



DO YOU BELIEVE WE CAN END HOMELESSNESS?

by Peggy Benedum

with permission by Monica Martinez

Jim Young (also known as Willie) and I attended the Smart Solutions to Homelessness Summit on December 1st. This Summit was attended by almost 250 community members who came to learn more about homelessness, discuss its impacts, hear about innovative solutions taking form in other communities and establishing a plan for greater community engagement and action.

We learned many things that day, things that we will be sharing with you over time. But I wanted to start by sharing the presentation given by Monica Martinez, Executive Director of Homeless Services Center. You may have heard of the 180/180 Project. Monica's presentation does a great job of starting the "180 Degree Turn"



Monica started by admitting that her critics think ending homelessness is an impossible vision, too idealistic or crazy. But she believes it is possible for two reasons:

1. Ending homelessness is more than just a lofty goal. It is actually a mindset. It is a deliberate decision that every effort we make, every dollar we spend and every success we celebrate is directly geared towards actions that end homelessness.
2. Solutions exist. While it is not easy, we know what needs to be done.

Our community is good at doing things that address the day-to-day symptoms of homelessness. But we have seen that this is not enough. We need to focus on long-term change.

We have over 2900 homeless people in this county. And we have some truly fantastic programs in our community. Programs that address shelter,

food, and basic needs like coats, blankets, shoes. No one can deny the importance of these life-saving programs, but they are temporary support to catch someone who temporarily falls into homelessness.

We also dedicate a tremendous amount of emergency services to the homeless population – emergency healthcare in the ER, detox and addiction support, emergency mental health services – but alone, these are not solutions to homelessness.

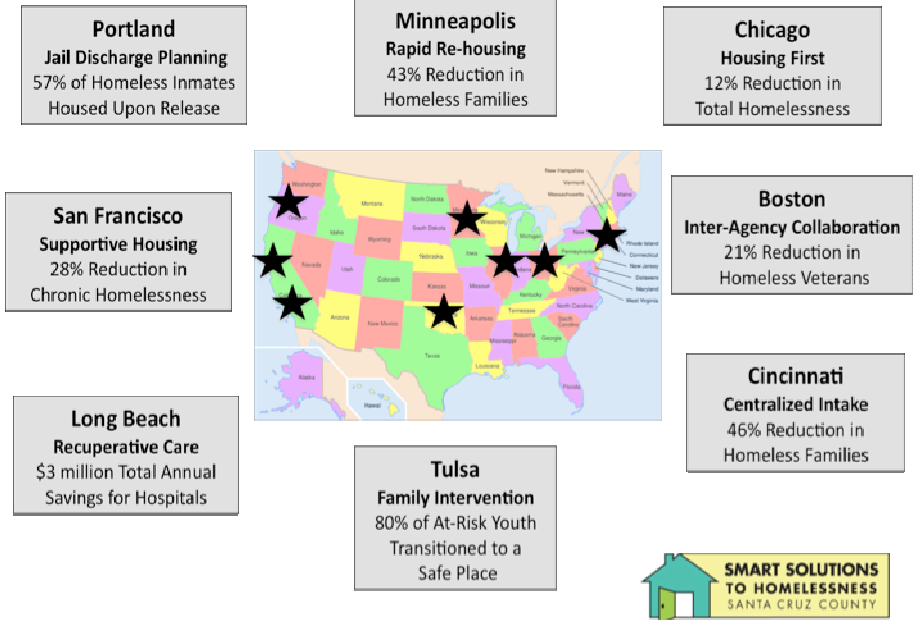
Another way of addressing the symptoms of homelessness is through the use of law enforcement. However, law enforcement (and jails and courts) address crime and public safety, they do nothing to alleviate homelessness.

And sometimes, when communities are most frustrated, they use local ordinances to address symptoms of homelessness. But these ordinances are not intended to solve homelessness.

Every one of these systems serve a very important purpose and they all must continue to exist into the foreseeable future. But unless we do something differently, this is our chosen solution. By NOT changing, we are saying that this is our system of care. This is why we need to talk about SMART SOLUTIONS.

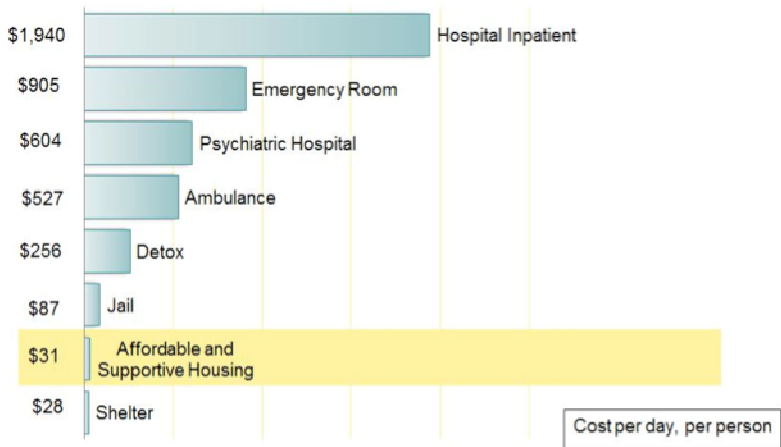
Smart Solutions are evidence based. Communities are being successful reducing their homeless population. We don't need to make things up, or be a pilot community. We just need to do what works.

Smart Solutions are Evidence-Based



Smart Solutions are cost effective

Smart Solutions Are Cost Effective



Finally, Smart Solutions are measurable. If we are serious about the impact of smart solutions, then we need to be bold enough to measure the results of our investments, and ensuring that these efforts actually help us to get closer to our goal of ending homelessness. And if something has the reverse effect, we need to be prepared to modify our approach, and keep measuring.

Jim and I came away from this Summit feeling more informed about our community's shift to a housing-first response to homelessness and empowered by the "Smart Solution" that Community Covenant has launched: Wings. We look forward to continuing to share with you other ways that we can all work together to end homelessness in Santa Cruz County. I believe!