

Business Task Force Advances Services for Homeless

OP-ED By JERRY NEUMAN and RENEE WHITE FRASER Monday, January 30, 2012

After one year of implementation of the Los Angeles Business Leaders Task Force on Homelessness blueprint, Home for Good, there is much good news. There is also a golden opportunity for the business community to make the news even better.

The task force's initiative to end chronic and veteran homelessness in our region in five years consists of two equally important components. First, Home for Good seeks systemic changes that will enable the large number of local, regional, state and federal agencies to not only work together but also in concert with public and non-profit social service providers.

Second, Home for Good relies on the targeted use of existing permanent supportive housing and an increase in the total number of those essential units available to homeless people.

The task force has made significant strides toward the first goal. The most welcome progress flows from sweeping support for Home for Good. Nearly the entire homeless services sector has joined countless elected officials and thousands of individuals to implement Home for Good. There is a powerful commitment to change the way we address homelessness.

That resolve has produced impressive results. At a meeting convened by the task force, representatives from local and regional agencies met with senior federal officials. Together, they hammered out a list of specific procedural and systemic changes that the local participants sought from the federal agencies. Within a few weeks, all of those changes were under way. That process replaced an often contentious and counterproductive atmosphere with one that is more cooperative and generates results.

Similarly, a boot camp that the task force and Community Solutions convened for those who work with homeless veterans achieved a remarkable feat. Those in the room found ways to reduce the time veterans wait for housing from 168 days to 30. Other systemic efforts are also moving forward. For example, progress is being made in the implementation of a single, unified homeless data collection system. On the systems side, Home for Good is moving forward as planned.

On the housing side, the housing stock needed to fulfill the year-one goal of the plan has been realized, and we are optimistic that the region can stay on track to meet the long-term objective of the plan. The year-one number isn't as large as it will grow in the next four years, however, so the task force has created a dynamic entity to produce permanent supportive housing.

The Home for Good Funders Collaborative is the first of its kind in our region. The concept is simple: The collaborative aligns housing seed money from all sources – foundations, government agencies and corporate contributions. In the coming months, the collaborative will release a request for proposals to create permanent supportive housing, inaugurating a one-stop process for housing providers.

Where those who develop permanent supportive housing currently careen from one funding source to another, all with different applications and calendars, they will soon have a consolidated path to pooled sources. For new development projects, this collaboration has the potential to ultimately decrease the housing production process from five years to two.

More importantly, the collaborative will greatly enhance the power of the funds it disburses. The housing generated by the sum total from the funding collaborative will be far, far greater than those of each participant's contribution can ever be.

The spirit of cooperation that has infused the task force's campaign is evident in the collaborative. Government agencies have committed funds to the process. So have foundations including the Hilton Foundation, with a challenge grant for \$1 million of the \$5 million the collaborative seeks in its first year. Several high-net-worth individuals have made substantial contributions and thousands of everyday folks brought in more than \$500,000 with their participation in United Way's Home Walk in November.

The collaborative represents the ideal path for corporate and business participation in the Home for Good campaign. It is, after all, good for business: Eliminating chronic and veteran homelessness will improve the business climate, save tax dollars, and create incentives for growth and expansion.

We all have a stake in reducing, rather than merely managing, the nation's largest homeless population, but few have a larger stake than the business community. From tourism to entertainment and restaurants to retail, business gets better where homelessness is sensibly and efficiently addressed.

The Home for Good Funders Collaborative offers a sound and practical way for the business community to join virtually everyone else in our region, all working to implement Home for Good together. It will also deliver a gift that is beyond value, replacing the ravages of life on the street with a home.

Jerry Neuman is an attorney with Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP. Renee White Fraser is president of Fraser Communications. They co-chair the Business Leaders Task Force on Homelessness, a joint project of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce and the United Way of Greater Los Angeles.

<http://www.labusinessjournal.com/news/2012/jan/30/business-task-force-advances-services-homeless/?page=2>