

1999 - 2000
Ventura County Grand Jury Report
Rain Project

Rain Project

Background

In operation since 1997, the RAIN (River-dwellers Aid Intercity Network) project has sought to meet the expanding needs of the homeless in Ventura County. The members of the Grand Jury twice visited the facility on Willis Road in Camarillo. The facility and its varied services initially sought to provide care and prevent loss of life for river dwellers and their companion animals during inclement weather preceding the predicted "El Nino" season. The program now serves individuals as well as families and provides care for their animals at the county's nearby shelter.

Clients are referred from the County's Human Services Agency and thus are screened for the protection of all residents and staff. Most clients come as referrals from the Cal-Works program and priority is given to Ventura County residents in deference to the funding the individual cities provide. Those staying in the facility are subjected to random drug and alcohol screenings and are asked to leave if they should fail. Those who fail are referred to an appropriate rehabilitation facility.

Findings

- F-1. Children generally make up more than half of the total homeless population at the Willis Road facility at any given time. An early spring visit by the Jury disclosed 61 residents, which included 38 minor children.
- F-2. Several hundred people are on the waiting list at any given time.
- F-3. Residents of the City of Oxnard receive the highest priority since Oxnard provides more funds than any of the other cities in the county.
- F-4. In addition to the individual cities' contributions, funds to operate the shelter come from private donations and federal grants (HUD) which are renewable every three years.
- F-5. The staff, currently numbering eighteen, are classified as county employees and receive regular employee benefits. Some staff members are former residents.
- F-6. The staff covers shifts around the clock and social workers are located on the premises to provide professional services and access to county resources.
- F-7. Current staff has leveraged its sparse resources to provide such services as transportation to medical/dental appointments, jobs, job training, childcare, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, educational assistance and on-site counseling and medical services.

- F-8. A limited supply of non-perishable food from various charitable organizations, including the Ventura County Food Share, is available to residents.
- F-9. Present accommodations lack a kitchen and adequate bathroom, heating and storage facilities.
- F-10. A site for an improved facility has been obtained on Lewis Road in the Camarillo area.
- F-11. The planned new quarters will have space for up to 115 people including any animal companions.
- F-12. County Counsel is presently preparing an application to the Federal Government to establish tax-exempt status for the organization in order to facilitate private donations.
- F-13. A Board of Directors is being recruited.
- F-14. Currently, the Board of Supervisors has oversight responsibilities for the project.

Conclusions

- C-1. The building and grounds are quite spartan but appear to meet the basic needs for food and shelter.
- C-2. The RAIN Project is an effective and efficient provider of fundamental and comprehensive services to a small sector of the county's homeless population.
- C-3. The project is able to leverage benefits from the public & private sectors.
- C-4. The management team has engaged in proactive thinking and planning, to cope with the changing demands and resources of the program.
- C-5. Management and staff are capable and caring members of the county's workforce.
- C-6. Because of the RAIN project's proximity to California State University, Channel Islands and Casa Pacifica, significant expansion of services is possible in several areas including: public transportation, education, behavioral health treatment, and access to a local labor pool for increased activities such as food services.

Recommendations

- R-1. A long-term, comprehensive funding strategy should be drafted to ensure the continuation of the program, including its capital and operational needs.
- R-2. The County Board of Supervisors should continue its support of the program and not initiate any change in oversight responsibilities until after the move to new quarters in 2002.

- R-3. The current management team should recruit a strong and capable Board of Directors that will enable the program to grow within a stable financial environment.
- R-4. The current management team should investigate use of low-income housing offset funds (those funds builders pay to compensate for lack of low-income units under development) to expand services to this population.

Response required

Ventura County CEO

RAIN Project, Cathy Jenks, Director