

## HOUSING HOMELESS WOMEN?



Photograph entitled "Charlene" taken by Lina Vital was graciously provided by the Carl Cherry Center for the Arts.



## HOUSING HOMELESS WOMEN?

### SUMMARY

“Tent Cities are America’s...waiting areas for affordable and accessible housing. The idea of someone living in a tent...says little about the decisions made by those who dwell within and so much more about our nation’s inability to adequately respond to those in need.”<sup>1</sup> Persistent community concern regarding the ever-increasing number and needs of local homeless women led this Monterey County Civil Grand Jury (MCCGJ) to study these women, many of whom are over age 50. Because single older homeless women are among the very vulnerable, the MCCGJ believed it was important to investigate their situations, including causes of homelessness, obstacles, and housing resources available to them. We found that loss of income (from partners or jobs) brought about evictions, resulting in women living in cars while they seek low cost housing; but this housing is so rarely available that women end up in tents, in shelters or on the street.

One of the major reasons for homelessness is lack of affordable housing for people at or below poverty levels; the current annual poverty income level for one person is \$11,880 or \$990 per month).<sup>2</sup> In Monterey County, the 2016 Fair Market Rent for an Efficiency (studio apartment) is listed at \$961.<sup>3</sup>

This report focuses first on plans for housing the homeless, housing issues and progress made in Monterey County and then discusses homeless women and what is being done to house them.

In 2011, Monterey County developed a plan to end homelessness; its first component was to create a "Housing Pipeline" committee to work on housing development. That

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<sup>1</sup> Tent Cities in America, A Pacific Coast Report, March 2010; <http://NationalHomeless.org>

<sup>2</sup> Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia, Federal Register Annual Update, 01/25/2016; <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2016/01/25>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.huduser.gov>

plan was mostly never implemented, and the committee never created. Therefore, the MCCGJ recommends that the County appoint a leader to implement the plan to end homelessness.

## **BACKGROUND**

Early in this investigation, the MCCGJ discovered that Monterey County had a plan to deal with homelessness. In December 2011, the Board of Supervisors approved this 10 year Lead Me Home<sup>4</sup> Game Plan to end homelessness in Monterey County. This plan required four years of work by a very broad coalition of Homeless Services Providers who represented county, state, and federal organizations as well as local charities, churches and housing groups using the approach of “Housing First”<sup>5</sup> model. This model’s primary focus was on helping individuals and families access and sustain permanent rental housing as quickly as possible without time limits. Studies have shown “that Housing First yields higher housing retention rates, drives significant reductions in the use of crisis services and institutions, and helps people achieve improved health and social outcomes.”<sup>6</sup> “In a study prepared by the University of New Mexico, the costs incurred were 31% less than the year prior to the Housing First adoption.”<sup>7</sup> This means that it costs less to house the homeless, rather than treat them with therapy and other services before they are deemed fit for housing. The Lead Me Home’s plan’s implementation stalled due to several factors including the recession, the loss of redevelopment funds, lack of leadership, and perhaps political will.

One of its key strategies was to create a housing pipeline through a Housing Pipeline Committee that would develop ways to increase housing for the homeless “by 75 units after five years.” The MCCGJ was not able to verify that this committee was in existence nor identify anyone on it. It is our understanding that the committee is not

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<sup>4</sup> Lead Me Home Game Plan; [http://www.mcdss.co.monterey.ca.us/reports/downloads/lead\\_me\\_home\\_01\\_13.pdf](http://www.mcdss.co.monterey.ca.us/reports/downloads/lead_me_home_01_13.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness; [http://www.endofhomelessness.org/pages/housing\\_first](http://www.endofhomelessness.org/pages/housing_first)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.usich.gov/solutions/housing/housing-first>

<sup>7</sup> University of New Mexico Institute for Social Research; <http://news.unm.edu/unm-study-reveals-cost-benefits-in-housing-the-homeless>

currently functioning, but that there is renewed interest in forming that committee. In the meantime, the five-year timeline is in its fourth year, and the population of homeless women is growing.

A recent newspaper headline read: “Housing the homeless requires political will and a lot of cash, but is it doable?”<sup>8</sup> Maybe, since the Federal Government Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) incentivizes adopting the Housing First approach, upon which the Lead Me Home Plan is based; meaning that HUD grants are available to those using the Housing First model.

## **INVESTIGATIVE METHODOLOGY**

The MCCGJ investigated the status of housing for homeless women by interviewing personnel from agencies that provide housing and shelter services, as well as County Government and department officials and a homeless woman. Several site visits were made to shelters and encampments. The MCCGJ also reviewed the following documents, reports, and articles:

- Reports from Monterey Planning Department and Monterey City Council Meetings.
- Lead Me Home Game Plan, the 2015 Homeless Point-In-Time Census<sup>9</sup>, and the 2015 Homeless Services Resource Guide.
- Homeless documents from other states, counties, cities and agencies.
- News articles from the *Monterey Herald*, *Monterey County Weekly*, *Salinas Californian*, and others from outside of Monterey County.

## **DISCUSSION**

One of Monterey County’s Lead Me Home Plan goals was to “Lead! Promote, request, allocate, dedicate, advocate for continued implementation of the plan.” As mentioned previously, the plan stalled, but there is hope. In November 2015, the Board of Supervisors approved two additional Coalition staff dedicated to implement the plan.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.montereycountyweekly.com/news/cover/housing-the-homeless-requires-political-will-and-a-lot-of/article-94a9b3d2-a450-1e-951b-9f506e7172aahtml>.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.chspmontereycounty.org/wp-content/themes/chsp/img/final-MC-2015-Census-Report.pdf>

In 2015, Health in All Policies<sup>10</sup> documents were presented to the Board of Supervisors and several county Departments, highlighting extremely high housing costs and the shortage of affordable housing throughout the county. This has forced many people to overspend, or overcrowd, live in unsafe shelters or live without shelter. In fact, emergency and transitional housing services were available to only 30% of the 2,308 homeless adults surveyed in the 2015 Monterey County Census Report.

It should be noted that Monterey County organizations including county, city and local federally funded departments, churches, charities and other private organizations continue to respond to the needs of the homeless population. The result is that most are kept alive, fed, clothed, etc.; few are housed.

#### **HOUSING IN MONTEREY COUNTY**

Monterey County has a shortage of affordable and low cost housing. Construction is not keeping up with population growth. The cost of housing is difficult for people of average income and out of reach for people with low-income. As mentioned earlier, the current annual poverty income level for one person is \$11,880 (or \$990 per month) and the 2016 Fair Market Rent for an Efficiency (studio apartment) is listed at \$961.

Landlords raise rents to a level where low income individuals are unable to pay their rents, thus causing a larger population of homeless. Additionally, few landlords accept Section 8<sup>11</sup> vouchers because the voucher amounts are less than the rental market rate.

Organizations that build affordable housing have not been able to keep up with the need since the California Redevelopment Agency ended in 2011. However, some projects were completed. Cities and other entities, including Interim, have partnered with the Housing Authority, the Community Housing Improvement Systems and Planning Association (CHISPA), Mid-Pen and others to develop, build or rehabilitate existing

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<sup>10</sup> Health in All Policies, Housing Fact Sheet; <https://htyhd.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/MCHD-Housing-Fact-Sheet-ENGLISH-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Housing subsidy paid to the landlord through a Federal program for low income, elderly, disabled or persons

homes and rental units. Many housing projects are in progress, but most of these will be for a population who have more income than the homeless. In the meantime, many local communities discourage the development of “tent cities” for their homeless populations. When there are affordable housing shortages in these communities, encampments show up. These are periodically razed by authorities when they become health hazards. Requests for port-a-potties and washing stations have been denied. Community members have voiced concerns for their neighborhoods when the homeless are nearby. The MCCGJ has been informed that local communities do not want to be the “dumping ground” for the homeless.

Cities such as Portland and Fresno have made accommodations to tent cities and storage shed habitats, but in Monterey County, these are seen as an inadequate approach. This county has about 2300 homeless. If it takes the *Lead Me Home* Plan five years to develop 75 housing units for the homeless, wouldn't even that provide some relief in the meantime?

### **OLDER, SINGLE, HOMELESS WOMEN**

According to the 2015 Point-in-Time Census, the number of homeless women has increased and is now equal to 50% of the homeless population in Monterey County. Studies, interviews and the census show that the most common causes of homelessness are loss of job, death of spouse or divorce, and medical/health problems. Many homeless women are still working but do not earn enough to afford rents in this area. 60% are over age 50. Homeless women are vulnerable not only to the elements but also to the people who prey on their vulnerabilities. If they live in a tent, on the street or in an encampment, they have no protection from those who rob, beat and rape them. If they have a dog for protection, companionship and for love, their dogs are not allowed in shelters or transitional housing.

These are three typical stories of the older homeless woman:

- Connie is 52 and worked as a server at a café full-time and was able to maintain a studio apartment, car and insurance payments and cover monthly utilities.

When the recession hit, her hours were cut in half and she couldn't secure additional hours anywhere else. The bills began to add up, the rent and car payments were paid late, and the car insurance lapsed. Eventually she lost the apartment, and moved her belongings that fit into her car. Later, her car was repossessed and she couldn't make it to work on time, so she lost her job. Eventually, friends tired of her frequent requests to sleep over and she began to sleep in the back of shopping centers and in parks. She still tries to secure employment but it seems the odds are against her.

- Maria is 66, a homemaker married for thirty years before her partner left her. She didn't want to burden her grown children who live in different states. They think Mom is doing okay. But she lost her house eight months ago and has been sleeping in the car every night since and visiting libraries in the daytime hours trying her best to blend in. She might qualify for Social Security if she knew about it, she comes from a generation that is simply uncomfortable asking for help. So she remains in the shadows, silent and afraid.<sup>12</sup>
- Jane was born on the Monterey Peninsula about 70 years ago. She now lives in a tent in a local park. She was recently diagnosed with terminal cancer. She used to live in Section 8 housing but was evicted for letting another homeless woman stay with her. She said it was against the rules. She receives Social Security income, and has enough money to rent a motel room about once a week to keep clean and warm. In the past, she had a van but had difficulty finding a place to park it overnight. She has been robbed several times, as it is difficult to secure items in a tent. She perseveres.

Resources available to homeless women include temporary shelters; however, the number of homeless women in the county is approximately 1150 and there are only about 100 temporary beds available for them. As of January 2016, the following beds,

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<sup>12</sup> Three Samples Email, Coalition of Homeless Services Providers, February 2, 2016



sleeping bags or mats or other housing units were dedicated for single homeless women in Monterey County:

| <b>Name of Shelter Facility</b>                 | <b>Beds/Units</b> |
|---|-------------------|
| Dorothy's Place, Women Alive Emergency Shelter  | 16                |
| Dorothy's Place, House of Peace                 | 12                |
| Franciscan Workers Jefferson House              | 12                |
| I-Help Outreach Plus Unlimited, Marina/Monterey | 14                |
| Shelter Outreach Plus, WOMEN IN TRANSITION      | 12                |
| Shelter Outreach Plus, Salinas/Seaside          | 16                |
| Veteran's Transition Center                     | 6                 |
| YWCA  | <u>15</u>         |
| <b>Total</b>                                    | <b>103</b>        |

When homeless women cannot find beds, they resort to living in their cars, in encampments, in abandoned buildings or on the street. Some women will be eligible to use motel/hotel vouchers for a limited time. There are other places that have beds which are open to any homeless adult, but the MCCGJ was informed that homeless women are uncomfortable or fearful of shelters with homeless men.

For women who live in their cars, a safe overnight parking program has been created. In September 2014, a Safe Parking Pilot Program called ONE STARFISH began at several church parking lots. The program allowed women to stay in their cars overnight. The women received access to toilet facilities, night-time lighting, and security. They also had access to case management services for health, jobs, legal and social service issues. After finishing its pilot year, it is now being administered by Pass the Word Ministry.

But citizen complaints arose regarding homeless encampment people using the toilet facilities at the Monterey United Methodist Church parking lot. The city of Monterey then declined in January 2016 to approve a permit for overnight parking at the Methodist Church. However, they did approve an ordinance to allow overnight parking in a city parking lot, under the One Starfish Program. It allows six homeless women to sleep there overnight in their cars. The ordinance will expire on October 1, 2016.

Other housing resources are also available:

- The Community Foundation for Monterey County approved allocating \$90,000 to the Housing Resource Center to “provide permanent housing for five women, 80 nights of emergency temporary housing and screening of 100 women.”<sup>13</sup> They also approved additional monies for Interim, Inc., Outreach Unlimited, Pass the Word Ministries and Shelter Outreach Plus to provide housing/shelter for women.
- Housing Authority units and Section 8 vouchers are occasionally available. There is a wait list for these.
- For all homeless persons who contact organizations for help, a new assessment system, which rates their vulnerabilities is in progress in Monterey County. This system could assist in placing vulnerable women in housing sooner than the previous practice of “wait-listing.” The system is called Coordinated Entry and assures compliance with HUD mandates.

Some obstacles that are preventing housing for homeless women include unwillingness of ordinary citizens to become involved, frightened citizens who fear the homeless, political will to solve the problem, and cities within Monterey County unwilling to provide temporary housing solutions while permanent housing is being built.

As the older homeless women in Monterey County await housing, so many live in tents and in unsheltered conditions. They are less limber, less healthy, and less prepared to manage safe survival during the nights and inclement days. Monterey County should

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.cfmco.org.fhw>

be able to respond promptly and adequately to the housing needs of older homeless women.

**In Memory of  
Dolores Jean Temple (DJ)  
Born October 10, 1944  
Died April 28, 2016**

## **FINDINGS**

- F1.** Monterey County's Lead Me Home Plan has stalled due to factors including the recession, loss of redevelopment funds, lack of identified leadership and political will.
- F2.** The creation of Housing Pipeline Committee, the first and primary step of the Lead Me Home Plan, did not occur.
- F3.** Faith-based and non-profit organizations are providing funding and services to house homeless women, but it is insufficient.
- F4.** Funding is provided by Monterey County and cities to build low cost housing most of which is unaffordable for homeless women.
- F5.** There are insufficient resources to house the homeless, evidenced by the increasing number of encampments and people living in the street.
- F6.** The cities of Monterey, Salinas and Marina and Monterey County have identified property owned by them that could be used for low cost and transitional housing, but it is currently not being utilized.
- F7.** Safe overnight parking for homeless women is scarce in Monterey County.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- R1.** Monterey County Board of Supervisors shall appoint a leader to implement the Lead Me Home Plan by June 2017.
- R2.** The appointed leader of the Lead Me Home Plan shall reactivate the Housing Pipeline Committee by June 2017.
- R3.** Faith based and non-profits should focus more funds toward *housing* the homeless. This would reduce the need for other ancillary services, saving money.
- R4.** Monterey County and cities within it, shall include more very low cost housing in their action and development plans, beginning with their 2017 plans.
- R5.** Monterey County and cities within it shall cooperate with non-profits on proposals for alternative temporary shelters for the homeless.

- R6.** Monterey County and cities within it shall identify which of their owned property could be utilized for very low cost and transitional housing by June 2017.
- R7.** Monterey County and cities within it shall increase permits for safe overnight parking for homeless women living in their vehicles by June 2017.

## **REQUEST FOR RESPONSES**

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

Monterey County Board of Supervisors:

F1 and R1; F2 and R2; F4 and R4; F5 and R5; F6 and R6, F7 and R7.

Cities of Salinas, Monterey and Marina:

F4 and R4; F5 and R5; F6 and R6; F7 and R7

### **Invited responses:**

Non-profits and faith-based organizations, such as Fund for Homeless Women, Dorothy's Place and Salvation Army:

F3 and R3.

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| Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury. |
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## WEBSITES REFERENCED

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