

Tent Cities in America

A Pacific Coast Report

March, 2010



A Report From
National Coalition for the Homeless
www.nationalhomeless.org

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The National Coalition for the Homeless

The National Coalition for the Homeless, founded in 1982, works to bring about social change necessary to prevent and end homelessness and to protect the rights of people experiencing homelessness. NCH achieves this by engaging our membership in policy advocacy, capacity building, and sharing solutions to homelessness with the greater community. NCH is a national network of people who are currently or formerly homeless, activists and advocates, service providers, and others committed to ending homelessness. We are committed to creating the systemic and attitudinal changes necessary to prevent and end homelessness and working to meet the immediate needs of people who are currently experiencing homelessness.

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“Tent Cities are American’s de facto waiting room for affordable and accessible housing. The idea of someone living in a tent (or other encampment) in this country 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.”

-Neil Donovan
Executive Director
National Coalition for the Homeless



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Tent Cities in America *A Pacific Coast Report*

Introduction

The journalist Lisa Ling presented a special report for the Oprah Winfrey Show in March of 2009 focusing on Sacramento's tent city along the American River, now known as Safe Ground. Concurrently, photojournalist Justin Sullivan exhibited a photo essay juxtaposing images of Hoovervilles built by homeless people during the Great Depression with contemporary shanty towns in California. Both the report and exhibit brought important media attention to the growth of tent cities in America.

Shanty towns, built by the homeless during the Great Depression, were popularly named Hooverville's, after blame for the nation's depression was placed squarely on the shoulders of President Herbert Hoover. The term tent city is used to describe a variety of temporary housing facilities that often use tents. Authorized and unauthorized tent cities, created by and for homeless individuals and families, are now found across the country.

The National Coalition for the Homeless is working to bring about social change through advocacy, education, and community organizing. This report seeks to address these three areas of social change by advocating for a dramatic increase in affordable and accessible housing, educating local communities and national leadership to the needs and conditions inherent in persistent poverty, and highlighting the variety of community organizing at work within these settlements.

Tent Cities in America, *A Pacific Coast Report* lays the groundwork for:

- Understanding the diversity and conditions under which tent cities are created
- Comparing various levels of community acceptance, regulation, and governance
- Advocating safe, legal, and effective methods and practices of encampment

This report is a living document and will be updated annually, as new settlements develop and existing encampments change. NCH will later combine this report with a more expansive profile covering the entire country. NCH chose to conduct its tent city reporting on the Pacific coast, because the region led the movement to formalize and regulate encampments.

Encampments range in structure, size and formality. Larger more formal tent cities are often named and better known, but don't represent the majority of tent city structures or residents, found with smaller populations and dimensions. This report and future national reports rely greatly on information provided from the "field". We request that readers of this report provide NCH with information about tent cities in their local communities.

This report is the first in a series of National Coalition for the Homeless publications that explore the tent city phenomenon. In future reports, NCH will profile homeless encampments nationwide and include a section on policy recommendations for local, regional and national policy and decision makers.

Comparison Chart

Camp	Location	Population	Year Est.	Stable/Mobile	Legal Status	Structures
Dignity Village	Portland, OR	60	2000	Permanent	City Ordinance	Wooden
Tent City 3	Seattle, WA	100	2000	Mobile	City Ordinance	Tents
Tent City 4	Seattle, WA	100	2006	Mobile	Local Ordinances	Tents
Nickelsville	Seattle, WA	55	2008	Mobile	Not sanctioned	Tents
Camp Quixote	Thurston County, WA	25-30	2007	Mobile	Local Ordinances	Tents
Safe Ground	Sacramento, CA	150-200	1930s-2009	Permanent	Not sanctioned	Tents
Village of Hope	Fresno, CA	66	2004	Permanent	Zoned for Camping	Wooden
Community of Hope	Fresno, CA	60	2007	Permanent	Zoned for Camping	Wooden
New Jack City & Little Tijuana	Fresno, CA	150-200	2002-2009	Permanent	Not sanctioned	Tents & Wooden
THSA	Ontario, CA	70	2007	Permanent	Temporary City Approval	Tents
River Haven Community	Ventura, CA	21	2005	Permanent	City Conditional Use Permit	U-Domes

Dignity Village, Portland Oregon

- Est. 2000 (Legally Recognized in 2001)
- Population: 60
- Location: Public Land / Urban Periphery / Permanent Site
- Regulatory Status: Leased Public Land with City Contract to Operate.
- Funding Source: The Community's Own 501 c (3) Nonprofit
- Structures: Wooden structures measuring up to 10x15 ft.

History

On December 16, 2000, a group of eight homeless men and women pitched five tents on public land and Camp Dignity, later to become Dignity Village, was born. Dignity Village's current mission statement is to create a safe, sanitary, self-governed place to live as an alternative to the over-burdened shelter system where there are about 600 beds for about 3,500 homeless people, sleeping alone in doorways and under bridges, or in the jails where the homeless are housed for urinating in public, jaywalking, and camping.

After Portland's anti-camping ban was lifted on two constitutional grounds, a group of homeless people emerged from the doorways of Portland's streets, out from under the bridges and bushes of public parks, to openly camp and protest the



Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon.

city's inhumane treatment of homeless people. From December of 2000 until September of 2001, Dignity occupied a series of otherwise unused public spaces near downtown Portland, and grew in numbers to as many as 150 people. Each move was a celebratory occasion marked by their famous shopping cart parades which increasingly became community-wide events well-covered by the media. During this early stage the group was often confronted by the police, but they did have the support of homeless activist Jack Tafari and a few local politicians. The Portland police department acknowledged the group was engaged in complicated Constitutional issues of redress of grievance and deferred the political issue to the local political authority. On September 4, 2001 Dignity was forced under threat of a police sweep to move to Sunderland Yard, a city-owned leaf-composting facility seven miles from downtown. Initially Jack Tafari and the group vehemently resisted the location on

grounds that it was too far from downtown, but eventually accepted the compromise as an acknowledgment of their legitimacy as a community. This was the community's sixth site and became the permanent site after city council and mayoral approval. Almost a decade later, Dignity Village has evolved from a tent city with minimal services to a community of wooden weather-safe structures with basic amenities and access to various services.

Community Model

“Dignity functions as a dynamic self-help environment that provides a participatory framework for supporting each other, while simultaneously encouraging individual residents to more effectively help themselves at a personal level. This occurs through involvement that builds community among the people going through the process together.”

-Dignity Village Website, www.dignityvillage.org

Dignity Village is a self-governed, self-funded community. In 2001 when city government moved Dignity Village to its permanent site the community partnered with the local non-profit *Street Roots*. Dignity Village currently has its own 501 c (3) non-profit that raises funds and pays the community's bills.

The village is limited to sixty residents under the city's lease agreement. The village has always been at full capacity since its establishment and accepts new residents on a first-come first-serve basis from a waiting list. The only requirement for entering the community is one agrees to the five basic rules and has been living on the streets or in shelters for some time. People under eighteen are not allowed, because the community refuses to run background checks on its residents on the grounds of its code of tolerance – it is required by law that they would screen for sex offenders were they to accept children and people under eighteen into the community. Couples and pets are allowed and pregnant women are permitted to stay up until their eighth month. After ninety consistent days of living at Dignity Village, residents become voting members of the community and non-profit. Members have the privilege to make decisions and serve on the village council, which makes funding, fundraising, community planning, and judicial decisions regarding violations of the community's standards of behavior.

The five standards of behavior are:

- No violence toward yourself or others
- No illegal substances or alcohol or paraphernalia on the premises or within a one-block radius
- No stealing
- Everyone contributes to the upkeep and welfare of the village and works to become a productive member of the community which includes ten hours of community service per week
- No disruptive behavior of any kind that disturbs the general peace and welfare of the village

The rules are enforced on a “one-strike-and-you’re-out basis” and all residents agree at move-in to leave voluntarily if found in violation of these rules.

There is no time-limit to any member’s stay as long as they are able to follow the community standards of behavior. However, there are no members from the original village, many have moved on to permanent and supportive housing. The community outreach coordinator of the village estimates that about one-third of the residents move on to permanent or supportive housing, one-third are unable to follow the community standards and are asked to leave, and one-third remain homeless but relocate to another area.

The village has its own twenty-four hour security, and each resident is required to serve two shifts a week. The security enforces the five standards of behavior, looks out for trespassers, and is also responsible for checking in on the sick and disabled residents. All residents must check-in and out when coming and leaving. This allows the security desk to take messages or connect callers with residents and also serves as a count in the case of an emergency.

The Village raises money through support from local non-profits, civic organizations, local businesses, individuals, and student groups. The village also raises funds through its own micro-enterprises including its on-site yard sale (from surplus donations), a hot dog cart that is

taken out to local events, recycling of scrap metals, and the sale of firewood (from surplus donations). In the current recession, funds have been cut short, leading the community to recently vote that each member be required to contribute twenty dollars every month to the general fund.

Location and Site Features

Dignity Village is located on city-owned land seven miles from downtown Portland and is surrounded by a metal fence that creates a clear boundary. There is no residential neighborhood nearby and therefore not in my backyard arguments (NIMBYISM) have never been an issue. It is adjacent to a state correctional facility and half mile from the Portland International Airport. There is nearby public bus transportation, however, the site is largely isolated making it difficult to access jobs and other social services located downtown. The isolation is considered by the homeless residents as the primary drawback of the community.

The village is comprised of fifty wooden structures which house sixty residents. Housing in the Dignity Village community previously consisted of tents, hogans, teepees, light wooden shacks, or more substantial structures built using principles of eco-friendly green construction such as hay walls and recycled wood. As of 2009, all fifty individual/family structures at



Dignity Village's garden, which grows a variety of plants. Designing and painting the raised garden beds was a collaborative community

Dignity Village are code-compliant 10'x10' houses made of recycled materials. The structures are built upon asphalt which keeps the area dry in the wet season, but residents complained that it requires them to garden in planter boxes and build decks instead of using yards.

Other site features include one hot shower, four Port-O-Lets, a TV room, phones for use, computer and internet access, a heated common area with a library, and a space for social

events. The village is already meeting or exceeding health and sanitation requirements for temporary emergency relief encampments sponsored by the Red Cross or Mercy Corps. The site is wired with electricity that is made available in the common areas only, although some residents have personal generators. There is a cooking area with a sink, refrigeration, grills, and stove-tops where donated food is also made available (no groups come to feed the homeless on-site). The village is currently looking to acquire a washer and dryer, but currently residents have to take a bus to the laundromat.

Non-Profit & Government Services

Several college, community, and church groups visit the village to provide services and donations to the Village, e.g., painting, cleaning, gardening, cutting wood, building planter boxes, and moving garage sale items. Most recently, University of Oregon architecture students did a studio workshop in Dignity Village on building affordable structures out of reused materials. *Outside In* provides health and behavioral services on a bi-weekly basis with their medical van. Local doctors and veterinarians make visits upon request.

The city government has allowed Dignity to hook up to the sewer system and provides trash removal, recycling, and electricity at a standard fee. The local government provides no funding for the village.

Regulatory Status

Dignity Village is designated by the Portland City Council as a transitional housing campground, and falls under specific State building codes governing campgrounds. This provides a necessary legal zoning status as lack of building codes has shut down many other tent cities in other areas. The city's contract with Dignity Village will be reviewed in 2010.

Current Issues

The community has many plans in the pipeline to further develop their community. Since its inception, Dignity Village has always considered itself a part of the green movement and is hoping to further its model and reputation not simply as a homeless community, but as an eco-village. They hope to expand their organic farming, build a compost toilet, and find new

ways to reduce their ecological footprint. Other planned improvements include the renovations of twenty houses with insulation, sheet rock, waterproof paint and another community building designed to host workshops from outside non-profits. While the community is thankful to have government support and a permanent site, they would still prefer a location closer to downtown, integrated within an actual community (although with clear boundaries and separation for safety and security), and owned by the non-profit rather than leased by the government.

Lessons Learned

Unlike other homeless encampments that are sponsored by local governments or outside non-profits, Dignity Village's model of complete self-governance and funding gives the homeless a unique sense of autonomy and ownership of their community. Having a permanent site (unlike other Pacific Northwest homeless encampments, which move to different churches every ninety days) furthers this sense of ownership and allows the homeless to make both tangible physical and social improvements to their community in a way that is not possible in a mobile community. Many of the homeless describe the village as a "stepping stone" to a better situation and the stability offered by the permanent nature of the village, which allows people to keep and store their items in one place, improve their residence and public assets, and be a part of a community that defines itself not simply as one of homeless people, but an eco-village and intentional community founded on socialistic and communal beliefs. All of this contribute to Dignity's mission and sets it apart from the other encampments.

Portland, Oregon is a hub for homeless people in the Pacific Northwest, partially due to its progressive culture and extensive homeless services. However, Portland has an overburdened shelter system – a common complaint among those living in homeless encampments across the country. Many homeless have to wait in lines for shelter starting in the early afternoon to get a bed for the evening, which makes the ability to move-on, look for work, and be a productive member of society nearly impossible. Villagers see their model not only as a viable alternative to an overburdened shelter system, but as one with significant benefits that offer their residents the stability, autonomy, and a platform for a better life. The density, publicness, and tangibility of the village attracts non-profits, students, and service groups in a

way to support homeless people that is unique to other homeless outreach work found in cities with dispersed homeless populations or with traditional shelter systems. While Dignity Village is no longer classified as a tent city, or even a homeless encampment, it is particularly relevant to this report as an evolutionary development that sprang from such a community ten years ago. The community consciously sees itself as a national and even international model; advocates and government officials from across the nation and world have visited to learn about the community. Dignity Village has a sophisticated website with links, resources, and an interactive DVD for advocates seeking to establish similar communities in their own municipality. However, the success of Dignity Village stands in contrast to many settlements across the nation. This demonstrates the importance of a progressive and supportive outside community of politicians, advocates, and most importantly local community members.

Contact: info@dignityvillage.org
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9401 NE Sunderland Ave.
Portland, Oregon 97211

Additional Resources: www.dignityvillage.org



Dignity Village's website states that it has now developed out of the "tent city" mode and has become a true Village.

Tent City 3 and Tent City 4, Seattle Metropolitan Area

Tent City 3

- Est. 2000
- Population: 100
- Location: Church Land / Urban Center / Mobile: 90 days
- Regulatory Status: City Ordinance / Consent Decree
- Funding Source: Seattle Housing and Resource Effort (SHARE) & Womens Housing Equality and Enhancement League (WHEEL)
- Structures: Tents raised on palates

Tent City 4

- Est. 2006
- Population: 100
- Location: Church Land / Urban Periphery / Mobile: 90 days
- Regulatory Status: Local Ordinance
- Funding Source: Seattle Housing and Resource Effort (SHARE) & Women's Housing Equality and Enhancement League (WHEEL)
- Structures: Tents raised on palates

History

Tent City 3 (TC3) and Tent City 4 (TC4) both had developments of punctuated equilibrium – a process of protest, negotiation, a series of trials and errors, and finally the church network encampment model that has been replicated in other localities across the country. The current mission statement of TC 3 & TC 4 is to provide a safe place for homeless people to spend the night and keep their belongings; to give a homeless person the privacy and dignity of their own residence (a tent); to develop a sense of community for homeless people who are isolated and alone, and to empower homeless people by being responsible for their own community.

In 1990, twenty-five homeless set-up camp outside of the King Dome. There had always been groups of homeless camping together in and around Seattle, but the encampment at the King Dome was an organized movement with a strong advocate in Scott Marrow, a Catholic Worker. As the encampment grew, the city began negotiating to find a more permanent site for the wet winter. The homeless campers were given an empty bus garage for the winter, but were forced to leave in April. Since that initial process, the idea of a permanent campsite became a goal of this non-profit.

The current encampment of TC3 can be traced more immediately to 2000, when an organized

encampment moved to over twenty-seven locations in two years throughout the city of Seattle. Its longest stay was at El Centro de La Raza, a Beacon Hill Community Center, for six months, which resulted in a court challenge between the organization and the city. The result was a consent decree approved by the City attorney, City Council, and State Superior Court. Since then the encampment has moved every ninety days to various church and some private properties across Seattle and its suburbs.



Tent City 3, located on the University of Washington's campus in Seattle, WA.

TC4 traces its beginnings to the first large homeless encampment that grew on the East Side of Lake Washington in the town of Bothel. At the time there were no ordinances for homeless camps in the suburban communities of Seattle. After facing threats from the town government, St. Brendan's invited the encampment and claimed protection under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA). RLUIPA is a federal statute that was passed in 2000 to provide stronger protection for religious freedom in the land-use and prison contexts. RLUIPA has since been asserted in dozens of lawsuits, prompting widespread media coverage and scholarly attention. After spending ninety days at St. Brendan's in Bothel, the tent city moved to Woodinville. Many towns began passing ordinances to set limits and regulations, and to formalize the permitting of the encampments in order to prevent tent cities from emerging. These ordinances were based upon the regulations on the housing for migrant workers. Advocates argued these regulations were unconstitutional. Seattle Housing and Resource Effort (SHARE) and Women's Housing Equality and Enhancement League (WHEEL), now the two sponsors of TC3 and TC4, then threatened to legally challenge the ordinances on the same grounds as used for TC3 along with RLUIPA. At this point towns moved into negotiations that would be the least restrictive means of insuring the health and safety of the tent city residents and the local neighbors. The towns that now frequently host TC4 tent cities all have similar ordinances and permitting requirements.

Community Model

Tent City 3 & 4 are both self-governed communities with financial and logistical support and sponsorship by Seattle Housing and Resource Efforts (SHARE) and Women's Housing, Equality, and Enhancement League (WHEEL). The consent decree that protects TC3 is between the non-profit, the city of Seattle, and El Centro De La Raza, but is based on the legal rights of churches to protect homeless people. These agreements and the close partnership between the non-profit, local government, and the faith-based community formed the church network model under which the communities operate.

Under this model, the communities are hosted by a different congregation about every ninety days. The tent cities are limited to one hundred persons by Seattle's consent decree and local ordinances. Both encampments have been at full capacity for the most part since their establishment and accept new residents on a first-come first-serve basis. However, if someone shows up late at night looking for a place to stay, the tent city will offer them a bed for the night in their large army tent, as long as they pass the initial screening. All residents must pass a police background check for warrants and convictions of sex offenses. Residents must agree to follow the community standards of behavior which include a series of basic rules of respect, non-violence, and tolerance as well as some additional rules due to their proximity to the church and local community, such as not asking congregates for anything, loitering in the nearby community, or buying alcohol in the host city. Responsibilities of residents include serving two security shifts, attending the weekly mandatory meeting, and returning blankets for cleaning every week as mandated by the Department of Health. Residents must also complete a "community credit" every fourteen days, which can be earned, for example, by attending a church meeting or service, completing a volunteer activity in the community, or attending a public meeting with politicians and local neighbors. There are varying lengths of bans from the community for violating the rules. There is an executive committee for each tent city, re-elected at regular intervals. The tent-coordinator is the spokesperson for the community and liaison with the church group and non-profit partners. Other elected leaders take turns at the intake desk and share responsibility of orienting new members and completing warrant checks.

There is no time-limit to any member's stay as long as they are able to follow the community standards of behavior. The community has its own twenty-four hour a day security run by community members.

Location and Site Features

TC4 change location every three months (ninety days) and TC3's occupations vary from a few weeks to several months. Rotating locations is required by the local ordinances, possibly out of political backlash of NIMBYISM. However, the camp coordinator and representative from SHARE both recognized that because their model relies on church property and cooperation moving locations every ninety days makes the model more feasible. Hosting the tent city for a temporary period increases congregation participation without burning them out and becomes an event and project for the local community. One camper recognized that moving locations increases education about homelessness and demystifies some of its negative stereotypes. Moving to different churches also creates new advocates for the community and builds political support more broadly while increasing the number of volunteers. For instance, while only one church hosts each tent city at a time, many of the people who come to feed the homeless are from other congregations that have hosted the community before. Nonetheless, the homeless and the non-profits expressed the desire for a permanent location that would offer residents increased stability and reduce the financial and social costs of uprooting the community frequently.

Both encampments each have eighty to ninety tents, all raised on wood planks off the dirt, which house individuals and couples. There is one tent reserved for those who arrive without a tent, or late at night. TC3 and TC4 both have a security tent, a donations tent, a kitchen tent (long army style), and larger tents for common use. Each community has portable restrooms, hand-wash basins, and a shower (each person is allowed one a day). The communities are located either on church lawns or parking lots and are bounded by a cloth fence for safety and visual appearance.

TC 4 has also been located on church owned land that was not adjacent to the church itself. While this is allowed by the local ordinances, the camp coordinator of TC4 noted that the

residents prefer being closer to the churches, both for amenities (some churches feed the homeless indoors and allow them to use washers and dryers) and for the increased social contact with congregates who visit and volunteer. Public transportation is a critical concern, especially for TC4 located in the suburbs. The encampments are located either on the church lawn or parking lot; the residents prefer the lawn in the summer and the asphalt in the rainy winter as long as there is a good drainage system. The tent city inevitably ruins lawns in the wet season and most the times the lawns must be replaced.

Non-Profit & Government Services

Tent City 3 & 4 are both sponsored by Seattle Housing and Resource Efforts (SHARE) and Women's Housing, Equality, and Enhancement League (WHEEL). SHARE/WHEEL operates fifteen fixed site shelters and the two tent city locations. SHARE/WHEEL manages 350 indoor shelter beds in Seattle, making it the largest shelter-providing organization in the Pacific Northwest. SHARE's membership is made of those who are homeless or formerly homeless. SHARE / WHEEL pay the bills for the communities, which usually amounts to \$4,000 - \$6,000 a month for each tent-city. The largest part of those expenses are for utilities (sewage removal: \$1,800; garbage and dump fees: \$1,200) and bus tickets for the residents (\$1,100). SHARE / WHEEL receives donations for the tent cities from organizations, individuals, and



Tent City residents and volunteers.

churches – sometimes the hosting church and its congregates will make a large donation when the tent city visits and others are regular contributors. While SHARE / WHEEL receive government money and contracts for their shelters they do not specifically receive money for the tent cities. SHARE / WHEEL do use a portion of its FEMA emergency shelter grant on the tent cities.

The host church will sometimes absorb costs including the permitting, electricity, and water into their regular operating costs. The host churches often allow the campers to utilize certain facilities such as a dining room for their meals, washer/dryer, and meeting space. The host is also responsible for organizing the meal schedule, although the volunteers are comprised of individuals from many churches and outside organizations, and managing donations. Meals are fixed for the residents each evening and therefore no grills or stoves are available for cooking, although there is a microwave and a food donations pantry.

Neither Seattle nor the suburban communities provide funding directly to the tent cities and all local services are paid for by SHARE/WHEEL. However, the town of Redmond, a frequent host of TC4, recently reduced its permit cost from the standard \$1,000 to \$200 citing the community's success, but was also concerned that large permitting fees could be construed as unconstitutional.

Regulatory Status

Tent City 3 is recognized by the City of Seattle by a consent decree issued in 2002 with SHARE/WHEEL and El Centro De La Raza. The agreement gives tent city residents the right to put their one hundred person encampment nearly anywhere in the city — a large backyard, a commercial parking lot, church property, etc — so long as certain conditions are met, such as being at least twenty feet from a neighboring lot or making sure a buffer to obscure the view is at least eight feet tall. The decree was a product of a dispute in which the city threatened to fine El Centro de la Raza, a community center, for opening its land to the tent city. Attorney Ted Hunter represented SHARE / WHEEL pro-bono and the Superior Court ruled that the city had erred in not issuing a permit. The city attorney settled by signing a consent decree on behalf of the city, which was approved by the city council, and the Superior Court signed to override the land-use code to recognize the tents as not substandard housing. Tent encampments, the judge said, are used safely by the military, disaster-relief organizations when there is a need for shelter.

Current Issues

While TC 3 and TC 4 are certainly seeing a rise in the number of recent recession victims,

what seems more troubling is the increased length of stay of many of their residents who are unable to find work. The residents expressed an increased level of stress related to securing full time employment and permanent housing. The impact of these increased stressors was stated to cause residents to be more likely to remain in the tent cities than to have plans to move out. Local non-profits reported fundraising challenges continue to increase. In June, both TC3 and TC4 were planning to stop providing bus tickets for their residents, a critical component of TC4 which is located in the suburbs and whose residents need transportation to access important medical and social services. TC3 and TC4 were temporarily saved in the eleventh hour by a \$10,000 grant from United Way. SHARE/WHEEL is currently facing a \$50,000 shortfall during a time when homelessness is on the rise.

Fortunately, the critics of TC4 in the surrounding suburbs of Seattle have acquiesced. Initially there was strong opposition in the wealthier suburbs of Seattle to homeless encampments. When the first ordinance was passed in the town of Bellevue there was intense public concern. The first public meetings regarding the ordinance were filled with detractors. A group of concerned citizens even created a website and an organization to stop the encampment, claiming firstly that homeless deserve better- (although most of the reasons on their website referred to declining property values, safety concerns, fears of vandalism, and negative effects of having homeless people in their community). However, those fears have largely dissipated, rarely does someone challenge the permitting of the encampment, and the public hearings are now empty. Many of the churches that have hosted the encampment have done so more than once and their local communities are largely supportive. The police who were at first concerned of increased incidents are now proponents of the encampment and believe that it makes their jobs easier.

Lessons Learned

TC3 and TC4 both rely on strong partnerships between a non-profit sponsor, a group of churches, and the local government. In both cases, religious institutions became grounds for protection and their special legal status and respected positions in the community gave the encampments a legitimacy that was otherwise lacking.

Many people were skeptical at first of having homeless communities in wealthier suburban communities outside of downtown, but many, homeless and advocates, would claim that Tent City 4 may be the best serviced and well maintained tent city in the country. Both the ninety day rotation and the lack of incidents surrounding the community have quieted most of the detractors over time. With each new congregation the encampment has gained far more volunteers and advocates than it has opponents, and has gained proponents not just of the community, but of homeless rights and services more broadly.

A strong non-profit partner and advocate (SHARE/WHEEL) with legal support proved critical in establishing both communities. Having a sponsoring organization that also runs various homeless services adds legitimacy to the encampments as viable alternatives to the city's shelters.

Contact: Scott Marrow (SHARE/WHEEL): 206-448-7889
Peggy Hoates (Veterans for Peace): 206-399-5458, PSHotes@aol.com

Additional Resources: <http://www.sharewheel.org/Home/tent-cities>
<http://hpn.asu.edu/archives/2002-March/005701.html>
<http://www.rluipa.com/>
<http://www.northshoreucc.org/Tent%20City%204.htm>
<http://www.redmond.gov/tentcity/>

Nickelsville, Seattle, Washington

- Est. September, 2008
- Population: 55
- Location: Public Land / Urban Periphery / Vulnerable
- Regulatory Status: Not sanctioned
- Funding Source: Private Donations
- Structures: Tents raised on Wooden Palates

History

In the summer of 2008 Mayor Greg Nickels issued orders to the police, without consultation of the city council, to crack down on homeless encampments and the unsheltered. Police would move-in with little warning and dismantle encampments, often confiscating and

destroying homeless people's belongings. With inadequate shelters and two tent cities already filled to capacity, the homeless joined together and congregated in South Seattle along Highland Way and Marginal Way, near a park and ride lot. The encampment came about after months of planning, weekly organizing meetings, two rallies, a die-in, and a car wash. The site they settled on was city-owned land and is currently under Land Use Review to become a jail, located amidst a large fish distribution warehouse and other riverside industrial development. The homeless were evicted from this site on September 25, 2008 and 25 homeless people and supporters were arrested for trespassing after refusing to leave.

The encampment then moved to the adjacent park and ride lot, which is state owned, during which the governor gave the encampment a few days to find a new site. That new site was Daybreak Star, the Indian Cultural Center inside of Discovery Park. Ordered to move yet again the camp relocated to the University Christian Church.

Since October, the encampment has stayed on two other church properties, most recently Bryn Mawr United Methodist Church. The encampment stayed at each church for a period of about ninety days, similar to the tenure of Tent Cities 3 & 4. At Bryn Mawr the living conditions were significantly better than their



Nickelsville Tent City in Seattle, WA.

current location and the community's numbers reached over eighty, with about seventy tents. The town charged the church \$1,400 for a permit for the camp, but later returned the money. The church provided water and hot meals. There were no complaints by neighbors during their stay.

After ninety days at Bryn Mawr, Nickelsville moved to state land adjacent to its original location at 2nd Ave SW and West Marginal Way SW. The camp made a strategic decision in

not attempting to find another church sponsor, based on their initial and current goal to gain a permanent site with permanent wooden structures. After a month of residency and communication with the Governor there had been no threat to relocate the community. A spokesman for Gov. Chris Greoire says, “We are not going to take the position of immediately moving them out.” The Governor’s spokesperson met with residents of the homeless encampment as well as advocates for the homeless and the Church Council of Greater Seattle to see if there is some place the campers can move where they can stay long-term. The camp has since moved again to a pier, Terminal 107, regulated by the Seattle Port Authority and have been continually threatened by eviction.

Veterans for Peace, the encampment’s nonprofit sponsor, is currently looking for a permanent site with encouragement from the state. The city has changed its position from a year ago, saying that they would be willing to consider condoning a privately owned site for the encampment if it met their criteria.

Community Model

Nickellsville is an illegal homeless encampment that has attempted to follow the church-network model in the short- to mid-term, but is committed to finding a permanent site on privately-owned land to accommodate up to 1,000 homeless people. Nickellsville is also committed to creating an eco-friendly community. The encampment is sponsored by Chapter 92 of the Veterans for Peace, a 501c3 nonprofit.

There is no requirement of becoming a member except to agreeing to follow the community standards of behavior, taking two security shifts a week, attending weekly meetings, and passing a sex offender background check. The capacity is only limited by the site itself or the restrictions of the private land owner and currently has no waiting list. Residents rely on each other and have a strong sense of community. Some of the homeless would like to stay at Tent City 3 or Tent City 4, but are unable to because these tent cities are at full capacity. Others prefer the more lax environment of Nickellsville, which does not require community service. However, Nickellsville is held to the same sanitation and safety requirements by government inspection as Tent City 3 and Tent City 4, also in Seattle.

While there is no community service requirement and not as many rules, there is certainly a sense of community among the members of the community, unlike some of the larger informal communities in California. Nickelodeons, as they call themselves, write letters to the city and state government officials advocating for their rights to camp and have garnered more media attention than any of the other homeless encampments in the state.

The community has twenty-four hour security carried out by the residents. There is a donations coordinator, who is a resident responsible for logging and distributing donations equitably and a “tent master” responsible for setting up and maintaining the tents.

Nickelodeons have non-mandatory meetings nightly where they discuss the day’s business, greet new residents, share work prospects, and socialize. There are also three elected “arbitrators” who are responsible to work with campers who don’t follow the rules.



Nickelsville’s tents in Seattle, WA.

Location and Site Features

Nickelsville is currently located at Port T-107, an unused port under jurisdiction of the Seattle Port Authority. The site is not a pier, but a park with access to the Duquamish Waterway for kayakers and small boats. The camp is currently being threatened by eviction, but the Nickelodeons with their non-profit financial partner and faith-based community partners are working with the government to resolve this. Earlier this summer the camp relocated to state land under jurisdiction of the state Department of Transportation. They moved to this site in early June, and were given until after July 4 to vacate the property by the governor. The site is adjacent to the area where Nickelsville first set up camp in September, 2008. There is no clear boundary between the two sites and one can easily see where the camp was first located from the current sites. All three sites have been on unused public land with low visibility to the public and away from any residential development. Over the winter the camp was hosted by various churches, very much the same as Tent City 3 and Tent City 4.

The camp is comprised of about forty-five tents, all raised on wood planks off the dirt, which house individuals and couples. There is one tent reserved for those who arrive without a tent or late at night without the ability to set up. There is a security tent, a donations tent, a kitchen tent (long army style), and three common sun tents. The site also includes four honey-buckets, three grills for cooking, and a dumpster. At the state- and city-owned sites the camp was not tied into the water line and instead had a volunteer stop by in a truck once a day to fill up water coolers, although they do have running water at the current location. There is no wired electricity, but a generator is available in the common tent twice a day for two hours for community use.

Non-Profit & Government Services

Veterans for Peace, Chapter 92 is the 501c3 nonprofit financial partner and advocate of Nickelsville. The community runs on their own donations, and uses Veterans for Peace as its fiscal agent. While there are no hot meals provided on site by outside groups there is a food bank directly across the river that provides food on Tuesday and Thursday. The Church Council of Greater Seattle, the Duwamish Tribe, and the Lutheran Public Policy Institute of Washington State are all advocates for the community and have been a part of recent negotiations with the government.

Regulatory Status

Nickelsville has no legal protections and has been evicted from all of its locations on public land. It is presently under threat at its current site at Port T-107. As of fall of 2009, there was an indication that a moratorium of eviction would be respected for 3 months after the state's House Leader became involved in negotiations advocating for the homeless campers.

Current Issues

The Port stated Nickelsville cannot stay at Terminal 107 due to legality issues. When pressed they have pointed to an audit by the State Auditor. However, Nickelsville has now uncovered contracts for shelter between the Port and SHARE which covered the period when the audit took place. The State Auditor made no issue with these contracts (probably because the state

constitution clearly allows 'help for the poor and infirm.' Secondly, the State Auditor himself directly told the Speaker of the Washington State House of Representatives that nothing in the Audit prohibited the Port from helping Nickelsville at T-107.

Since then the Church Council of Greater Seattle, the Duwamish Tribe, the Lutheran Public Policy Institute of Washington State, Representative Sharon Nelson, the Chief of State for the Speaker of the Washington State House of Representatives and several Nickelodeons met with the Port of Seattle at the Duwamish Longhouse.

The Port was presented with two contracts, one with the Duwamish and one directly with Nickelsville's financial sponsor - Veterans for Peace Chapter 92. Both contracts have the same format, terms and conditions that were acceptable to both the Port and the State Auditor when used by SHARE and the Port from 2001 to 2005.



"In the absence of proper shelter, it is the basic right of any living being to construct a temporary one."

Lessons Learned

The Nickelsville settlement displays government opposition faced by those seeking safety in numbers in a dangerous city for homeless. In 2008 fifty homeless people died outside or through violence in the city and there had already been that many deaths in 2009 by September. The Nickelsville community is a unique space of protest and their resistance to disband through continued efforts has raised awareness of Seattle's homeless issues. This is apparent in its name, which was chosen in retaliation to Seattle's Mayor Greg Nickells homeless sweeps of 2008 which were swift, brutal, and without political consultation. In response, homeless people banded together to gain safety, publicity, and a goal of legitimacy through numbers by forming Nickelsville.

Additional Resources: <http://www.nickelsvilleseattle.org/>

Camp Quixote, Thurston County, Washington

- Est. 2007
- Population: 25-30
- Location: Church Land / Urban Periphery / Mobile: 90 Days
- Regulatory Status: Local Ordinance
- Funding Source: PANZA
- Structures: Tents and Portable Wooden Huts

History

The first encampment in Olympia, Washington began as a protest movement of homeless people and homeless advocates against criminalizing “anti-social” legislation that was passed by the city in 2007— specifically referring to the ordinance restricting people from sitting on sidewalks. A group of homeless people set up an encampment on city-owned land four miles from downtown and the situation soon became very adversarial between the homeless activists and the city. After five or six days and several threats from the city to clear the encampment, the Olympia Unitarian Universalist congregation offered the encampment



sanctuary on its front lawn, being familiar with the Seattle faith-based network of homeless encampments. What began as a protest surrounding homelessness

Camp Quixote in Thurston County, WA.

quickly became a faith community protest. The church community protested the city’s insistence of dismantling the community on the grounds that churches maintain a specific land use right that allows them to offer sanctuary to the poor (Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, or RLUIPA). Eventually, the adversarial protest turned to negotiation with Olympia and Tumwater City authorities that resulted in local permanent

ordinances condoning tent cities with specific regulations, including a ninety day limit to a settlement, forty person capacity, etc.

Community Model

Camp Quixote is a self-governed community with logistical support and sponsorship by PANZA, a Thurston County collaboration of faith communities, individuals and organizations that work with residents of South Sound tent cities to establish themselves as healthy communities while growing toward new and creative housing opportunities. The community took Tent City 3 and Tent City 4 of its northern neighbor as a model.

The community is hosted by a different congregation every ninety days. Olympia and the nearby town of Lacey are the only towns currently with ordinances allowing and regulating tent cities. In July, 2009 there were twenty-five residents at the Lacey Community Church, the first time the encampment has been located outside of Olympia proper. In its downtown location there were between thirty and forty residents. It is estimated at any given time that 2/3 of the community members are chronically homeless. There has not been a rise in numbers at Camp Quixote since the start of the recession. In Olympia, homeless families have felt the largest repercussions of the recession. However, Camp Quixote does not accept homeless families, referring them to the city's family shelter upon their arrival. The city, which is near Fort Lewis has seen a recent rise of homelessness among returning veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq. The majority of residents have some form of mental illness, and many of the couples are disabled.

Applicants to the community must pass background checks in requirement with local law to prevent sex offenders or persons with outstanding warrants from joining the camp. Interviews are held for applicants with the members of the camp who determines if they may become a probationary member. If accepted, new members are considered probationary members for thirty days to assure that they are a good fit for the camp. All residents must agree to follow the community standards of behavior.

All residents are required to attend a weekly meeting where decisions are made and problems

are worked through. A representative from PANZA, the sponsoring non-profit, attends and occasionally a member of the host church, as mediators. Residents are required to perform six hours of community service a week and cover some security shifts if there are not enough volunteers available. All of the primary rules that the residents must follow are written into the local ordinances. There is no time-limit to any members as long as they are able to follow the community standards of behavior.

There is twenty-four hour security, which is covered primarily by volunteers. When there is a shortage of volunteers, campers also cover security.

Location and Site Features

Camp Quixote changes location every three months. The same pros and cons that were recognized by advocates and homeless in Seattle were cited by the church hosts and non-profit partners in Olympia- the moves prevent NIMBYISM, increase church participation, and educate the public about homelessness in a positive way, but at the same time require increased costs and energy in gaining permits, moving the encampment, and uprooting the community. PANZA is currently seeking a permanent location that would reduce both the financial and social costs of uprooting the community so frequently and provide the benefits of building more permanent structures while offering the residents increased stability.

The camp is located either on the lawn or parking lots of the host church. Besides the tents for residents, the camp includes a security tent, a grill, a microwave, several hand-washing stations, porta-potties, and a large common tent with a kitchen, sitting area, and TV area. There is no shower available for the use of community members.

Non-Profit & Government Services

PANZA is the 501c3 non-profit sponsor. It was created out of the initial protest and is tied closely to the Unitarian Universalist Church that first hosted the camp. PANZA pays the bills for the camps and accepts donations from various organizations. The cost of the camp for PANZA, is \$17,000/year minimum, which does not include meals. The cost does include porta-potties, utilities, electric, propane for heaters of community tent and host tent, moving

costs, fencing, and other rudimentary needs. PANZA encourage residents to pay small amount for prescription and bus tickets, but will subsidize or loan when necessary.

Sometimes there is hot food provided at the camp depending on church volunteers' schedules and outside organizations. In the town of Lacey, the camp relies on groups coming to feed the homeless, since they do not have the feeding services that are available in downtown Olympia.

PANZA also connects community members with advocates who help them receive public services, health and behavioral treatments, and housing. There is discussion that this may become a requirement in the future.

Regulatory Status

Homeless camps are legally recognized and regulated by local ordinances in Olympia, Tumwater County, and Lacey. Thurston County is currently considering a similar ordinance. Camp Quixote is however recognized by the Thurston County Continuum of Care making it eligible for federal homeless dollars.

While the town of Lacey worked and passed its own ordinance it was also looking to the state Supreme Court to see how it would rule on a case brought against the town of Woodinville that prohibited a church to host the tent city. In July of 2009, all nine justices, in essence, sided with the church and ruled against the city. But a close examination of the details shows that the decision, written by Justice James M. Johnson, would have been of little use to Lacey officials because the judges dodged the question of whether federal religious freedoms were violated in the case. This came as a major disappointment because civil rights advocates and churches were looking for clear guidance on the issue. Justices had a chance to clarify whether cities can limit encampments, but sidestepped the opportunity. The justices said that Woodinville violated the state's constitution by using a temporary ban on development to block Northshore United Church of Christ's effort to set up a tent city for the homeless. City officials had refused to consider the church's land-use permit application for Tent City 4 in a largely residential area in 2006. By limiting their ruling to a technical, land-use question, the

Supreme Court sidestepped the central issue in the case: whether cities and other government jurisdictions violate the constitution when they try to regulate church decisions.

Lessons Learned

Camp Quixote's beginnings show the way in which a protest movement surrounding homelessness was quickly conjoined with a movement surrounding religious freedom that led to the successful adoption to the legal rights of campers. In the case of Lacey, it was a specific church—the Lacey Community Church—that led the political fight for a local ordinance before any encampment appeared. This is a necessary expansion to the Olympia tent city network that is still hard pressed in finding church sponsors. Camp Quixote is a unique example of congregations leading the way both in defending the rights of homeless people and offering alternatives to the shelter-system in their community. With only twenty-five residents, the camp is also an example of the ways in which churches in smaller cities can make a difference on a more intimate scale.

Similar to the tent cities of the Seattle area, most all of the initial opposition to the tent city subsided quickly after being erected and legally recognized. The director of the local housing authority was at first vehemently opposed to the encampment, but is now a strong supporter. The police were initially concerned, but now are some of the biggest supporters citing the safety provided from the community. Camping in the woods among homeless people is common in the Pacific Northwest and much of the violence committed against the homeless occurs there. Earlier this year two men were beaten to death, their bodies thrown into their tents and burned. This was committed by two other homeless men camping in the forest. In Camp Quixote there has never been an arrest or act of violence.

Because churches have the right to host the encampment there is no community approval requirement. However, the ordinances do require that the church host an informational session for the community and that the locals are made aware of the camp. Representatives from the town government, members of the host church, police officers, and members of the encampment are in attendance at the meeting. This has worked well at calming the locals who have concerns and smoothly integrating the temporary settlement into their communities.

Contact: (PANZA): Selena Kilmoyer, k.selena@gmail.com, 360-951-0326
(Lacey Community Church): Pastor Howard E. Ullery Jr: hullery@comcast.net

Additional Resources: <http://www.campquixoteoly.googlepages.com/homes>
<http://www.theolympian.com/opinion/story/923035.html>
<http://www.campquixote.org>

Safe Ground, Sacramento, California Formerly: American River Tent City

- Est. Continuous - April, 2009
- Population: 150-250
- Location: Public Land / Urban Center / Vulnerable (No Longer Exists)
- Regulatory Status: Not sanctioned
- Funding Source: None
- Structures: Tents and Tarps

History

The banks of the American and Sacramento Rivers in downtown Sacramento have long been a site for homeless encampments dating back to the Great Depression. There have been dozens of scattered campsites for decades along the rivers and in the areas close-by. Periodically law enforcement would dismantle

Safe Ground encampment in Sacramento, CA.



the settlements and take the possessions of many of the homeless people, claiming that they had the legal right to confiscate property under the city's harsh anti-camping ordinance. After a federal civil rights lawsuit was brought against the city and county of Sacramento, an unannounced, informal moratorium on enforcement of the anti-camping camping ordinances ensued. This allowed the growth of "Tent City," with hundreds of campers congregated on

one site because the city and county felt vulnerable to further costly litigation.

Eventually tents were set up on a mile-long strip stretching along the American river, but most were concentrated on five acres. The settlement was unsanctioned and grew organically. Self-governance began to occur in certain areas and people started to sort themselves out. One area agreed to no drugs and no alcohol and another was populated with meth users. The encampment peaked at around 200 tents and 250 persons in the winter of 2009 and there were weeks when new people were arriving every day, many whom had just become recently homeless due to foreclosures or job loss.

After an Oprah Winfrey special on Safe Grounds aired in March of 2009 produced by Lisa Ling, there was a media frenzy that resulted in articles and news stories in nearly every major media outlet including the NY Times, The Nation, NPR, NBC's Today Show, Good Morning America, CNN, MSNBC, The London Times, The Guardian, Le Monde, BBC, and Al Jazeera to name just a few. To the international press it represented America's public apathy and tolerance to accept third-world conditions for its poor.

The city and state had no immediate plans to deal with the encampment as of the winter of 2009, but quickly reacted after the press storm with several proposals, but settled on closing the campground and relocating the campers to winter shelters that would extend their season an additional three months to June 30, 2009. As of June 30, there was no place for an estimated 100-150 of the former campers. Mayor Kevin Johnson states he is inclined to support a city sponsored homeless encampment with proper sanitation and safety regulations and has formed a safe ground task force to make recommendations by the end of the year. In the meantime the homeless of Sacramento are vulnerable and legally unprotected under one of the harshest anti-camping laws in the U.S.

Community Model

Out of this turmoil grew the SafeGround movement, a group of homeless campers and advocates, who banded together to lobby for a permanent government sanctioned campsite. On July 3, 2009 hundreds of homeless people rallied to demand SafeGround and for the rights

of homeless people to simply exist in the city of Sacramento. Since then homeless encampments have been frequently disbanded by police.

The American River encampment had been a relatively small settlement until the unannounced moratorium on the anti-camping band took effect after the lawsuit was filed against the city, at which point it quickly grew and stabilized with 100-250 campers at any given time. The community had third-world conditions with no sanitation, garbage disposal, electricity or running water. Neighborhoods began to form within the settlement, usually ranging between six to thirty residents. Neighbors would look after each other's belongings and take turns running errands. Certain areas became self-governed with specific community



standards of behavior, such as drug and alcohol free areas, while others became areas for meth and drug users. There were some who became landlords and would rent out their tents, and there were others who became philanthropists who would own several tents and allow new arrivals to stay there for free.

Two residents of Safe Ground tent city outside their encampment.

This lawsuit, *Lehr et al vs. Sacramento*, was brought by local civil rights lawyer Mark Merin on behalf of homeless persons and several non-profit organizations. Merin, the lead plaintiff attorney, fought for compensation for belongings of homeless people that had been illegally confiscated by city and county police. The lawsuit pressed the city and county for a way out of the policies that had been criminalizing homeless people. Merin states, “With the safety net long ago shredded – public housing eliminated, community mental health facilities closed – the unemployed and evicted are joining the ranks of the homeless individuals and families

who drag their few belongings from one temporary camp to another as law enforcement moves them up and out in a perennial pursuit of a failed policy that promises no rest for the weary, no sanctuary for the homeless in Sacramento County.” Merin was recognized as “Lawyer of the Year” by the Sacramento Bar Association.

The concept of having a “SafeGround” is very meaningful and important to homeless campers. The city of Sacramento, through various laws and regulations, essentially makes it a crime to be homeless, resulting in even fewer individuals succeeding in working their way out. The city’s “camping ordinance” makes it illegal for anyone to use or store camping paraphernalia on public property, in effect making it a crime to be homeless. What SafeGround does is protect the belongings of its residents from confiscation, giving homeless people an opportunity to look for employment without fear of their belongings being taken away by police, sheriffs, park rangers, or county law enforcement officials.

This group of homeless campers and supporters have been advocating for a legally recognized, self-governed SafeGround, an outdoor community which will become a stepping stone to empowerment and a path out of homelessness. Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson has convened a “Stepping Stone” Task Force which has brought homeless people and law enforcement, business, social service and neighborhood representatives to the same table to determine how and where to create a legal outdoor community.

A survey was completed in March of 2009 that reveals both common trends confirmed by estimates in other settlements along with some unique results. Most striking was the number of those who had become recently homeless. Of the 97 people surveyed, 35% had become homeless within the year and 25% had become homeless within the last six months. While the majority of homeless people at the camp (65%) had been homeless longer than a year, the number of recent recession victims is staggering compared to the more established and formal homeless encampments where 80% - 100% of its residents could be considered chronically homeless. Other results that matched estimates at other tent cities included: 55% disabled, 75% male, and a majority of residents who would prefer to live on the streets (67%) before resorting or returning to the shelter system. Of most significance, however, is the report’s

finding that of those who said they would not go to the shelter system after tent city shut down, a majority said they would if they were put on a two to three month waiting list for permanent housing. This demonstrates the broader structural need for increased supported permanent housing. For the full survey, refer to the Appendix of this report.

Location and Site Features

The primary Sacramento encampment was located on multiple acres stretching over a mile along the American River, but most homeless people were concentrated on five acres. Sacramento is unique in that it has large tracts of unused land close to the downtown area. The homeless encampment was centrally located and one can see the state capital from the site. The site is environmentally and socially unsafe, located on top of a toxic dump with a river on one side and a railroad on the other with no fence in-between; one camper was hit and killed by a train earlier this year. There have always been and still are numerous smaller encampments across Sacramento due to the benign climate and available land. However there has not been a tent city as large as the one by the American River since the great depression.

Non-Profit and Government Services

Three Sacramento homeless service organizations – Loaves and Fishes, Francis House, and the Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee (S.H.O.C.) – have banded together with a group of homeless campers to advocate for SafeGround, a parcel of land on which homeless people could camp with proper sanitary and safety provisions. They have created a website (<http://www.safegroundsac.org>), have seats on the city’s Task Force, and are working with public interest attorneys to reach this goal. The groups also provided food and material donations to the campers and worked closely with the media over its coverage of the tent city.

Members of Safe Ground in Sacramento, CA.



The encampment was only a five-minute walk from Loaves and Fishes, the largest, privately funded provider of services for the homeless in Sacramento. It provides multiple services on one site, including a dining room, a school for homeless children, a medical clinic, mental health services, a recovery program and programs providing showers and practical necessities for homeless individuals and families. Church groups also came out to Tent City and provided material donations.

Regulatory Status

Safe Ground campground was only allowed to grow to large numbers after the lawsuit filed against the city made the police feel vulnerable to continuing raids. Sacramento's anti-camping ordinance is one of the strictest in the U.S., which condemns anyone from setting up camp, even on private property with permission for more than twenty-four hours.

Current Issues

Currently the SafeGround Initiative is working with the Mayor's Task Force to make the case for a legal campground. While the mayor is inclined to support this idea he wants to ensure proper research is done to find the best location and regulatory framework. However, there is less support from the city council and unfortunately, the public's conception of a homeless campground is largely connected with the squalid conditions of the American River site. The task force will submit a list of recommendations to the mayor on the issue and a potential list of sites for the encampment. The task force includes all stakeholders; homeless people, businesses, community leaders, etc. The central question the Mayor's task force was assigned was to make recommendations on whether a tent city makes sense for Sacramento, taking into account questions related to size, funding, staffing, and location. Current updates from SafeGround state that the Mayor's task force is now calling it "Stepping Stone," and members of Safe Ground are meeting with each member of the City Council to gain support.

The SafeGround Initiative is also exploring legal considerations arguing that a homeless Safe Ground and encampment should be permitted under California State Law SB2, which permits sitting emergency shelters, transitional housing and permanent supportive housing by right in certain zones. The law requires that cities zone for emergency needs, and if someone comes

forward and shows those needs aren't met, then citizens have a right to set up an emergency site. A political consultant, Phil Garrizo, is working on this approach and has created maps, brochures, and PowerPoint presentations for the task force of possible sites that would work within this regulation. The SafeGround Initiative is also working closely with Legal Services of Northern California to assure that the legal rights of homeless persons are protected.

Lessons Learned

The American River tent city of Sacramento served as a wake-up call to Americans and the world to America's growing number of informal homeless settlements. However, while the media attention spurred action in Sacramento there is still no clear sign of the whether the results will merely result in the further criminalization and marginalization as it currently stands or whether a SafeGround will emerge from the Mayor's efforts. So far no religious institution has stepped up to offer sanctuary to homeless campers, and even though the anti-camping ordinance seems to apply to all private property, Andrew Roskam, director of the mayor's task force, was unable to say how the city would react if in fact a church or religious property took such action. Currently, it is illegal to exist as a homeless person with any sense of permanence or safety, and while the media campaign opened up and advanced a discussion and recognition of the needs and rights of campers, no improved solution has been established.

The way in which the media portrayed the tent city also had ramifications for the public's understanding of the other settlements across the country, many of them seriously misleading. Most of the articles covering the Sacramento encampment ran off a list of four or five other camps across the US without any distinction, research, or background information. The story was understandably picked up as one of the paper's or station's "recession stories." While Sacramento's settlement had the largest number of recent homeless and recession victims (35%), few news sources mentioned that the majority of the people were chronically homeless and had been there for a number of years before the recession. Even more inaccurate was grouping the other tent cities as part of a growing phenomenon of America's economic downturn, when in fact this growth has stretched over the last decade as neoliberal economic policies and anti-homeless criminalization laws have advanced throughout American cities.

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Greg Bunker, Francis House at (916) 443-2646
Paula Lomazzi, Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee at (916) 442-2156

Additional Resources: www.safegroundsac.org
Survey, Report Appendix



The Village of Hope and the Community of Hope, Fresno, California

- Village: Est. 2004, Community: Est. 2007
- Population: Village- 66, Community-60
- Location: Private Land / Urban Center / Permanent Site
- Regulatory Status: Zoned as Campground
- Funding Source: Poverello House
- Structures: Wooden structures

History

In December 2003, a ‘Shantytown’ had developed outside the gates of Poverello House on F and Santa Clara Streets. Poverello House, the largest local homeless services provider was a magnet for homeless people, and the tent city sprouted on vacant land owned by the organization. Poverello House staff, business owners, Fresno Police, community activists and the homeless themselves realized that many illegal activities associated with this area had become a severe problem, although only a minority of community members was participating in such activity.

While City officials and Poverello House were discussing possible solutions, a group of homeless individuals held meetings and made decisions of their own – to create a supportive community. The collaboration between these two groups led to the Michael McGarvin



Village of Hope in Fresno, CA.

Jr. Village of Hope in February 2004. Fresno didn't want to fill up its jail with the whole encampment and homeless people in camp wanted to do something to keep the encampment by partnering with a non-profit. Poverello had just purchased a piece of land next to the center and the area was re-zoned by the city as a campground, which relaxed its building code requirements of having running water, weather-safe materials, fixed sanitation and other building code enforcement requirements.

As the Village of Hope developed into a more permanent community with wooden structures, encampments were still prevalent throughout Fresno. The settlements became particularly troublesome in 2006, when police raided various homeless encampments and confiscated the belongings of 350 individuals. Yet the raids did nothing to stop the growth of tent cities and led to a class action lawsuit against the city of Fresno and the State of California. A U.S. district judge ordered the defendants to pay \$2.3 million in damages in 2008. Since then the city has hesitated to crack down harshly on the encampments.

Seeking to bring more of the encampments under regulation and to provide improved sanitary and health conditions, the city turned to Poverello House to partner in creating another encampment similar to the Village of Hope. Poverello offered the land and the

city paid for improvements to the site which became the Community of Hope and opened its grounds in 2007.

Community Model

The Village of Hope and the Community of Hope are sponsored by the 501c 3 nonprofit Poverello House, the city's primary homeless service provider, and are located permanently on the nonprofit's property.

The Village of Hope was founded by a group of homeless people and is a self-governed community with specific community requirements for membership and residency. All residents are voted-in by the existing residents. This happens at the weekly meetings. There is a resident committee that prospective residents

Residents of Fresno's tent city cooking on one of the community's grills.



have to speak to about who they are and what their goals are. Prospective residents also must do an hour and a half of community service as a visitor to the village before being admitted. More than anything else, this process is designed to make sure the person applying actually wants to be a part of the village. If they're not voted in, it's usually due to their behavior on the streets, but staff encourages the residents to give everyone a chance at being a resident before passing judgment.

The Village is a unique community of individuals whose commonality is not only found in the circumstance of homelessness, but in their belief in three simple basic rules:

- Take care of yourself.
- Take care of others.
- Take care of this place.

With these basic rules of conduct, this community is self-governed and largely self-supporting with oversight provided by Poverello House staff. The Village believes that it has a role in the wider Fresno community, and part of the chores assigned to residents include clean up of surrounding businesses and other areas. The Village residents perform odd jobs and recycle cans to raise funds for their special events, including donations to nonprofit organizations. As a community they have parties and there is lots of peer encouragement.

At the Community of Hope there is no admissions requirement and everyone is accepted on a first-come first-serve basis when there is space available. Both camps are at full capacity and there is a line around the block almost daily for those seeking a place at the Community. There is no community service requirement at the Community and since it is sponsored by the city it is a non-discriminatory shelter alternative, without the shared community dynamic and self-governance aspects of the Village. There are no bans on legal substances (residents may be intoxicated), but a resident cannot be a danger to oneself or others. If someone cannot function due to substance abuse, the person is confronted. All residents must leave the camp in the morning. This is designed to relieve staff work during those hours and motivate residents. There is a curfew of 10pm during the week and midnight on weekends, and residents must be in most nights to keep their space.

There is no time-limit for members, who can stay as long as they are able to follow the community standards of behavior. However, turnover in the Community is much higher than the Village, primarily due to non-compliance. Those at the Village tend to have less substance abuse problems and are more motivated. The community has its own twenty-four security, with each resident required to serve two shifts a week.

Location and Site Features

The Village and Community of Hope are sited in a former junkyard behind a chain-link fence in downtown Fresno. The communities are clearly separated by a food warehouse, but are both adjacent to Poverello House which has a plethora of homeless resources. Being located next to Poverello House reduces overhead costs, makes the camps both convenient and

popular among the homeless, and increases the amount of staff time available to assist and advocate for their clients. The downtown location is also critical for the homeless to access public services outside of Poverello House. Both the Community and Village are comprised of small wooden structures, each contain two cots, sleeping bags and a solar-powered light for two people. Both communities have a security shed, a tools shed, and a shed for study. There is also a common area to socialize. There are porta-potties in the camps, but Poverello House includes bathrooms and showers for camper use during the day.

Non-Profit & Government Services

Poverello House is the nonprofit sponsor/partner of the community and is Fresno's largest and only full-service homeless provider. The homeless campus provides three meals a day, all year. Other services include hot showers, a washer/dryer, mail, clothing distribution, free medical and dental clinics, transportation, a resident rehab program, and an overnight shelter for women eighteen and older. Directly across the street is a shelter for single men eighteen and older. Neither of the communities have heat, showers, or electricity, but all of this is provided through the adjacent center.

Because Poverello offers these services to the entire homeless community, the only additional costs for the camps are necessary supplies and repairs, and sanitation costs for porta-potties, hand-wash basins, and trash removal. Poverello House has a contract for \$10,000 per month for normal operations paid by the city for all of its programs. The only other government money received by Poverello is HUD emergency shelter funding passed through Fresno.

Regulatory Status

When the homeless population began congregating outside of the Poverello House on unused land in 2003 it was an illegal encampment. Poverello House agreed to become a nonprofit sponsor of the homeless community and the city of Fresno agreed to rezone Poverello's property as a campsite to provide legal recognition. When the Community was established in 2007 it was also protected under the same zoning status.

Current Issues

The city of Fresno has been especially hard hit by the recession, which hosts many seasonal day laborers and construction workers. Even before the recession Fresno ranked as having one of the highest concentrations of poverty in the U.S. (Brookings Institute). Gregory Barfield, director of the city's homeless services office, is leading an ambitious initiative to increase affordable housing options for the city's homeless and has successfully housed many of the homeless people that had lived within the city's informal tent cities; Taco Flat and New Jack City. However, there is still a growing number of homeless in the city and with the recent closure of the informal tent cities a group of tents are now forming once again outside of Poverello's door. The city's goal is to eventually make the Village and Community of Hope a thing of the past by providing all of the city's homeless people with stable permanent housing and there is no discussion amongst officials of opening yet another encampment similar to the Village or Community of Hope.

Lessons Learned

The Village of Hope and Community of Hope are unique among the homeless camps featured in this report in their close proximity both in location and programmatic partnership with Poverello House. There are several obvious benefits of situating a homeless settlement adjacent and in partnership with a city's primary feeder and service provider. For the homeless, it provides easy access to a wide array of services not found at most other camps without having to take hours out of their day to obtain basic necessities as is the case with other peripheral settlements. For the service provider, it reduces the administrative overhead costs since the services are provided to the whole homeless community at the center anyway, and saves staff time and money, allowing them to prevent the travel to the campsite. Having two connected, yet programmatically different encampments, also allows the city and non-profit to provide safe temporary shelter for different populations of homeless people that have varying needs and attitudes.

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Additional Resources: www.poverellohouse.org

New Jack City and Little Tijuana, Fresno, California

- Est. Continuous - April, 2009
- Population: 150-200
- Location: Public Land / Urban Boundary / Vulnerable
- Regulatory Status: Not sanctioned
- Funding Source: None
- Structures: Tents, Tarps, Wooden Shanties

History

Along the tracks bordering Fresno's central business district existed two adjacent yet distinct homeless encampments. New Jack City as it was referred to by its residents, traces its history to earlier encampments in the city's abandoned rail yards. Although no exact dates are known, references to the settlement in local newspapers can be found dating back to 2004 and when the California Department of Transportation (Cal Trans) did a sweep of a nearby property in 2002. Little Tijuana, Little TJ, or Taco Flats, as it's commonly referred to among residents, or tent city as its referred to by city officials, organically emerged as a separate settlement on the same property of New Jack City in late Summer of 2007. The Fresno City Government had made no attempt to dismantle the community at the time. Similarly to Sacramento and Seattle, the City of Fresno and Cal Trans had lost a costly class-action lawsuit in 2008 after conducting a sweep and confiscating the possessions of homeless people, which made available \$2.35 million to 350 homeless persons. Having the homeless population concentrated near Poverello House, and its nearby camps also profiled in this report, was also a preferable alternative to the more vulnerable encampments that continue to exist along corridor 41 and within the city's parks.

Union Pacific Railroad, the company which owns the site of the camp, indicated to the city government in the fall of 2008 that it wanted to sweep the site of its homeless people to complete environmental remediation and reclaim the property which used to be used as a maintenance and storage yard. Realizing the growing magnitude of the encampments, the company was convinced to wait until the new mayor was sworn in and a housing plan was in place. The city worked with Union Pacific officials throughout the year to complete the environmental remediation without disturbing the encampments. The site was finally vacated in July, 2009, with the City of Fresno working with the Housing Authority to assist 103

people directly in finding rental apartments. Twenty-nine others have received relocation help from other service agencies. As the city continues to roll-out an ambitious housing plan, taking advantage of the county's recessionary vacancy rate, there are still a growing number of smaller encampments throughout the Fresno area.

Community Model

New Jack City and Little Tijuana were distinct communities in terms of demographics, social organization, and standards of behavior. Little Tijuana was predominantly comprised of Hispanics and poor whites. A large contingent of the Hispanics included undocumented workers, who left their homes in Latin America to find work on the Central Valley's farms and construction sites. As borders tighten and immigration raids increase, the act of signing a lease has become more risky, prompting many to forego formal housing altogether. The glut of work in construction has also had a greater effect in this area than other parts of the nation.

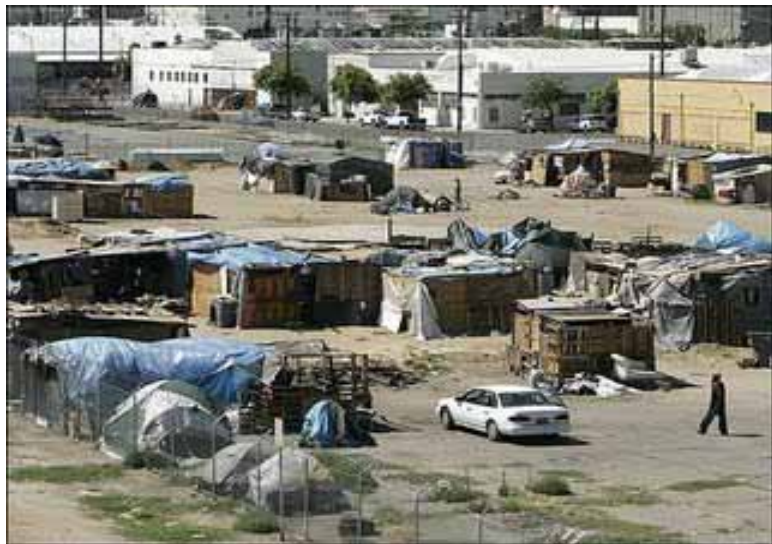
Within the community there was self-segregation with Mexicans and Hispanics occupying the core of the camp surrounded on two sides by pockets that were predominantly white. Certain areas organically developed degrees of self-governance and community cooperation. In the northeast corner of the settlement developed a group of recent homeless people who actively discouraged disruptive behavior and the use of drugs and alcohol. However, there was still a sense of shared community through the common space and eating area, referred to as the Cantina. Here communal meals were cooked and served to the entire community. There was always coffee going in the afternoons and there was drinking in the evenings. The food was primarily provided from donated sources including family and friends of the campers and the campers themselves, but did not funnel through any outside institution or formal organization of the residents. While there was no governing committee or camp leader, there was a core group of members who coordinated the food who also took an active role in organizing the community.

New Jack City did not have the same degree of community organization, but people looked after one another in a more general sense. There was no group cooking or central area for socializing. More often than in Little Tijuana, there were pockets of the community with

blood relations and others who had long relationships stretching over years from life on the streets. The community had more numerous issues with drug use and prostitution and was considered to be less safe; its name being derived from a dark drug-filled movie made in 1991. Because of this, the camp did not attract as many people who had recently become homeless as Little Tijuana did. Little Tijuana had a mayor that was looked to among the community's members to settle disputes and organize actions.

Location and Site Features

Both encampments were located just across the railroad tracks that separate Fresno's central business district from the industrial yards and lower density development. The site is located within close walking distance to Poverello House, the city's primary homeless care provider, which sponsors the Village of Hope and Community of Hope, both of which are also profiled in this report. After the homeless population had grown on the site, the railroad company which owns the land fenced in the area as it began to prepare to dismantle the camp. There was a stark distinction between the two encampments both in terms of their location and their structures. The north side of the property was inhabited by the Little Tijuana settlement, which was comprised of a number of shanties made of wood and other recycled materials, along with tent and tarp constructions. New Jack City was located on the southern part of the site underneath the freeway and was almost completely comprised of basic camping tents. Facing public outcry, the City of Fresno provided a dumpster and porta-potties only in the May of 2007. The porta-potties required a private security force to monitor them, which cost the City \$11,000/month. However, it increased efficiency and reduced costs of calling on services required in specific locations that had been problems before the security was in place.



Location site of Fresno's homeless encampments.

Non-Profit and Government Services

Because the encampments were within close walking distance to the Poverello House many of the basic services were provided by the center itself; showers, meals, case management, accessing services, etc. Donations of clothes and food were frequently dropped off at the site. Each week, local community members would provide clean drinking water to all the residents. Students from the local university came by with carloads of donated food and water. Local residents brought wood for heating and cooking, and two nearby religious charities provided meals, hot showers, and temporary beds – at the cost of some obtrusive proselytizing. During the discussions between the City and Union Pacific Company, the City of Fresno underwent a change in local government which led to a moratorium on evictions while the city worked on an enhanced housing plan.

The change in government, a new mayor, Ashley Swearengin, played a critical role in the city's ability to negotiate with Union Pacific in delaying the evictions of the homeless people and increased access to services, beyond just providing the porta-potties and dumpster. The government's largest role in relation to the settlement, however, has been in its relocation efforts discussed below.

Regulatory Status

Both encampments were located on the private property of Union Pacific Railroad without permission. Union Pacific did not take action against the settlements until an underground storage tank was discovered on the site that required environmental remediation. While the tank was able to be removed without posing a health hazard to the homeless people, Union Pacific wanted the site fenced and locked to prevent future issues as soon as possible. The city worked with Union Pacific on a timeline, which provided them the time to create a relocation strategy. There are still a number of homeless encampments, both near the Union Pacific site, but also along the tree lined beams of a major freeway, along the landscaping of highways, and in local parks. Police do not evict homeless residents unless they are located in an unsafe area (near major thoroughfares) or are disruptive.

Current Issues

Both encampments were evicted in mid-July. The new mayoral administration assigned Gregory Barfield to manage the initiative, and hired the Fresno Housing Authority to find existing units. His office also reached out to apartment landlords and property management firms. The Housing Authority has taken out leases on a number of apartments and sublets the units to the former campers. So far this has been done with \$550,000 from the city's general fund, which includes rent and case management fees. So far the Authority has leased 70 units throughout the city and housed 103 people directly. A survey was completed in April, 2009 and has been used by local nonprofits to help people relocate. Some of the campers were doubled and others moved into two-bedrooms to accommodate couples and those that had long lasting relations from the streets. In 2008 the city's strategy was largely based on the Housing First model, but since the property market has collapsed there are a number of vacancies, which the Housing Authority is trying to take advantage of first. Fresno plans to use a large amount of federal stimulus money in leasing vacant rental properties to expand its housing options, with the goal of moving all campers into permanent housing.

The city does not have an anti-camping ordinance and recognizes and fiscally supports two homeless communities of wooden sheds, sponsored by Poverello House; The Village of Hope and the Community of Hope. While there is still a great demand among the City's homeless population for another Community of Hope style encampment, as seen in the lines of people that form every day hoping to find a space at the camp, Fresno has no plans or desire to fiscally sponsor or legalize another encampment in the long- or short-term.

Lessons Learned

Little Tijuana and New Jack City, like Sacramento's American River settlement, were at the center of the media storm in March and April of 2009. Unlike Sacramento, Fresno, with its new mayor and progressive community had the political will to put forth an ambitious housing plan that activists in many cities have been organizing around in the wake of the current financial crisis, which has opened up swaths of vacancies across U.S. cities. While it seems inhumane and shameful that the unique opportunity offered by this recession to house the homeless and to reduce or at least slow their growing numbers by providing them shelter

in the massive surplus of housing has not become a common approach among municipalities. However, it is not surprising in considering the public's continued animosity to support social safety nets and public programs in a time of shrinking local budgets. Among all the cities profiled in this report, Fresno is the only city that has responded to the negative media on its tent cities directly with a program to expand traditional housing options for its campers.

Yet, even with the current plan underway, it seems highly unlikely that Fresno's campers will all be housed, and certainly not within the next year, raising the question of whether or not another temporary camping area with basic amenities could not serve the homeless people of the city as a positive alternative in the meantime, especially considering the popularity of the Community of Hope. According to Gregory Barfield, the director of Fresno's homeless initiative, this is not a good option, primarily due to a limited amount of resources, which the mayor and his team wish to use entirely on its permanent housing initiative. While Fresno does not have an anti-camping ordinance like Sacramento, which is currently considering a safe ground, other activists still advocate for such an option until all the city's homeless can be reasonably housed.

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Temporary Homeless Service Area, Ontario, California

- Est. 2007
- Population: 70
- Location: Public Land / Urban Periphery / Permanent Site
- Regulatory Status: City Council Approved
- Funding Source: City and County Governments
- Structures: Tents

History

The Temporary Homeless Services Area (THSA) was established by the City of Ontario in June 2007. The THSA was established to provide one place for Ontario homeless to congregate and receive consolidated services and also to address complaints from residents to address homeless problems. According to Brent Schultz, the City's Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Director, these problems included "homeless going through

trash, sleeping in trash enclosures, loitering in the civic center and parks, defecating and urinating in public areas and the parks, and panhandling in highways and street rights-of-way.” City officials were also concerned about the safety and vulnerability of homeless people who were sleeping in the open, and in some cases close to railroads, streets, and highway rights-of-way.

Tent city in Ontario, CA.



By January 2008, the THSA population had reached approximately 400 persons. It was later discovered that approximately 260 of this total were from other cities and some from outside the state of California. With the THSA area beyond capacity, which was

originally designed to serve approximately fifty to one hundred local chronic homeless, the city developed improvement plans for the area in an effort to ensure that Ontario’s chronic homeless population had better facilities. The two and a half acre site was improved with security gates, more lighting, bathrooms, showers, and a food distribution area, and city staff helped homeless people obtain permits and identification to stay within the area. Homeless people were required to prove some type of connection to the city of Ontario such as attendance at local schools, leasing or ownership of housing in the city, known to police or other city staff, or known to relatives from Ontario. After the restructuring and site



improvements, 127 homeless were accepted and received photo identification and ninety day permits to stay in the THSA. In a year and a half since inception of the area, a total of seventy homeless remain in the area today. According to the City’s Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Director, this reduction in the THSA population has been partly due to the combined efforts of Mercy

House, the site's primary non-profit provider, as well as local homeless service providers and the County of San Bernardino Office of Behavioral Health, all of which have worked diligently to find transitional and permanent housing for the THSA population.

Community Model

The THSA is financially managed and operated by the City of Ontario. To be admitted to the community, residents must be able to prove some connection to the city in terms of recent residency, birth, family, or former employment. The city issues photo identification cards, ninety day permits, and provides residents with tents. Permits are re-issued every ninety days if homeless are complying with rules and regulations and show some promise and desire to find a job and acquire housing. The community has no aspect of self-government or community service requirements. The city established a set of rules which residents had to agree to; no drugs, alcohol, pets, etc. There is a professional twenty-four hour security force that is paid for by the city.

Location and Site Features

A two and a half acre plot of city-owned land just southwest of Grove Avenue and State Street was chosen by the Ontario government. It was originally designed in 2007 to accommodate a camping area for 50 to 100 chronic homeless from Ontario. Of the seventy

people that remain in the THSA area today, a total of twenty people are in recreational vehicles and cars and the remaining fifty are in tents. The tents can accommodate up to four people and are provided by the



Donations coming in at the Temporary Homeless Services Area.

City. Other features in the THSA include, porta-potties, security fencing, trash bins, a food distribution area, and showers, all provided by the local government.

Non-Profit & Government Services

The site provisions and basic necessities are all provided by the local government. The startup costs and initial construction fees totaled \$100,000, which was funded by the city. Operating costs in the first year were \$400,000 and fell to \$300,000 in the second year. The camp currently costs the city approximately \$25,000 per month. Funding sources include Community Development Block Grant (CDGB), Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG), and Continuum of Care apartment rental property income.

Non-profits, advocacy groups and individuals provide services to the homeless on a daily basis in the form of food, clothes, blankets, counseling, medical services, assistance in obtaining identification and welfare benefits, job referrals, etc. The city retained the services of a non-profit homeless service provider (Mercy House) to coordinate with all advocacy groups and interested individuals to ensure appropriate service levels to homeless people. Each non-profit working in the THSA must receive a permit issued for no charge from the government. It is also required to meet certain eligibility criteria. The food providers and donations must also receive approval from the Health Department.

Regulatory Status

In June 2007 the city of Ontario decided to address the homeless population in Ontario by creating a legal space for homeless to congregate. The site was selected by the government and is owned by the city. Before the site could be used as the THSA it had to be approved by city council.

Lessons Learned

Homeless encampments are typically born out of non-profits, and faith-based activism, and problems are framed in terms of the lack of government services and inadequate shelter systems. In contrast to the typical model, the THSA was initiated by the local government to offer a safer location for its chronic homeless populations, provide efficient services, and

respond to public complaints about homeless people. The city of Ontario's innovative response and government management has a number of effects on the community, which include among others a lack of self-governance and sense of autonomy that is stressed as important by homeless residents in the other tent cities. This has led some THSA residents and former residents to perceive the camp as over-regulated and smothering.

Many of the non-profit sponsors questioned for this report expressed frustration with local government initiative and the high cost of funding. Among the causes for this high cost include the privately contracted security force (\$11,000/month), which is usually covered by the homeless themselves or local volunteers at other camps. From the encampments studied in this report, there is no indication that a privately hired security force provides any more protection or reduction in crime or incidents than security shifts assigned to residents.

The THSA had to restructure its admissions process into the first year because of the oft-touted "magnet effect," which attracted homeless throughout the region. This effect, which has not been significant at other West Coast encampments largely has to do with both local realities of the inland empire and the small size of Ontario. Cities like Seattle, Portland, Fresno, and Sacramento all have large homeless populations. The formal self-governed encampments of these cities are all at full capacity and have thousands of homeless people that remain on the streets. Ontario, by national statistics should only have a population of chronically homeless near 150. Ontario is also a unique progressive locality within the sprawling inland empire and has stronger support for non-profits helping the homeless people, affordable housing development, and other services that would attract the region's homeless population. Because of the high costs associated with the THSA, which is funded primarily by local tax payers, there was strong support to limit the services to Ontario's homeless only, who had become the minority at the camp within a year. This requirement has also allowed Mercy House, the permitted non-profit service provider, to help some of these residents into the city's permanent and supportive housing programs, which homeless from other areas may not have qualified for.

The city and county government of Ontario are leaders in this respect, and have been able to use their platform of local governance to funnel funding from state and federal sources at a much larger scale without the grant and contract process found at other camps sponsored by



A tent city resident in Ontario.

nonprofits. They are one of the only cities in Southern California which acknowledges their chronic homeless population and provide means, facilities and counseling to help them get out of homelessness. In addition to the THSA, they have provided an intake center, a 34 bed transitional facility, and a 15 unit apartment for permanent housing. The city also recently acquired an additional 30 units of apartments that can also be utilized by its homeless population.

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River Haven, Ventura, California

- Est. 2005
- Population: 21
- Location: Public Land / Urban Periphery / Long-term Temporary Site
- Regulatory Status: City Conditional Use Permit
- Funding Source: City, Private Donations, Resident Payments
- Structures: U-Domes

History

In September 2004, the city of Ventura became concerned with the large number of encampments along the Ventura River. There had been a flood a few years before, during which homeless people had been evacuated and complaints of fires and trash had been

growing. The initial solution was moving those camped along the river to the winter warming shelters. City officials and activists realized this was only a temporary solution for the winter months and began a civic engagement on the issue through a series of community forums. Over thirty homeless people who resided in the camps showed up at the forums, stating that, “we may be houseless, but we aren’t homeless.” The group of homeless people, along with community members, created an “alternatives” group to work with the city on a longer term solution outside of the shelter system, which many of the homeless people had problems with for three primary reasons: 1) no couples 2) no pets and 3) the lack of autonomy and inability to have a space of ones own. One of the members of the group discovered Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon, researched it, and began forming a plan based on its model. Turning Point Foundation, one of the city’s homeless service providers, met with thirty homeless people and presented the plan to the City Manager who approved the settlement and offered initial funding. The group rented campsites at state and private campgrounds for nine months, staying together as a community. After that period, the group went back to the city and was given temporary permission to stay on its current site. Since then the camp has gone through significant changes discussed in the following sections and is currently in a critical phase of reform in terms of its target population, mode of governance, and management structure. On October 12, 2009 the tents were replaced by U-Domes and the community became more focused on helping those who are motivated to become permanently housed with steady income.

Community Model

River Haven is a small encampment, currently comprised of twenty-one residents, with the maximum number of homeless residents capped at twenty-five by the city. From its inception River Haven has been a private-public partnership between the Turning Point Foundation, the encampment’s 501(c)3 fiscal agent, and the City of Ventura which has rezoned its land as a temporary



River Haven tent city in Ventura, CA.

campground and provided funding. Residents also make significant contributions to the camp paying \$250 a month for their U-Dome and camp services. Those who don't have an income when entering the camp are eligible to receive money from the county's general relief fund.

The camp has always been comprised of homeless people of whom about 95% would be categorized as chronically homeless. Since opening, 120 homeless people have been through the camp. Of that population, 104 individuals were white, eleven Hispanic, two black, and three Native American. Out of 104 surveyed, ten individuals were between the ages of 18-24, twenty-eight were aged 25-39, sixty-one were 40-59, and five were 60 and over.

Originally there was no discussion of a time limit or admission requirements outside of making the monthly payments. The community attempted to replicate Dignity Village's model of self-governance, but the city and Turning Point Foundation soon found that they were not able to keep the camp within city and county regulations without a stronger role played by an outside institution. According to Clyde Reynolds, executive director of Turning Point, there were two primary dynamics occurring. First, there was a predominance of individuals who came in that were not committed to changing their lifestyles. This would lead to tension with members who were interested in changing their lives and different ideas of self-governance. As a result, the community became hard to change and discouraged those who were positive about changing their lifestyles in order to stay at the camp. Secondly, rules were not being followed; and perhaps more problematically was that when rules were broken, the enforcement of consequences upon individuals conducted fairly. During the first two years under this model, there were positive outcomes: people came and went and were helped in that process, but many also struggled in the process of making it a positive space without intimidation.

Eventually Turning Point made the decision to dismantle the resident government in terms of its power of selection and enforcement of rules. The community still has a council, but it has much less authority. The change was also part of a broader strategic goal of the city and Turning Point of establishing River Haven as a transitional housing model, which will target people that are motivated to contribute positively to a community while having the capacity to

work toward employment and permanent housing. The new requirements of the camp are as follows: 1) A two year time limit to reinforce River Haven as a transitional housing model. 2) Every River Haven resident must have an honest plan to end their homelessness, which will be reviewed with case managers every ninety days. 3) The new encampment will be a clean and sober living environment, a place for people looking to recover or have at least recognized their substance addiction as a problem. 4) Those capable of working should be in training or participating in some type of part-time, full-time work. At the same time recognizing that those with disabilities and mental health issues need a different plan, through a mix of benefits and accessing services. 5) Besides ongoing rules and responsibilities, there will be a new expectation of positive contribution to the community through attending meetings, helping out in the camp, etc. With these changes Turning Point hopes that a stronger and more successful role of homeless people in the community may lead to the model of self-governance they had originally sought. In the new model, Turning Point has hired a full-time camp manager who will take care of managing the physical site and provide stronger security.

On September 15, 2009 the camp was closed for renovation and installation of six U-Dome200s for couples and thirteen U-Dome120s for singles. Working with World Shelters, the manufacturer of the U-Domes, the Seabees, and over 400 community volunteers the camp was cleared, site prepared, platforms built and U-Domes assembled and installed. On October 12, 2009 River Haven reopened with nine returning residents and twelve new residents.

Location and Site Features

The River Haven Community is located on three quarters of an acre on sandy soil next to the Santa Clara River at the entrance to the Ventura Harbor. Located four miles from downtown, it is extremely far away from any residential neighborhoods. The community is adjacent to a golf course, agricultural fields, and other vacant land in a primarily industrial area. The community has one large tent for socializing, as well as other rudimentary camp amenities, including grills, a propane refrigerator, water, porta-potties, picnic tables, and a dumpster.

Non-Profit & Government Services

The Turning Point Foundation is the non-profit fiscal agent and sponsor of River Haven. It serves more than 500 clients each year through its shelter, supportive housing, and rehabilitation programs. Turning Point is the only non-profit agency in Ventura County that addresses the critical community support needs of mentally ill adults. The non-profit played a critical role in the creation of the community and gaining initial government support. The non-profit is also now playing a larger role in the governance of the community and admissions process as the camp turns towards a transitional housing model. The city has been supportive of the community through funding, the land use approval process, and did not oppose the initial proposal of a regulated encampment.

The camp currently costs \$84,000 a year to operate. Included in River Haven's budget are the costs for case management and camp management salaries and benefits which amount to \$47,125 a year. The salaries covered include part-time work of a case manager, a certified social worker, a program manager, camp manager, and the foundation's clinical director. No other tent city profiled in this report included case and camp management in their operating budgets. The next largest section of the budget is \$17,900 on occupancy costs, which the residents fund in return for services that include a monthly propane allowance, chemical toilets, and grey water management, transportation costs for a vehicle, and property management costs. The camp is also required to take out insurance, which comes to \$6,000 a year. Income from the tenants alone comes to \$50,000 a year. The city of Ventura provides \$18,750 a year, although this is likely to be reduced in future budgets due to the recession. Other funds are raised through the Foundation's fundraising efforts.

Regulatory Status

The city of Ventura noticed the River Haven campers in 2004 and moved them temporarily into winter shelters. The city of Ventura recognized this was a temporary response and was open to alternatives proposed by the homeless and activists. After the stay at temporary shelters, the city of Ventura allowed the community to camp at state and private campgrounds for nine months. The community then went back to the city and petitioned for a permanent encampment. The site for River Haven was then selected by the government, is owned by the city, and was approved by the City Planning Commission as a temporary campground.

Lessons Learned

River Haven is unique both in its evolution to a transitional housing model and the rent requirements of its tenants. Both the homeless members of the initial community and the non-profit sponsor Turning Point began the settlement with the notion of self-government as a keystone; to provide its residents with the autonomy, responsibility, and respect. However, there were negative dynamics, not simply in terms of illegal activity, but more prominently in terms of internal intimidation, eventual lack of leadership, and a tension between members regarding the community standards and mission. When the model was reconsidered Turning Point Foundation took the role as lead agency and is now focusing on a more specific population to increase the opportunity of those who come to the community seeking recovery, accessing benefits, or finding a job to gain permanent housing. This is similar to the goals of Ontario's encampment as well as the one being discussed by Sacramento's city government, which are all concerned with screening admissions based on motivation to be off the street. Sacramento and Ontario have this goal because it is linked with their government's goals to end homelessness and are, or will be in Sacramento's case, entirely funded by the government. This is in stark contrast to the encampments of the Pacific Northwest, which are charity based and hold open admissions without requirements or evaluations of progress. However, none of the Pacific Northwest encampments or sponsoring non-profits spend funds on case management and other social service workers, whose time and costs are a primary driver towards targeting populations in the admissions process.

The \$250 rental fee for the U-domes, displays the extreme demand for affordable housing. It is certainly a misnomer to call River Haven 2 (as the community will be renamed) a tent city, as it sets itself apart from the other encampments reviewed in this study in its significant rental requirement. The demand for such housing speaks to the extreme need for alternatives that fit between shelters and supported or affordable housing and is an easy inexpensive model that more municipalities should consider.

Contact: Clyde Reynolds, Turning Point Foundation Director,
creynolds@turningpointfoundation.org, (805)652-0596

Additional Resources: <http://www.turningpointfoundation.org>

U-Dome sin Ventura's encampment.



Report Summary

American's Great Depression was greatly defined by the newly homeless and their creation of tent cities. As the homeless gathered in shanty towns they began calling them Hooverville's, after the sitting president, Herbert Hoover. Unemployment grew, rural communities collapsed, industrial cities were economically shaken and both small and large businesses failed, as millions more Americans became homeless for the first time.

Currently, the United States is experiencing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression and its associated social ills are similar. Americans are once again experiencing a significant growth in poverty and double digit increases in their newly homeless. Just as during the Great Depression, temporary housing has begun to dot the national landscape, from coast to coast. Tent cities can now be found across the United States, ranging from large organized communities to makeshift encampments. This is not to say that tent cities have not remained on America's landscape since the 1930s, but due to the current recession, there has been a rise in homelessness, and tent cities have received more media attention.

Since the Great Depression, Americans have tried unsuccessfully to cure the social ill of modern homelessness by treating its symptoms rather than its causes. A severe lack of affordable housing and a scarceness of jobs that pay a living wage are the root causes of homelessness. But, failing a final solution-based strategy to ending homelessness, we are now assigning rank-and-resources within a hierarchy of needs and conditions, measured along a compassion scale of those who are deserving, less deserving and undeserving.

Efforts by the George W. Bush administration, at reducing one of the most visible signs of America's poverty, chronic homeless individuals, were moderately successful. But, the ultimate and important goal of abolishing chronic homelessness, as a tipping point to ending all homelessness, has not been reached. So like many illnesses, chronic homelessness, as a social ill, will have its symptoms wane, its cures will lessen and attention will be paid elsewhere. And like most illnesses, the symptoms will reemerge stronger and more resistant.

Currently, the federal government is focusing on the prevention of homelessness and the

growing need to preserve and increase affordable and accessible housing. Congress created, and President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which includes 1.5 billion for homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing. The omnibus spending package, for fiscal year 2010, includes an increased commitment of 4.2 billion in funds targeted for affordable housing and homelessness.

Additional funds for the existing safety net of resources and services, rapid re-housing, and homelessness prevention are necessary, welcome, and address a vital and ongoing need. But, the scale and scope of today's homelessness and the profound and lasting impact that the current economic crisis is having on homelessness dwarfs the current response.

The National Coalition for the Homeless believes that now is the time that we, as a country, must embark on a final campaign to Bring America Home and end homelessness once and for all; through a coordinated and comprehensive national response that addresses the housing, income, healthcare, civil rights, and causal factors and consequences of extreme poverty.

Tent Cities Directory

Camp	Name	Organization	Email	Phone Number
Dignity Village	Randy Curl	Dignity Village	info@dignityvillage.org	(503) 281-1604
Tent City 3 & Tent City 4	Scott Marrowe Peggy Hoates	SHARE Veterans for Peace	N/A PSHotes@aol.com	(206) 448-7889 (206) 399-5458
Nickelsville	Peggy Hoates	Veterans for Peace	PSHotes@aol.com	(206) 399-5458
Camp Quixote	Selena Kilmoyer	PANZA	k.selena@gmail.com	(360) 951-0326
Safe Ground	Joan Burke	Loaves and Fishes	Advocate4loaves @yahoo.com	(916) 879-5082
Community & Village of Hope	Doreen Eley	Poverello House	eley@poverellohouse.org	(559) 498-6988
Taco Flat and New Jack City	Gregory Barfield	Office of Fresno City Manager	Gregory. Barfield@fresno.gov	(559) 621-7788
Temporary Homeless Services Area	Brent D. Shultz	Ontario City Housing & Revitalization	ci.ontario.ca.us	(909)395-2317
River Haven	Clyde Reynolds	Turning Point Foundation	Creynolds @turningpointfoundation.org	(805) 652-0596

Appendix

Safe Ground (formerly American River Tent City) Survey, Sacramento, CA

Results of Tent City Campers Survey

97 people surveyed (as of March 31, 2009)

Due to the wide scope of national and international media that the Sacramento Tent City was receiving, this survey was conducted in order to counter any possible backlash on how to address the crisis and break down stereotypes of individuals who are homeless. This was also completed in part to provide a more thorough understanding to policymakers of whom the homeless issue is actually affecting, as well as the factors and reasons behind the development of a tent city. Previous similar surveys have been conducted on Los Angeles' homeless encampments to study and explore the tent city phenomenon. The results from these proved beneficial, instructive, and educational for policymakers, as well as helpful in pointing them towards positive, proactive solutions.

This survey was developed and completed by staff at the Ending Chronic Homelessness, now known as Sacramento Steps Forward. The survey was administered several different evenings over the course of a week. The results from the survey, compiled below, were presented to the Mayors Ad Hoc Tent City Committee. These findings were instrumental in helping to create rule changes in the winter shelter program (such as allowing couples of all sexualities, as well as accepting pets). The results also laid the foundation the facilitation of over thirty people being transitioned to permanent supportive housing. This is now a Task Force at the Mayors office under the name "Stepping Stone;" however, it is referred to as SafeGround by homeless individuals and activists.

Family status

Single Individuals: 63%

Families: 37%

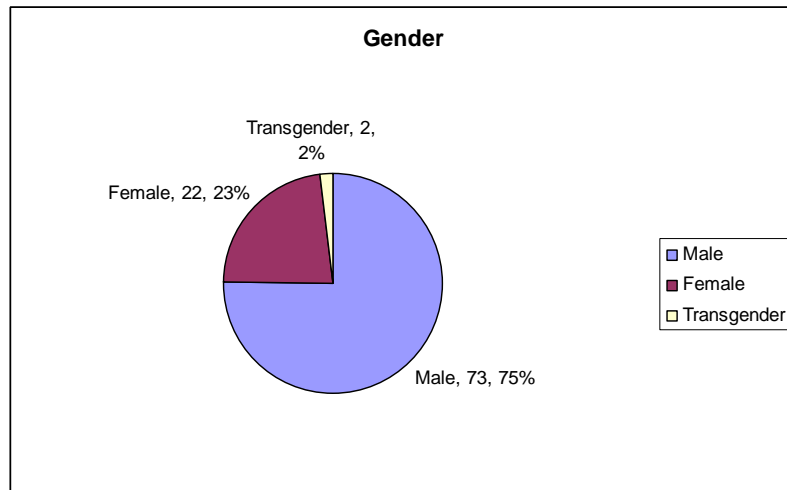
Gender

The majority of those surveyed were male, with the breakdown as follows:

Male: 75% (73 individuals)

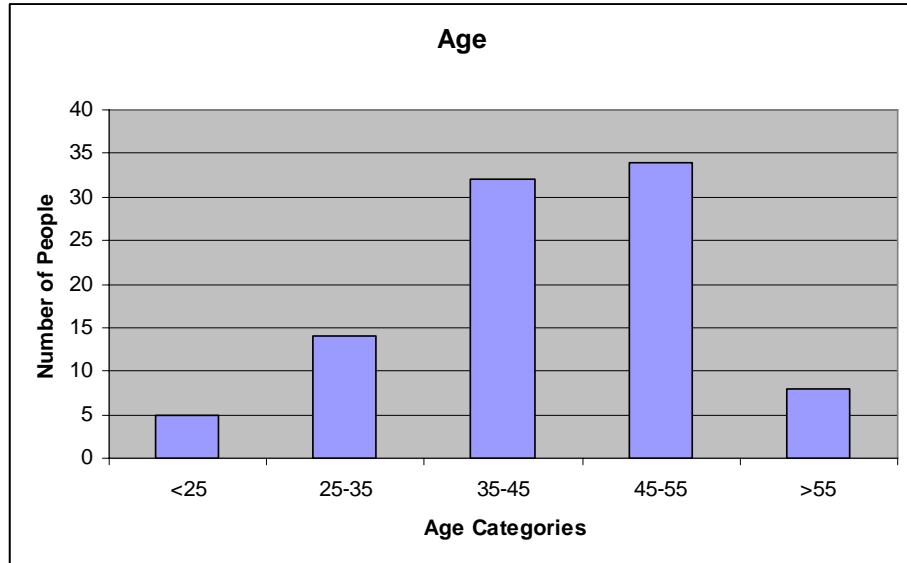
Female: 23% (22 individuals)

Transgender: 2% (2 individuals)



Age

Ages <25: 5%
Ages 25-35: 15%
Ages 35-45: 34%
Ages 45-55: 37%
Ages >55: 9%



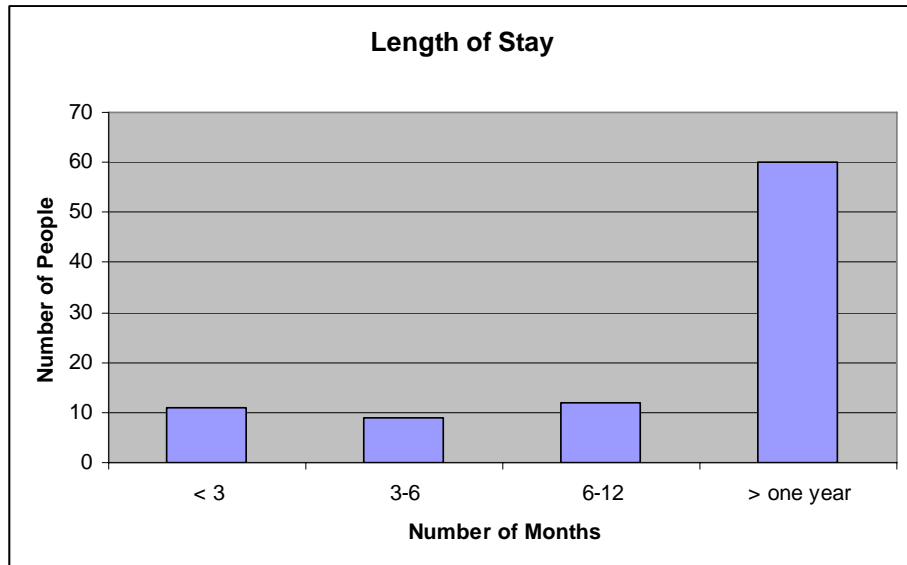
Length of Homelessness

Less than 3 months:
12% (11 individuals)

3-6 months: 10% (9 individuals)

6-12 months: 13% (12 individuals)

More than a year:
65% (60 individuals)



Individuals with Disabilities

Individuals without disabilities: 45%

Individuals with disabilities: 55%

Of those with disabilities, the disabilities included:

- Limited walking
- Problem with hands
- Steel plate in foot, bad back
- Missing left foot and right leg
- Schizophrenia
- Colon cancer
- PTSD
- Cerebral Palsy
- Mental illness, bipolar disorder
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Bone disease, back injury
- Steel plate in leg
- PTSD, agoraphobia, depression, arthritis
- Schizophrenic, degenerative disc disease, fibromyalgia
- Hepatitis C
- Back injury

Mental Health Services

Accessed mental health services: 23%

Not accessed mental health services: 77%

Emergency Room/Psychiatric Hospital

24% of individuals had been to the Emergency Room in the last six months.

Health Insurance

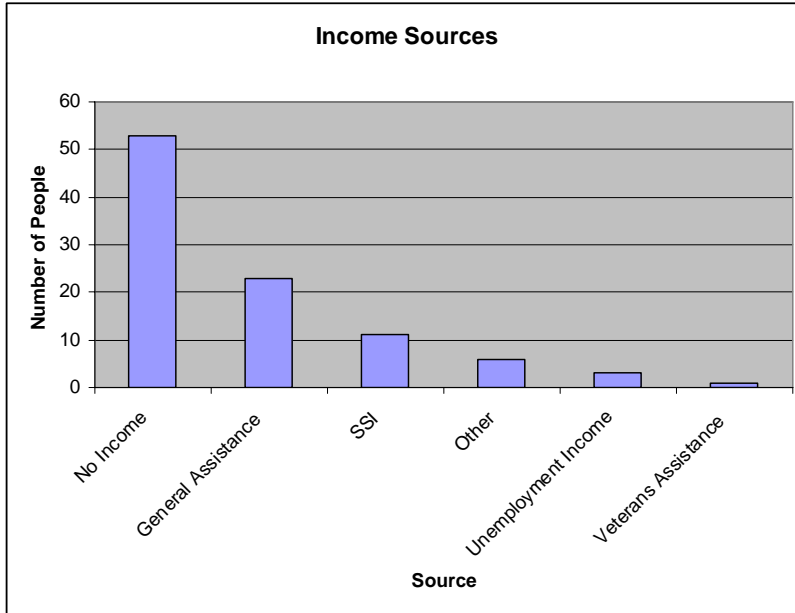
75% do not have any form of health insurance.

20% of individuals surveyed do have health insurance, from sources including:

- Medi-Cal: 12%
- Medi-Medi: 1%
- Medicare: 0%
- Other: 11%

Veteran Status

19% surveyed were veterans.



Sources of Benefit Income:

Individuals without benefit income: 55% (53 individuals)

Individuals with benefit income: 45% (44 individuals)

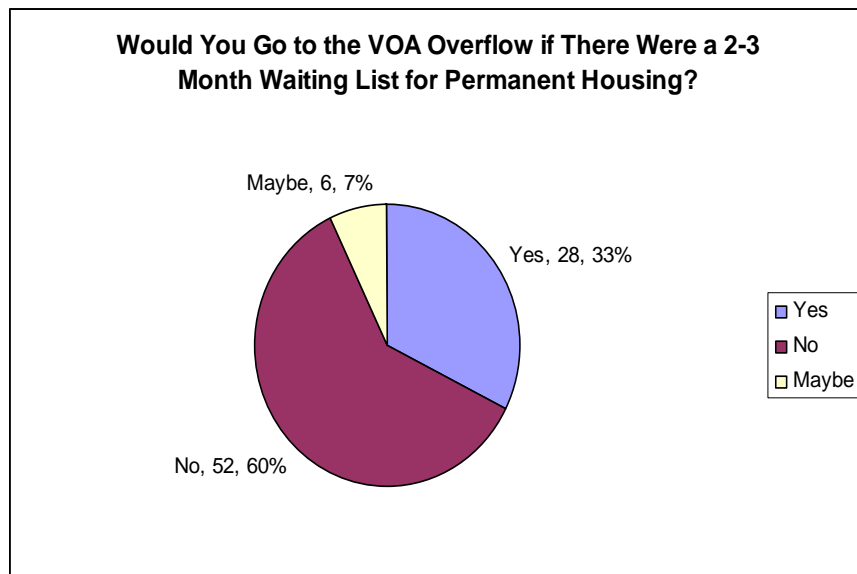
Of those with income:
 General Assistance: 24%
 SSI: 11%
 Other: 6%
 Unemployment Income: 3%
 Veterans Assistance: 1%

Volunteers of America Overflow

33% (28 individuals) said they would be willing to go into the VOA Winter Shelter when they leave Tent City.

Of the 67% (58 individuals) who would not go or would maybe go:

- 30% would go if they had private space for individuals and couples
- 22% would go if there was an open space for recreation and outdoor enjoyment
- 21% would go if they had the ability to sleep longer
- 18% would go if they could store belongings at Salvation Army
- 8% would go if there was an overnight kennel for their pet at Loaves & Fishes



Shelter Wait-List

65% would consider going into the shelter if they were put on a 2-3 month waiting list for permanent housing.

28% would not go.

7% answered "maybe."

17% did not respond.

Why not? Responses included:

- Shelter beds are not equipped to handle people who are disabled. No handicapped / wheelchair access.
- No freedom
- No privacy, uncomfortable, similar to jail with strict rules
- No pets allowed
- Too many rules
- Couples can't stay together
- Wake up too early
- Transportation is a problem
- Too many people around
- Can't make 3pm deadline
- No private shower
- Asthma
- Don't like shelters, like freedom of the open field
- Pets can't be kenneled

Drug & Alcohol Recovery Housing

22% would be interested in going to drug & alcohol recovery housing.

78% would not be interested. However, it is unclear whether or not this was because they do not have an AOD issue, or if they did not feel interested in going regardless. Some respondents replied "N/A" for this question.

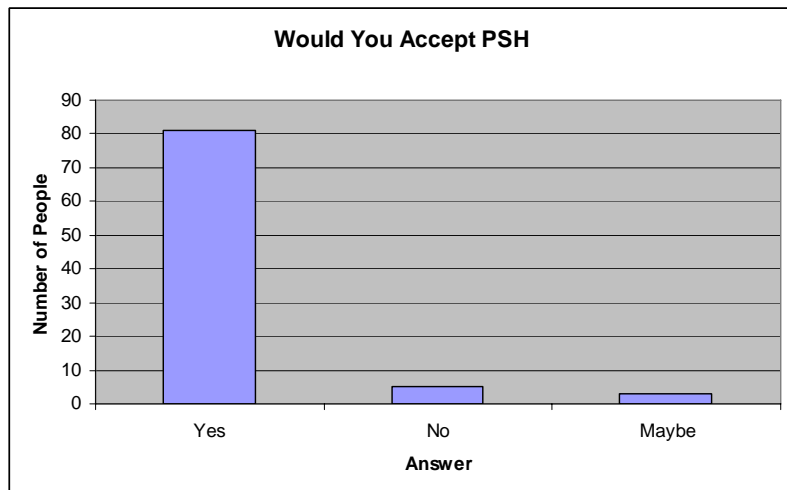
Permanent Supportive Housing

Yes, would accept with voluntary services: 94% (81 individuals)

No, would not accept: 6% (5 individuals)

Maybe: 4% (3 individuals)

No Answer: 8 individuals



Media Coverage

Fresno, CA:

<http://bullsheet.wordpress.com/2009/05/06/the-road-to-tent-city/>

King County, WA:

<http://www.24-7pressrelease.com/press-release-rss/tent-city-4-an-emergency-solution-for-the-last-5-years-85367.php>

<http://www.northshoreucc.org/Tent%20City%204.htm>

<http://www.sharewheel.org/Home/tent-cities>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tent_city

<http://www.redmond.gov/tentcity/>

Olympia, WA:

<http://www.theolympian.com/670/story/840753.html>

<http://campquixoteoly.googlepages.com/about>

<http://campquixoteoly.googlepages.com/thetentcitymovement>

<http://www.theolympian.com/opinion/story/849188.html>

http://www.olywip.org/site/page/topic/poor_people_s_union.html

<http://www.olywip.org/site/page/article/2007/03/02.html>

<http://tentcitysolutions.com/>

Portland, OR:

http://www.dignityvillage.org/content/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1

<http://www.dignityvillage.org/indexold.html>

<http://streetroots.wordpress.com/2009/05/27/dignity-village-today/>

Sacramento, CA:

<http://cbs5.com/local/sacramento.tent.city.2.957994.html>

Seattle, WA:

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/politics/2009320626_nickelsville10m.html

<http://en.wordpress.com/tag/nickelsville/>

<http://www.nickelsvilleseattle.org/>

<http://www.sharewheel.org/Home/tent-cities>

<http://whrrl.com/story/show/2207>

<http://www.westseattleherald.com/2009/06/05/news/nickelsville-redux>

http://www.democracynow.org/2009/3/30/nickelsville_seattle_newest_tent_city

<http://homelesstales.com/2009/02/inside-nickelsville-community-solidarity-empowerment/>

http://blogs.seattleweekly.com/dailyweekly/2008/06/hatching_a_plan_for_nickelsvil.php

<http://anistrastreet.blogspot.com/>

<http://ragebot.com/?p=2878>

<http://www.blogginggeorgetown.com/2009/06/nickelsville-update-and-links.html>

Ventura, CA:

http://www.geocities.com/river_haven_ca/

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