

Working with the Homeless...Past to Present

Our approach to homelessness has always focused on the idea that if we can help the individual, we can make progress on this large problem. If we can assist one person at a time, we can actually make dent in getting people off the street and into housing.

Many of you may be aware that we have had Officer Brinser working with our homeless community for several years. We were the first city in this county with the City of Pleasant Hill to forge a partnership with Contra Costa County Department of Health, Housing, and Homeless Services (CH3). This partnership has allowed us to leverage outreach workers from the CORE (Coordinated Outreach Referral and Engagement) Teams to help create connections to the homeless in an effort to link them to services and help them get into housing. This can be a challenge as housing in the Bay Area is costly and limited, but we have a robust system in place with CH3 that is connected to various service providers. In the last few years our County has made great strides to open CARE Centers, bolster the capacity of the Shelters, and streamline the ability to connect with services.

Our collaboration with the City of Pleasant Hill means that each city pays for half the cost of a homeless outreach team dedicated to working in both cities. The outreach teams – CORE Teams – focus on building trust with our homeless community. They conduct assessments, help determine individual needs, and work on addressing these needs to support people in getting into housing. Some of our homeless suffer from mental illness, addiction, disabilities, and illness; we do our part with CORE to get people services so that they can focus on getting help and housing.

We have had some great successes in getting folks assistance with medical needs, substance abuse services, and getting off the streets into housing. We do our part to maintain the ever so important human connection with people. We also do our part to enforce the law and hold people accountable when needed. Many of the lower level crimes committed by the homeless are no longer prosecuted and rather than shuttle people in and out of jail like a revolving door, we are trying to put resources into addressing the root causes and working with our counterparts in the justice and non-profit world to get people the help they need.

Since we began the partnership with CH3 and CORE other cities have also adopted some of the same practices to work on their homeless issues. Homelessness is a serious concern, not just in Martinez, but in this county and state; roughly 1/5 of the nation's homeless people are in California.

Our work with CH3 has also blossomed into additional partnerships to include working with the Bay Church in Concord. They built a shower trailer and prior to the pandemic, we were able to work with them to provide free weekly showers; we also assisted with a clothing exchange through our partnership with the local non-profit, Homeless Action Coalition. These efforts were done to provide a basic need to those that are vulnerable, to build trust and connections,

to help with public health and personal hygiene efforts, and to work towards getting people resources and ultimately, be on track to get housing.

This outreach also allowed us to connect with folks outside of the normal contacts in hopes of getting to know them, understand their needs, and linking them up with CORE and service providers. The collaboration expanded with the assistance of County Health deploying their mobile medical van at the weekly showers to provide medical care for homeless and those that are low-income. Loaves and Fishes as well as Passion to the Streets, two local non-profits, have also been fantastic partners by providing meals to those in need during the time the showers are operating.

We are continually looking at different ways to increase our effectiveness in collaboration with others. We plan on assigning another Community Resource Officer to assist Officer Brinser in the future. Homelessness is a challenge for all communities. It is also a challenge for those that are homeless and we are doing all we can to apply resources the best way possible to give them hope, get them help, and work with our partners to get them into housing.

While we have much more work to do, we would not be able to accomplish anything if it were not for our supportive City Council, supportive City Manager, an amazing community that is open to trying new ways of fixing complex problems, and the hard work of police department staff, city staff, along with our partners in the non-profit world and the County, especially CH3. Our Martinez/Pleasant Hill CORE Team is amazing as are all the people in the background that put in time and effort to make everything come together to serve others.