



BEST PRACTICES FOR ADDRESSING STREET ENCAMPMENTS

LOS ANGELES HOMELESS SERVICES AUTHORITY



JUNE 2021

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207

people come out of homelessness but 227 more fall into it.



INTRODUCTION

Tens of thousands of people experience homelessness in Los Angeles County on any given night, often falling into homelessness due to failures of upstream systems, from health, mental health or foster care to the criminal justice system to the housing and job markets. This is underpinned by systemic racism, a dearth of affordable housing, and a growing wage and income divide.

On an average day, 207 people come out of homelessness—but 227 more fall into homelessness. Our homelessness crisis is not isolated to a specific location or area; every community has seen increases in unhoused community members.

ENDING HOMELESSNESS WILL REQUIRE A REGIONAL VISION BACKED BY INTENSE ONE-ON-ONE ENGAGEMENT AND AN INVESTMENT IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING THAT GOES BEYOND EVEN OUR REGION'S GREATEST RECENT EFFORTS. IN OTHER WORDS, HOMES END HOMELESSNESS.

Within this context, local considerations often dictate concentrating resources on individual encampments. But when removing people from an encampment replaces individual needs and regional strategy, it's not uncommon that the same people return to the same place or disperse nearby days or weeks later, none any closer to permanent housing.

Finite resources mean that focus on one encampment draws resources needed for other unhoused people in the region.

Lastly, under-planned encampment operations can retraumatize people who have already undergone considerable physical and mental suffering



There may be times where a more intensive focus on specific encampments is warranted. This includes scenarios where there's significant safety concerns for those at the encampment and areas being closed off, thus creating displacement. In these situations, the following document provides guidance on how best to provide location-specific actions.

This document offers guidance for balancing the need for location-specific work with the importance of a regional, trauma-informed approach to unsheltered homelessness that places people experiencing homelessness on the path to a stable, permanent home. It previews tactics and concerns grounded in the following five critical key principles, all of which must be addressed before moving people from an encampment:

- 1 Provide ample **time** to engage with people living in the encampment during this important transition
- 2 Ensure voluntary, client centered, and trauma-informed **care**
- 3 Provide adequate, appropriate and low-barrier **resources**
- 4 Identify an experienced service **partner** with deep ties to the community and let them lead
- 5 Establish strong team **coordination**

Below is a summary of best practices for location-based strategies. Several case studies accompany explanations of each principle, followed in turn by additional resources. It should not be considered exhaustive.

1

PROVIDE AMPLE **TIME** TO ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE IN THE ENCAMPMENT DURING THIS IMPORTANT TRANSITION

1. Time to prepare our unhoused neighbors

People experiencing homelessness are often in crisis. They are focused on staying safe, figuring out where to get their next meal, how to protect their belongings and more. To safely move people in crisis from a place where they have settled to shelter and onwards towards housing, strong relationships and trust must be established. That requires time and coordination from outreach teams.

2. Time to prepare housing resources

Enough interim housing needs to be available before moving people from encampments. It is not just a matter of quantity but matching people's needs to resources available.

3. Time to properly coordinate services and collect data

Moving an entire community from an encampment to housing takes an immense amount of coordination. Service providers must have sufficient time to collect necessary information to match and coordinate resources. Compressed time windows can erode the quality of data needed to forge long-term connections with people and to match them to appropriate housing and services.



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ENSURE VOLUNTARY, CLIENT CENTERED, AND TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

1. Build rapport and trust

Encampments are people's homes. Leaving them for somewhere new and unknown can be challenging. The goal of outreach is to build rapport and trust, empowering clients to accept services that align with their needs.

Most people living in encampments have had past negative experiences of trying to access help. As such, it often takes considerable time and skill to build a trusting relationship with outreach workers.

2. Support community and personal agency

People living in encampments are part of a community. As such, all work must recognize the agency of that community and its residents.

- Encampments often create community leaders, and it merits working closely with those leaders. Provide encampment community meetings that allow everyone in the community to hear the same information and respond to it as a community.
- Some communities may want housing opportunities that allow them to stay together as a community.

3. Ensure transparency

The key to building trust and rapport is providing accurate and transparent information. The most valuable tool every outreach worker has is the value of the information they provide. Any surprises that make people experiencing homelessness believe that they have been lied to will significantly jeopardize any efforts to connect them to services.

If the location is set to be closed due to construction, or other hazards, it is important that the municipality clearly posts these timelines with ample notice and share with service providers details on this closure.



2

ENSURE VOLUNTARY, CLIENT CENTERED, AND TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE



4. Communicate consistently and accurately

People in crisis face significant barriers to processing information shared with them. Outreach workers must communicate with a trauma-informed approach that ensures information is communicated in the easiest to understand form and is repeated many times for people to be able to process the information. Information must be accurate, precise, and provided consistently for the best results.

5. Know every individual and document their needs

The key to successful planning is creating a By-Name List of every individual member of an encampment and their needs. The list, developed by the outreach teams and managed by the outreach coordinator, should be used to identify resources needed to successfully transition people indoors. This includes but is not limited to:

- Age
- Gender
- Location
- Household status
- Acuity
- Pets, emotional support animals, service animals
- ADA requirements
- Higher-level needs
- Other characteristics that may make the individual eligible for, ineligible for, or need other resources (e.g., veteran, minor children, RV dwelling)

6. Ensure warm handoffs by outreach workers as people move into interim housing

If someone is having challenges, ensure that the interim housing provider reaches out to the clients' point of contact.

PROVIDE ENOUGH APPROPRIATE RESOURCES SO UNHOUSED NEIGHBORS ARE CARED FOR AND HAVE SOMEWHERE APPROPRIATE TO GO

3

The only successful way to address encampments is to provide housing opportunities for people to transition off the streets. If we do not provide authentic and meaningful housing choices that align with all the unique needs of all people living in an encampment, we are simply shifting people to another area temporarily and retraumatizing people.

1. Identify housing resources to support the transition indoors

- *Interim housing resources are not one-size-fits all. Access resources that fit all identified needs. Those needs may include:*
 - Staying with a partner
 - Staying with a pet or pets
 - Staying close to a community
 - Having access to higher-level resources (e.g., medical care, mental health)
- *Ideally, relocation is the next step to transitioning out of homelessness and towards permanent housing*
 - Interim housing beds are not permanent housing. A strong investment by municipalities and other entities to create affordable permanent housing resources for people experiencing homelessness is vital.
 - The ideal ratio to make sure people are not stuck in a cycle of shelter and the streets is five permanent housing spots for every one interim housing bed.
- *After determining the number of people at a relocation site, flag any gaps in interim housing resources available*
- *Plan for more people than you count*
 - Not all people who are residing at an encampment may be counted initially. People have jobs. They leave encampments for doctor's appointments and many other reasons and opportunities. Estimates are often lower than the actual number of residents.
 - Encampment populations commonly rise after efforts to connect people to housing and services begin. Consider this phenomenon an opportunity to help more people in the immediate area.

IDEAL RATIO

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permanent housing spots for every interim housing bed

PROVIDE ENOUGH APPROPRIATE RESOURCES SO UNHOUSED NEIGHBORS ARE CARED FOR AND HAVE SOMEWHERE APPROPRIATE TO GO

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- *Ensure that teams understand the full picture of the amenities, requirements, and types of interim resources available*
 - The outreach coordinator should compile key information about available housing resources and share that with outreach teams, such as:
 - Location and type of setting (e.g., congregate, single room, hotel, etc.)
 - Eligibility requirements (e.g., mental health bed, singles, no minor children, etc.)
 - Amenities (e.g., storage, laundry, parking)
 - Onsite case management
 - Curfews
 - Animal policy
 - COVID precautions
 - Ideally people experiencing homelessness will be able to bring their belongings to interim housing and/or have access to storage nearby.
 - Assess other storage needs and explore options.
 - *Develop client transportation plans*
 - Successful transportation for people moving into interim housing can be provided by outreach directly, rideshare services, shuttle vans to interim housing or other options.
 - *Leverage homeless services and allied partnerships*
 - People experiencing homelessness have a wide variety of needs and no single outreach team can meet every person's needs. As such, it's critical to leverage partnerships through outreach and homeless services and allied networks including County MDTs (Multi-Disciplinary Teams), the Veterans Administration, the County Department of Health Services, the County Department of Mental Health, Substance Use Disorder treatment providers, and others.
- ## 2. Identify and match additional resources that must be addressed to move the client indoors
- *Support coordination to address personal belongings*
 - People experiencing homelessness in encampments should be actively engaged to identify which belongings they plan to keep, which need storage, and which they would like to be disposed of. Coordination of identifying personal belongings in these various categories can occur with people experiencing homelessness and Sanitation staff present at the same time.

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IDENTIFY AN EXPERIENCED SERVICE PARTNER WITH DEEP TIES TO THE COMMUNITY AND LET THEM LEAD

1. Accountability and leadership is critical to any effort to address a significant encampment. Leadership should be provided by a homeless services agency. LAHSA coordinates a network of outreach providers across the County and organized by Service Planning Areas. Initial discussions should establish whether a community-based organization already provides outreach at the designated encampment. This is sometimes a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) funded by Measure H. In areas not yet served by MDTs, LAHSA may provide lead services for an encampment.

Whether LAHSA or a community-based organization, the homeless services lead must direct the operation, coordinating services, setting the time frame and establishing protocols.

2. The SPA lead and LAHSA outreach coordinator will support the relocation launch by leading a discussion of:

- Prioritized location(s) and residents' general demographics, needs, etc.
- Interim housing resources available
- Appropriate outreach teams to engage in coordination
- Next steps required to activate and coordinate appropriate resources

3. As multiple teams often serve larger encampments, an outreach coordinator/s will facilitate coordination of this work, serving as 'air traffic control' among teams and other key stakeholders Smaller encampments served by only one team may not require the formal assistance of an outreach coordinator

4. Privacy regulations forbid the sharing of client-level data outside of service providers, including with law enforcement and elected officials



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ESTABLISH STRONG TEAM COORDINATION

- 1. Establish a joint outreach plan or outreach schedule for each team**
 - Determine outreach rendezvous location
 - Determine if area needs to be broken down in zones
 - Identify and address any safety concerns
 - Create group outreach text distribution for field-based communications
- 2. Discuss daily intake procedures (including hours, number per day)**
- 3. Efforts to address encampments often start with weekly outreach huddles to coordinate resources and often shift to daily huddles as move-in dates approach**
 - Teams should discuss challenges and potential solutions that arise to troubleshoot.
 - Barrier-bust around resource gaps, challenges that participants, outreach workers have flagged
 - Separate huddles may be required with municipalities where macro issues (e.g. disruptions by sanitation activities) are discussed



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ESTABLISH STRONG TEAM COORDINATION

4. Launch case-conferencing meeting with appropriate outreach teams and other service providers to discuss people's needs.

- Homeless service providers are bound to protect client confidentiality, so only homeless service providers with HMIS access should be invited to discuss clients' needs.
- If other referring entities have concerns about individual residents, they should refer those names to the outreach coordinator.
- Identify other encampment needs and coordinate with key municipal entities. Strong collaboration will improve outcomes.
 - People experiencing homelessness need municipal services just like their housed counterparts. The provision of services by municipalities in close coordination with the service provider can address long unmet needs of unhoused residents and can smooth relocation efforts for all.
 - Key services include trash receptacles and pick-up and hygiene services such as bathrooms, hand washing stations, and mobile showers.
- The provision of sanitation services might occur at a time that allows outreach workers to engage people before the service and encourage people to dispose of unwanted belongings.
 - Discuss encampment needs and schedules with elected officials' offices, sanitation entities, and other municipal teams.
 - Revisit these activities and services as people begin to move into housing in order to ensure that the move-in process is client-centered and to ease potentially difficult transitions.
- Collect and share metrics
 - Using the by-name lists, develop a plan to aggregate and share data to share with key stakeholders. These aggregate data include number of people identified, engaged, served, placed in interim housing and/or matched to permanent housing.
 - Share these metrics with key partners involved upon completion.

5. Debrief to determine what worked well and what could be improved

- Flag any issues that arise and create a plan to improve.
- Share lessons learned with key stakeholders.



CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1: EL SERENO

VETERANS MONUMENT; AVE 60/HERMON PARK; ALHAMBRA AVENUE



TIMING

Outreach coordination began two months before move-ins at three locations in El Sereno. Team huddles began on February 26, 2021. Move-ins began at the beginning of April.



LEAD SERVICE PROVIDER

Exodus Recovery Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT), LAHSA Roadmap, and LAHSA Homeless Engagement Teams (HET).



TEAM COORDINATION

Outreach teams met weekly with the Outreach Coordinator at onset to develop outreach strategy and by-name list of everyone in the encampment for a new Project Homekey (PHK) Interim Housing opportunity in the community. Teams case-conferenced multiple times a week around each client's needs, developing individual strategies for each person. Coordination with the PHK operator Union Station Homeless Services began closer to move-ins to ensure the move-in process went smoothly.



APPROPRIATE RESOURCES

Project Homekey interim housing spots were identified. LASAN was deployed on move-in days for voluntary trash removal and storage services.



CLIENT-CENTERED CARE

People experiencing homelessness in the area were engaged by MDT and HET outreach teams about the opportunity to move into their own Project Homekey interim housing room and were supported throughout the transition.



OUTCOMES

Nearly all people at the encampments moved into the two PHKs: 63 clients (38 at Super 8 and 25 at Titta's Inn). A few remaining people moved into a local Project Room Key (PRK). Client retention at the PHKs remains high.

CASE STUDY 2: VENICE AND GLOBE

VENICE AND GLOBE (UNDER THE 405 FREEWAY)



TIMING

Engagement with the residents of this encampment began in August 2019 and continues today. Once Project Homekey Super 8 was ready to launch in February 2021, outreach teams were in place to quickly connect their clients to this interim housing resource, having built strong rapport over a year and a half.



LEAD SERVICE PROVIDER

LAHSA HET, LAHSA Roadmap team, and St. Joseph Center.



TEAM COORDINATION

LAHSA teams coordinated with St Joseph Center MDT for COVID testing, Department of Mental Health HOME team support for people with significant mental health needs, and UCLA Street Medicine. Coordination between the PHK operator The People Concern and outreach teams close to opening ensured a smooth move-in process for participants.



APPROPRIATE RESOURCES

With support from LAHSA Housing Central Command (HCC), teams were able to connect clients to Single Room Occupancy (SRO) permanent housing opportunities and barrier-bust during a time when access to documents and other programs was extremely challenging due to the pandemic. LAHSA also supported a pilot program to provide California IDs (which is needed for permanent housing) without going to the DMV as well as connection to DPSS via a hotline to ensure a quick move-in process as soon as the PHK rooms opened up.



CLIENT-CENTERED CARE

Outreach teams built relationships with encampment residents for months delivering information and preparing them mentally, emotionally, and getting them “doc-ready” (prepared with all necessary forms of identification and other supporting documents) to move into housing. Teams also provided COVID testing, mental healthcare, and physical healthcare.



OUTCOMES

Sixteen people experiencing homelessness moved into Project Homekey. An additional ten people moved into SROs. One additional client from Venice and Globe was connected to the local A Bridge Home. Another was placed into an independent hotel space to accommodate special needs. Interim and permanent housing placements are continuing as of June 2021.

CASE STUDY 3: SEPULVEDA RECREATION CENTER



TIMING

Outreach teams began engaging people at Sepulveda Rec Center in early January 2021 and move-ins began mid-March 2021. After the original residents were sheltered, new people moved to the site, and outreach teams continue to engage with them.



LEAD SERVICE PROVIDER

LAHSA Roadmap Team



TEAM COORDINATION

The LAHSA Roadmap team was able to quickly mobilize to reach out to the clients and present the opportunity to move indoors in their own room in a location not far from their encampment.



APPROPRIATE RESOURCES

CD 6 identified the site as a priority outreach location in anticipation of the opening of a Project Homekey nearby.



CLIENT-CENTERED CARE

Coordination with the PHK operator (Volunteers of America) allowed for a client-centered intake process. During move-in, LA-SAN was deployed to provide voluntary trash removal and storage for participants transitioning to PHK.



OUTCOMES

Of the twelve participants at Sepulveda Recreation Center, eleven moved to PHK within a week. PHK Retention has been relatively high for these participants since the site opened with nearly no exits back to the street.

CASE STUDY 4: SOUTH LA “ENCAMPMENT TO HOME” DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

LEIMERT PARK AND BROADWAY PLACE



TIMING

Outreach teams began working with clients starting in February 2018. The project went from February 2018 - November 2018. As of November 2019, 150 people were permanently housed.



LEAD SERVICE PROVIDER

The lead agencies included LAHSA, HOPICS, The People Concern, Department of Mental Health (DMH), Department of Health Services (DHS), Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA), and Meta Housing.



TEAM COORDINATION

Local officials identified the site as a priority outreach location in anticipation of the opening of a Project Homekey nearby. Biweekly leadership and implementation meetings problem-solved, addressed barriers and concerns, and kept the project on track. Joint outreach was supported by Outreach Coordination and conducted via LAHSA HET, HOPICS MDTs, DMH’s HOME.



CLIENT-CENTERED CARE

Encampment-to-Home (E2H) was a demonstration project led by LAHSA, DMH, DHS, United Way, and the Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative. It was designed to demonstrate that people living in encampments, regardless of acuity, age, family composition, gender, health and mental health status, will voluntarily move indoors when provided low-barrier permanent housing options. E2H also explored ways to improve and expand collaboration between homeless services subsystems and other important community partners. Outreach teams discussed housing options with their clients, sought buy-in, and carried out the “leg work” in collaboration with intensive case management services (ICMS) to get clients from the streets into permanent housing. DHS ICMS trained outreach teams on housing processes and needed permanent housing documents. Outreach teams provided support to ICMS during the engagement process after clients were matched to housing.



OUTCOMES

As of November 2019, 150 people from these encampments were permanently housed via this demonstration project (111 via project based housing and an additional 39 via scattered site options). Housing retention at one year remained high at nearly 95%.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Encampment-to-Home was the subject of close study by the Home For Good coalition as well as the Los Angeles Times:

- [Managing Encampments with Consistency and Predictability](#)
- [After 18 months reporting on the homeless crisis, this is what I learned](#)

An encampment relocation at Paxton-Bradley also provides a sound example of collaboration:

- [Close-Knit Community Moves into Safety Together with Project Roomkey](#)

This Arnold Ventures report delivers three powerful top-line lessons about local approaches to unsheltered homelessness:

- Punitive policies do lots of harm, and little good
- Effective management of public spaces must aim to accommodate everyone
- Approaches that work are oriented toward low-barrier solutions, with a specific emphasis on getting people into housing

[Research & Results: Nine U.S. Localities Offer Human-Centered Approaches to Unsheltered Homelessness](#)

United Way's Home for Good Street Strategy for LA County synthesized interviews from more than 150 stakeholders:

- [Announcing the Street Strategy for LA County](#)