5:30 am to 7:30 am. Surveyed 3 consecutive mornings.

Second Survey: July 26-28, 2011 (Tuesday through Thursday); from 5:30 am to 7:30 am.

The Actual Survey Tool: A Six-page survey of questions: demographics, health risk indicators, institutional usage (shelter, foster care, prison, etc.), employment, benefits, citizenship, and Long Beach-specific questions.

A Partnership with 100K Homes Campaign

Long Beach Connections joined a national initiative to permanently house the most vulnerable homeless persons throughout the United States. Nearly 100 cities and communities throughout the country have joined the campaign – 100,000 Homes Campaign – to survey local homeless population and facilitate permanent housing placement.

As of September 2011, nearly 11,000 chronically homeless neighbors have been housed across the nation through implementation of this solution-based model.

The 100,000 Homes Campaign team leaders assisted Long Beach Connections with the 2009 survey and provided guidance to team leaders.

Homeless in Downtown Long Beach In 2009 (Two Years Ago)

Highlights: Homelessness Two Years Ago

- 345 people sleeping on Long Beach's downtown streets
- 133 people were considered vulnerable (38%)
- 76 veterans
- 92 mental health issues
- 21 under 25 yo; 20% from foster care system
- 7 HIV/AIDS
- 45 average age
- Race: 47% White, 40% Black, 12% Hispanic

Assessment of 2009 Survey

People on the streets are sick, and using the emergency health care system within the City as their primary care and for basic needs.

968 visits to the emergency room within the previous 3 months of the survey.

The cost for our city to care for these people is high.

- \$351,000 per year in hospital visits.
- \$2.4 million-\$4.2 million in last 3 months of emergency room visits. (124 people, at \$2,000-\$3,500 per visit, 968 visits)
- \$774,400 in un-recouped Fire Department ambulance (Basic Life Support) costs. (968 visits, \$800 per BLS)

Average length of years being homeless in Long Beach (4.8 years) is less than the national average (9 years).

- This means Long Beach's homeless service system is getting people off the streets quicker.
- 14 agencies; 35 programs; 2,100 emergency, transitional, permanent housing units.

The State of Homelessness Today (2011)

LB Connections Surveyed the Same Boundaries in July 2012

- Same boundaries
- 100 volunteers
- Same survey
- Same month of the year, same 3 days and early morning.

Results

1. **Homelessness in downtown Long Beach has been reduced** by 12 percent in the past two years.
 - a. In 2009, there were 345 people. In 2011, there are 303 people on the streets.
2. **The cost to the public health system (ER and EMS) has reduced.**
 - a. In 2009, there were 968 visits to the ER in the previous 3 months. In 2011, there were only 309. A 68% reduction.
 - b. That means a cost savings of up to \$1.4 million in ER costs and \$500,000 in EMS ambulance transports.
 - c. Five people in 2011 visited the ER more than 15 times in 3 months. Discharge planning consortium, led by the Homeless Services Division (hospitals, Fire Department, service providers) will prioritize housing these five people.
3. **More than 80 people on the original survey were housed.**
 - a. In the past two years, the Long Beach homeless service system helped people move into permanent housing, enter long-term care programs, or assisted people into moving back with their families within the city or back to their hometowns.
4. **Fewer Homeless Veterans on the Streets.**
 - a. In 2009, there were 76 veterans on the streets of downtown Long Beach. Today, there are 46 homeless veterans.
 - b. The City of Long Beach is well positioned to end veteran homelessness because of its collaboration with the local Veterans Administration Healthcare System and Long Beach Housing Authority for VASH (Veterans Administration Supportive Housing) housing choice voucher. As well as the Homeless Veterans Initiative, funded by Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe, that coordinates services and housing between the VA, Housing Authority, and the Villages at Cabrillo site..
5. **The Community is Mobilized** Around Housing Homeless Neighbors.
 - a. The Faith Community has been actively involved in helping homeless neighbors move into their new apartments. This is led by Kingdom Causes-Long Beach, a collaborative faith effort.
 - b. Local educational institutions, Long Beach City College and California State University at Long Beach, are actively involved in the surveying of homeless persons.
6. **The Community is Working Together** to Address Homelessness. This includes:
 - a. Long Beach Veterans Healthcare Administration

- b. Downtown Long Beach Associates
- c. Health Care – Hospitals, care-givers. The City of Long Beach’s Homeless Services Division has led a coordinated effort with health care providers to identify high utilizers of emergency medical services and prioritizing housing to reduce costs.
- d. Outreach – The City of Long Beach’s Homeless Services Division operates the Multi-Service center and has led coordination efforts with all homeless outreach programs in the city.
- e. Emergency Services – Long Beach Police Department, Long Beach Fire Department, other city services.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the many groups and people who supported and participated in Long Beach Connections. This includes:

Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe and his office, Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster and his office, Long Beach Vice Mayor Suja Lowenthal and her office, Long Beach City Council member Robert Garcia and his office, Long Beach City Health Department, Long Beach City Homeless Services Division and the Multi-Service Center, Long Beach Veterans Healthcare Administration, Long Beach Housing Authority, Long Beach Police Department, Long Beach Fire Department, CSULB, Long Beach City College, Memorial Hospital, St. Mary’s Hospital, Downtown Long Beach Associates, United Way of Greater Los Angeles, and the Hilton Foundation.

Thank you to the agencies that participated: Mental Health America of Long Beach, PATH (People Assisting the Homeless), PATH Ventures, U.S. Vets, Behavioral Health Services, Long Beach Rescue Mission, Memorial Counseling Associates, Catholic Charities.

Special Thanks to:

- Kingdom Causes, for their assistance in helping people move into their apartments
- Community Solutions’ 100,000 Homes Campaign, for their technical assistance
- First Baptist Church and St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, for hosting the two surveys
- Greg Mellen of the Long Beach Press Telegram and Harry Saltzgaver of The Grunion Gazette , for their coverage of this initiative