

VENTURA COUNTY RAIN PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

With heavy winter rains predicted for Southern California, Ventura County needed to take steps to relocate the homeless who camped in the river bottoms of the Ventura and Santa Clara Rivers. Thus was formed the River-dwellers Aid Intercity Network (RAIN). A temporary shelter was opened at the former Camarillo State Hospital for those evicted by Ventura and Oxnard police from their camps. It quickly became apparent there was a need for the shelter to be available to any homeless person who needed a warm, safe place to stay between November 4 and March 31.

INQUIRY

We made a visit to the shelter and toured the facility. We interviewed the director of RAIN and its program manager on site.

FINDINGS

About 135 single people and 25 of their pets are staying at the shelter. The pets are housed in outside kennels and cared for by their owners.

In the family wing, there are about 100 people, 60 of them children as young as 1 month old.

The Ventura County Board of Supervisors and the Cities of Ventura and Oxnard funded the shelter with \$200,000 through March 31; another \$120,000 extended it to June 1 for families and working homeless only.

The RAIN project is trying to find homes and jobs for those in the shelter program with varying degrees of success.

No one knows what will happen to the families when they leave the shelter. There is a need for year round shelter and transitional housing.

RAIN also provides a cold weather shelter for men and women who do not wish to participate in the daily program and remain on site. There is a bus which picks them up in the late afternoon in Ventura and Oxnard and brings them back there in the morning.

Food comes from Food Share and other donations. Cooking and cleaning are done by the residents.

Donated clothes are available.

Inhabitants must be sober.

Children attend school in the Pleasant Valley School District.

There is medical care available as well as on-site counseling and job training. A volunteer cosmetologist visits once a week. Alcoholics Anonymous also meets there.

Volunteers help in all capacities.

Next winter, the county will not operate a homeless shelter. Each city will be responsible for their own program.

CONCLUSIONS

Homelessness is a problem that exists throughout Ventura County. Through the extraordinary efforts of nonprofit and public agencies, civic leaders, public and private funders and community volunteers, the county has established some outstanding programs and services to assist homeless people. While the current network of services provides an impressive array of services, there are still hundreds of homeless individuals on our streets and hundreds of families at risk of homelessness. It has become clear that efforts to remedy homelessness cannot be fully effective if they are isolated from the broader community-based strategy designed to address the problems of extreme poverty, substance abuse, mental illness and the inadequate supply of affordable housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish an integrated, effective and coordinated plan that addresses housing, support services, transportation, health services and employment opportunities to prevent and reduce homelessness in Ventura County.
- Establish an integrated continuum of care system to replace current homeless services which are delivered through a loosely linked network of agencies.
- Establish a coordinated information system for housing, health care, employment and support services for homeless persons, providers and the public; establish a common intake form and centralized intake system for emergency, transitional and permanent housing to provide integrated care.
- Provide accessibility to, and increase mental health and primary health care sites; develop a mobile medical/dental team; establish multi-service centers within each city.
- Develop a plan to provide year-round emergency shelters and increase transitional housing opportunities.
- Develop a plan to provide permanent housing opportunities for very low income individuals and families; identify financing sources.
- Increase and integrate job training and employment programs for homeless persons.
- The County should continue to be involved in temporary, transitional and affordable housing.

RESPONSE REQUIRED

Board of Supervisors