Homelessness In Center City

As part of CCRA's ongoing focus on quality-of-life issues, on December 3, we convened a panel of leaders on homelessness from City agencies, nonprofit service providers, and the Philadelphia Police Department's Homeless Detail to share facts, dispel misconceptions, and offer practical guidance for residents.

The panelists were:

David Holloman, Chief of Staff Office of Homeless Services, Amanda David, Deputy Commissioner Office of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services, Candice Player, Senior Vice President Project Home, Nadia Malik, Mural Arts Philadelphia Porchlight Program, and Michael Levin, Philadelphia Police Department Homeless Detail. The panel was facilitated by Stuart Shapiro, MD former Philly Health Commissioner and originator of the City's homeless program.

Valuable and useful information was imparted by this superb panel. We learned that common perceptions were false and the Center City homeless had different characteristics than the overall Philadelphia homeless population. We were also given important telephone numbers and emails to contact for assistance, and what we, as citizens, can do to reduce homelessness.

Center City Homeless Characteristics and Facts

1. **The Center City homeless are primarily single, frequently suffer from mental health issues or substance addiction.** The Center City population have experiences multiple traumas that have contributed to their current situation: loss of home, family and steady income.
2. **The Center City homeless commit a very small portion of violent crime.** The crime committed is petty theft, frequently personal care and food items.
3. **The number of homeless has continued to increase year over year.** The most recent and reliable numbers are from the required federal government Point-In-Time Count which you can read here.
4. **There has not been a notable migration of the homeless population from Kensington to Center City.** (Note: Center City includes both west and east of Broad Street.) In a follow-up communication with the Police Department, they cited the weekly night count has stayed between 300 to 335 people. These statistics are maintained because the department is out there constantly enforcing multiple city ordinance issues.
5. The city needs approximately 1200 more beds for the estimated unsheltered people in Philadelphia.
6. According to Officer Levin, approximately 300-335 people are not taking shelter at night. Outreach workers, including the police homeless detail, know each of these people, know their stories, and gain their trust that will eventually bring them inside.

What Should I Do When:

Someone asks me for money

- The panelists recommended that a person should do what you are comfortable with.

- There are many effective Philadelphia non-profits that work to end homelessness who could do more with more financial support. Consider adding your financial support to the organizations working to end homelessness in Philadelphia.

    - The Mural Arts Philadelphia Porch Light Program is an example of an innovative "same day pay program". Participants in the art program also engage with outreach specialists who link them with support services, including social and/or behavioral health services and potential opportunities for longer-term employment while working in the program.

Should I give food?

- Giving food is a way to develop trust with a person. The panelist noted that it can take many interactions before a person is willing to accept help and the act of providing food can be helpful in gaining the trust to accepting available services.

Someone appears to be in emotional or physical distress.
Call Homeless Outreach: 215- 232-1984,
They will determine if this is for an outreach worker or 911 situation.

Someone is sleeping on the street, and the temperature is below freezing (Code Blue) or sweltering hot (Code Red).
Call Homeless Outreach: 215- 232-1984

If someone is clearly in acute physical or emotional distress, or if you feel the person is either a danger to themselves or anyone around them:
Call 911 and convey the immediacy of the situation to the dispatcher.

Someone is on my property

Email Police Officer Levin at: Michael.levin@phila.gov
You can also file a Roll Call Complaint for the 9th Police District which provides a means for informing patrol officers of chronic problems that are not emergencies.

Remember: when calling or emailing, provide as much detail as possible of the person's appearance, location and when applicable behavior. This assists in determining the resources to dispatch.

How We Can Help Solve Homelessness
Panelists stressed that homelessness is fundamentally an affordable housing issue. CCRA encourages members to advocate with local, state, and federal elected officials for sustained investment in affordable housing and supportive services.