



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

3433 South Higuera Street, P.O. Box 8119, San Luis Obispo, CA 93403-8119

Date: June 24, 2010
To: Honorable Board of Supervisors, County of San Luis Obispo
From: Lee Collins, Director: Department of Social Services
Subject: Response: Report of the Grand Jury

The County Department of Social Services has reviewed in depth the findings and recommendations of the Grand Jury contained in its Report on "Homelessness in San Luis Obispo County," and offers this response pursuant to the provisions of Penal Code Section 933 *et seq.*

Findings

Finding 7: No single county official or agency is charged with overall responsibility for assisting the homeless.

Response: DSS agrees with this finding.

Finding 8: The County Departments of Social Services, Mental Health Services and Drug and Alcohol Services assist homeless persons who are eligible for their programs, but simply being homeless does not qualify an individual for any particular service.

Response: DSS disagrees partially with this finding. The CalWORKS program offers a special assistance benefit for otherwise eligible families who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless. DSS is unable to confirm the Finding as it relates to Mental Health Services or Drug and Alcohol Services.

Finding 9: The extent to which the key county agencies (DSS, Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol) integrate services to the homeless is uncertain. Agency leaders offer differing assessments.

Response: DSS agrees in part with this finding. Homeless services that cross departmental and program lines are not effectively integrated. However DSS is unable either to agree or to disagree with the second element of this finding, in that it has not been informed of the assessments of other agency leaders.

Finding 10: Some homeless persons who are afflicted with drug and alcohol problems or (are) mentally ill are not well served.

Response: DSS agrees with this finding.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The county and all the county's incorporated cities should "adopt" and begin to implement the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented by DSS on the basis that DSS cannot adopt the Plan on behalf of the County's Board of Supervisors. Upon adoption by the County, however, DSS will participate actively in its implementation.

Recommendation 3: A full-time (*Homeless*) Services Coordinator (a senior official who is more than the currently contemplated HSOC "Executive Director") should oversee the implementation of the ten year plan. This person should be supplied with a staff, including a grant writer.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented by DSS on the basis that DSS cannot establish positions without authorization of the Board of Supervisors. Should the Board of Supervisors or other jurisdiction establish such a position, DSS will coordinate closely with the appointed individual to ensure effective implementation of strategies intended to eradicate homelessness.

Recommendation 4: The Homeless Services Coordinator should monitor funds directed towards helping the homeless and make recommendations and offer guidance to all involved agencies and groups throughout the County.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented by DSS on the basis that no current authority permits DSS to direct the activities or monitor the performance of a Homeless Services Coordinator.

Recommendation 5: The Homeless Services Campus should be built as soon as possible. The coordinator and appropriate staff from DSS, County Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol should also be stationed there. These professionals need to meet with the homeless where they eat and sleep. Each department should have one or more staff assigned to the Prado Day Center on a regular basis until the campus is occupied. Appropriate arrangements should be made to address issues of client privacy and confidentiality as required by law, but such requirements should not provide a (*rationale*) for not delivering services.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented, in part. DSS already assigns a staff person to the Prado Day Center on a regular basis, as described in the Grand Jury's report. While DSS endorses the construction of the Homeless Services Campus, however, it is not within DSS's authority to fulfill that element of Recommendation 5.

Recommendation 6: The county, south county incorporated cities and appropriate non-profit groups should vigorously pursue joint efforts to build and operate a facility that provides both day services and night time shelter for homeless persons in the five cities region.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented by DSS on the basis that no current authority permits DSS to build or operate a facility in the five cities region.

Recommendation 7: Cities in south county, the county itself and The Five Cities Homeless Coalition should begin to work with local churches and service groups to provide temporary shelter until the facility is operative. ECHO in Atascadero provides an excellent model.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented by DSS on the basis that no current authority permits DSS to provide temporary shelter.

DSS's responses to these recommendations should not be interpreted as either disinterest or disagreement with the recommendations. DSS believes that the County, its constituent departments and the cities within the County should work together with non-profit agencies, with the business community and with individuals toward the eradication of homelessness within our community. DSS agrees that progress has been made, and that much more work is required.

DSS is committed to reducing poverty, to providing supportive services to individuals and families and will continue to dedicate its staff and resources to support our community's efforts to reducing poverty, to eliminating homelessness and to creating a community that, in the words of DSS's Vision Statement, is "a responsible and caring community: Safe, Resilient and Healthy."