

MEMO

Date: March 18, 2016
To: ACT Delegate Assembly
From ACT Homeless Issues Local Organizing Committees
Subject: Campaign Report and Perspective

Almost four years ago both Trinity Episcopal Cathedral and St. Marks United Methodist ACT LOC's conducted listening campaigns to measure concerns and issues. Both Local Organizing Committees were surprised to find the issue of homelessness emerged as the number one concern in both congregations. While both congregations are involved in direct service to meet the basic human needs of homeless individuals, we were interested in "going up the river" to look at the causes of homelessness and what could be done to end homelessness in Sacramento.

As a result we formed a joint LOC and began the research process into the causes and potential solutions to homelessness. We conducted over 30 research meetings with agencies providing services to the homeless, business associations and public officials. Committee members looked at resources and structures for individuals and families who were homeless. We learned about reasons for homelessness, chronic homelessness, mental health issues of the homeless, and current governmental support to relieve homelessness. We especially looked for long term solutions to homelessness and programs to treat all people with dignity.

We learned that in February 2012 an investigator from the United Nations reported to the Mayor the human rights of the homeless in Sacramento were being violated. Unfortunately, the response was not to provide water and toilet facilities and a safe place to camp, but was to reiterate the city's opposition to overnight campaigning and closure of park restrooms from dusk to dawn. The Mayor did cause Sacramento Steps Forward (SSF) to be created to address emergency winter shelter after the County cut the funding for emergency shelter from its budget. Subsequently, SSF became the agency to apply for and disburse the federal funds all communities receive to address the needs and issue of the homeless (HUD funds). SSF is responsible for drafting the community's plan to "end homelessness in ten years." Having such a plan in place is a requirement to receive federal funds.

Our research revealed homelessness is a complex problem. The homeless are a multidimensional, multilayered group with different causes for their condition and different solutions required to address their needs and reintegrate them into society. Until the past few months, the service system to the homeless community lacked effective coordination and analysis of the effectiveness of providers. Each provider is in their silo and it is difficult to provide a coordinated entry into available services for a person in need. The homeless often have to knock on many different doors before they are let in to receive needed assistance.

In the process of working on the problem of homelessness, we also advocated for more affordable housing, recognizing that the goal of getting people off the streets is made much more difficult when there is an inadequate supply of housing options for those with the least resources. We met with the

Mayor and his staff, with the City Manager, with City Councilmembers and did the same thing with Sacramento County's staff and elected officials, lobbying for an extension of the ordinances related to affordable housing, which were up for renewal and under attack by those arguing that the ordinances had contributed to financial pressure on developers during the economic downturn, an argument which had little substantiation. Our constant pressure and presence at all meetings as the voice of Sacramento's faith community helped preserve these ordinances, although we were disappointed that both elected bodies approved modified ordinances that frankly, fall far short of what is needed to meet the demand in our city and county. The affordable housing ordinances that were adopted no longer require developers to include a small portion of low income housing within each of their projects; they only require developers to contribute a small per square foot fee into a fund managed by Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment to build future low income housing.

As we continued our advocacy and research, we realized that one key to changing the situation was the operation of and the political support received by Sacramento Steps Forward. A little over two years ago it appeared SSF was part of the problem not part of the solution. We could get no details of the ten year plan to end homelessness which the agency is required to draft and implement. The parts we received were not complete and operation of SSF seemed to be chiefly to be a conduit to pass available federal funds to the several providers providing services to the homeless community. While SSF talked about best practices from other communities, none were being applied in Sacramento.

Fortunately, two years ago SSF was restructured and a new Executive Director selected to run the agency. The change has been dramatic and we now see Sacramento Steps Forward as part of the solution to end homelessness in Sacramento. Indeed the new Executive Director, Ryan Loofbourrow often states his goal is to work himself out of a job.

Under his leadership SSF has implemented a number of best practices that our research had identified and seems to be improving or inventing new approaches. The list includes implementing a "housing first" strategy which now has over 90% of the homeless veterans housed and receiving needed services to remain in housed. SFF is now applying the same strategy for the chronic homeless population. They have created a common assessment tool that means the homeless only need to be interviewed once to gain entry into multiple programs.

SSF has established the Navigator program where individuals (often formerly homeless themselves) reach out to the homeless, establish relationships and as they build trust help place a homeless person into a program that can help them. The Navigators use a one on one model similar to the one we use in ACT which demonstrates that the "power is in the relationship." The Navigators have grown from 2 or 3 teams a year ago to over 15 teams now. The Navigator teams are funded from a variety sources including funds from both the city and county, Sutter and Dignity health systems, the California Endowment and other sources.

Additionally, under Loofbourrow's leadership both the City Council and the Board of Supervisors have increased funding and efforts to support SSF in the agency's plan to end homelessness in Sacramento. SSF has drafted and implemented a plan called Common Cents designed to house both veterans and the chronic homeless that is producing good results. They have set specific goals and measurable results to achieve by specific dates. They have drafted a strategic plan to end homelessness in Sacramento. Here is the introduction from the plan:

“Built For Zero

The Strategic Action Plan to End Homelessness in Sacramento

The Continuum of Care adopted its [strategic action plan to end homelessness](#) in Sacramento in May 2015. The plan sets forth a systematic, strategic approach to ending street homelessness by the **end of 2020**. Organized around the concept of **functional zero**, the plan sets forth timelines for ending homelessness for each subpopulation experiencing homelessness, and identifies changes to the system that are needed to end street homelessness for all. The name, Built for Zero, is the result of this focus on achieving functional zero for all populations experiencing homelessness.”

The following goals have been set to reach functional zero with specific population groups:

- Veterans – End of 2015
- Chronic Homeless – End 2016
- Families – End of 2020
- Transitional Age Youth – End of 2020
- 10% Reduction in Homelessness Biannually

As you can see, SSF now has a specific, rational plan in place that is already moving the needle toward ending homelessness in Sacramento. SSF’s strategic plan of over 111 pages can be found at <http://sacramentostepsforward.org/strategic-action-plan/strategic-action-plan/>. Clearly Sacramento Steps Forward is now part of the solution. However, many issues, concerns and gaps remain which must be addressed to effectively solve the problem. Here is a quick list of items needing to be addressed to bring real progress on the issue of homelessness.

- Rising rents and property values in our region
- Inadequate supply of affordable housing and a lack of funding to build more affordable units.
- Inadequate supply of emergency shelter beds for homeless individuals identified by Navigators as ready for housing.
- Anti-camping Ordinance being enforced without adequate supply of shelter beds. Where are they supposed to go?
- Lack of access to mental health services for the homeless population
- Unacceptable number of homeless deaths due to unsheltered conditions. (50 to 60 deaths each year for the past 10 years).
- American River Park Rangers writing over 4,000 anti-camping citations in the past two years while only making 10 referrals for services.
- Conditions that dehumanize and demonize struggling people dealing with housing insecurity.

Regardless of the list of issues that need to be addressed to effectively address the issue of ending homelessness in Sacramento, there are reasons for some optimism and hope of progress.

The chief cause for some optimism is the significant change in the political will in both the City Council and Board of Supervisors. The City Council has formed a new Council Member subcommittee to look for some additional solutions to our homeless crisis. They will report back to the full City Council in April with their recommendations. Members of this Council subcommittee have scheduled meetings between them and two members from the Board of Supervisors to discuss more formal collaboration between the City and County on this issue. For your information, Sacramento ACT was one of the few

community groups asked to address this subcommittee at its formation and we have been invited to attend one more session prior to the committee's report to council.

The Council Subcommittee and community leaders including Ryan Loofbourrow recently traveled to Seattle to examine how that community is addressing their homeless issues. Other trips have been made to San Francisco and other communities to help identify some innovating solutions. Clearly, our local political leadership are looking to change the current situation.

One of the prime causes for this political change is clearly the political pressure the City Council is receiving due to the Occupy Group that have been protesting at almost every City Council meeting for this past year. Other community groups, including our ACT group have also been engaged.

Indeed, our joint LOC, backed by our congregations, have served as a prophetic voice of the faith community regarding the issues of homelessness and housing. We have been visible and vocal at all major public policy junctures the past two years. We have been asking hard questions and making recommendations based on our analysis and the recommendations of the larger homeless and affordable housing advocacy community of which we are an active part. We believe our voice has made a difference