

REPORT OF FINDINGS - HOMELESSNESS

INTRODUCTION

Orange County is the third largest county in California and the fifth largest in the nation. Orange County is also one of the least affordable counties nationwide. The cost of living is 43% above the US average; housing and rental costs are among the most expensive. These conditions lead to an **affordability gap** as well as the phenomenon of the **“working poor”**.

It is not surprising that homelessness and poverty are growing conditions in Orange County. Anecdotal accounts and community agencies have long noted the trend. A UCI study from late 2017, funded by Jamboree Housing, provides supportive statistical information:

There has been a dramatic increase in “unsheltered” homeless people from previous counts. Over 32,000 children are unstably housed; 1 in 4 children lives below the poverty line. The average life span of a homeless person is 48.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s definition of homelessness for the purpose of a Point in Time homeless count includes only people who are literally homeless—living unsheltered on the streets, in a vehicle, or another place not fit for human habitation or in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program. The count is conducted in one 24 hour period in the odd number years with an actual physical count.

According to Orange County’s POINT IN TIME reports:

- January 2013: 4251 experience homelessness on any given night.
- January 2015: 4452 experience homelessness on any given night.
- January 2017: 4500 experience homelessness on any given night.
- January 2019: data to be added.

In addition to the devastating physical and psychological effects of homelessness, there are considerable economic costs to the communities in which it exists. Driving down almost every major street in Orange County, including Tustin Ave, as well as most freeway exits, presents a shocking visual. What used to be a hidden issue now confronts us on a daily basis.

JEWISH VALUES

And if your neighbor becomes poor and his means fail him with you, then you shall strengthen him, be he a stranger or a settler he shall live with you. Leviticus 25:35

Do not allow him to decline (socially and financially) and fall (altogether so that) it will be difficult to restore him to his original position, but strengthen him from the time of his weakness. To what may this be compared? To a burden on a donkey: while it is still on the donkey, one (person) may grab hold of it and hold up (the load, but if the donkey) falls to the ground, five cannot raise it (the load) up. Rashi on Leviticus 25:35

The highest form of charity is to step in with help to prevent a person from becoming poor. This includes offering a loan or employment, investing in a business, or any other form of assistance that will avoid poverty. The basis for this principle is the commandment in the passage... ***you shall strengthen the poor. Maimonides' commentary on Leviticus 25:35-38***

There is no word in the Hebrew vocabulary for charity in the modern sense. The word used is Tzedakah, which literally means "righteousness". Tzedakah is not an act of condescension by the affluent toward the needy; it is the fulfillment of a moral obligation. Injustice to humanity is a desecration of God. Refusal to give charity is considered by Jewish tradition to be idolatry. Albert Vorspan and David Saperstein, ***Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice: Tough Moral Choices of Our Time.***

CAMPAIGN GOALS:

ELIMINATE HOMELESSNESS IN ORANGE COUNTY

Orange County's city governments and public services bear the brunt of the costs associated with homelessness in Orange County. It is estimated that approximately \$299 million was spent to address homelessness in Orange County by governmental and non-governmental entities in a recent 12 month period. The costs of homelessness are driven upwards by the heaviest service users: those who are chronically street homeless. The cost savings data on housing the homeless shows a consistent and compelling pattern. Costs are

remarkably lower among the homeless who are housed; this is especially true for the chronically homeless.

Orange County's annual cost for a chronically homeless individual is \$100,759, including emergency room calls, law enforcement, and other related services.

When these same individuals are placed in permanent supportive housing, costs are cut almost in half to \$51,587 per person, including housing and supplemental services. (*Homelessness in Orange County: The Costs to our Community Executive Summary 2017*).

In addition to economic considerations, the moral and ethical implications of a growing underclass is inconsistent with our mandate as Reform Jews. Without active community intervention, homelessness and poverty will continue to grow in our midst.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

We have multiple resources when examining homelessness in Orange County. An educated and aware congregation is essential. The committee on Homelessness has met with and selected **United to End Homelessness** as Temple Beth Sholom's community partner.

United to End Homelessness

Led by United Way, this initiative is comprised of Orange County's top business, philanthropic, faith-based, and non-profit leaders, as well as caring citizens who agree that we must act now if we are to end the community's homeless crisis. Representative organizations and individuals include: Anaheim Ducks, Orange County Community Colleges, Bank of America, Kaiser Permanente, Wells Fargo, Orange County Community Foundation, Disneyland, Jewish Federation and Family Services, as well as numerous others. Opportunities to get involved include:

- Join and participate in the Faith Leaders Council
- Sign the proclamation to End Homelessness
- Attend a Homelessness 101 program which addresses: the key factors leading to homelessness, the current state of homelessness

in Orange County, who is homeless in Orange County, and how homelessness can be solved.

ADVOCACY: STATE AND LOCAL ACTION

California Proposition 1, Housing Programs and Veterans Loans Bond 2018-Status approved.

This measure authorizes \$4 billion in general obligation bonds for housing related programs, loans, grants, and projects and housing loans for veterans.

Congregational entry points include monitoring implementation on state and local levels.

California Assembly Bill 448 is a tool that mitigates homelessness. This proposal includes the development of 2700 units of permanent supportive housing as part of a comprehensive system of care that delivers wrap-around services to homeless individuals. The Orange County Housing Finance Trust would be the monetary leveraging tool necessary to finance the development of these units. AB448 passed and was signed by Governor Brown on September 11, 2018.

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WIDESCALE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVOLVEMENT

Create Welcome Home Baskets

Sponsor a Hygiene Kit Drive

Sponsor a back to school drive and fill back-to-school backpacks with supplies.

Create Literacy Kits

Tutor from Your Desk Program

Adopt a classroom

Become a United to End Homelessness Housing Champion and advocate for changes within our community

Become a Social Media ambassador

Participate in Community Garden Projects

SUMMARY

The vast majority of Orange County's homeless are U.S. citizens and long-term Orange County residents of over 10 years.

United Way and its partners in the business, philanthropic, faith-based, non-profit, and government sectors responded to this need and launched **United to End Homelessness**. The goal of this collaborative effort is simple: end homelessness in Orange County in a humane and dignified way by providing long-term housing with supportive care to those who need it the most.

For all of the above reasons, the Homelessness Sub-Committee of Temple Beth Sholom recommends that the congregation adopt ending Homelessness as the Social Justice Project. We propose a partnership with United Against Homelessness and the RAC to pursue the vision of Leviticus 25:35: "If your neighbor becomes poor and his means fail him with you, then you shall strengthen him, be he a stranger or settler..."

