

hollywood central park

World

Commentary

| Summer 2015



There are times when FHCP comes across topics of interest to our community which we feel are important to share with you. Jeff Briggs, FHCP Vice President and HUNC stakeholder, has written the following commentary on homelessness.



COMMENTARY by Jeff Briggs, Vice President, FHCP

Homelessness recently has received more attention than usual in our local papers and from Hollywood residents and business owners. But it always has been at the top of the list of issues for both proponents and opponents of Hollywood Central Park. It is time for those who care about homelessness—regardless of whether they care out of compassion or aesthetics—to come together in support of the Park as an integral part of the effort to end homelessness in Hollywood.

Hollywood has been doing groundbreaking work on homelessness for

going on seven years now, since the formation of “Hollywood 4WRD” (4 Walls, a Roof, and a Door), a loosely organized group of local business improvement districts, local non-profit service providers (including our churches and hospitals), property and business owners, and residents dedicated to a “housing first” model designed to actually end homelessness here instead of allowing government to continue to simply “manage” it. Hollywood 4WRD has helped house hundreds of formerly chronically homeless persons, including virtually all of our homeless veterans—which is hundreds more than the City and County have managed to house in the same time frame. Hollywood 4WRD does not rely on government to lead the effort; it leads the utilization of government resources to actually get people off the streets.

A significant majority of our homeless population is comprised of people with mental illnesses controllable with proper medication. These members of our community understandably are not always aware of their own illness, and can function pretty well when on their prescribed medication; they are, however, aware when they are feeling better and they then go off their medication thinking they are “cured.” The symptoms of their illnesses, of course, then simply return, and eventually they are arrested or otherwise end up at the Department of Mental Health, get back on medication, feel better and stop taking their meds, and the cycle continues. The expense of this taxpayer supported revolving door is staggering, both in hard costs and in the largely wasted time of law enforcement and mental health officials. If, however, these mentally ill friends can be housed with a modicum of supervision to ensure they stay on their meds, they can live stable and often productive lives—and at a fraction of the cost of the vicious cycle that presently defines their lives and the lives of those trying to help. Housing facilities such as the one built by the old Community Redevelopment Agency on Gower, and the “Step Up” facility at Santa Monica and Vine, prove that this model works for the homeless and for neighboring businesses and residents alike, and at far less per capita cost than the usual street-jail-DMH-street “program” run by the government.

Adoption of this proven “housing first” model will provide permanent

supportive care for some 75% of our homeless neighbors, and resources then can be focused much more efficiently on the 25% who are severely mentally ill and/or are suffering from the ravages of substance abuse—and the even smaller number of “travelers” who simply choose to literally camp-out on the streets largely because nobody stops them from doing so. When we are able to house and monitor the medication of the majority of our homeless citizens, those remaining on the streets will be far less overwhelming of our resources and can be helped off the streets much more effectively.

Hollywood Central Park will not, as many fear, be a “magnet” for our homeless neighbors—homelessness already has plenty of magnets in and around Hollywood. Instead, the Park will be an important element in the effort to get the homeless into housing or proper care. If we push the County and City toward a “housing first” emphasis, by the time the Park is built our homeless population will be greatly diminished and our many local service providers will be able to focus their resources on those homeless who do come to the Park to get them the help they need more efficiently and effectively.

The community benefits of and need for our Park are well established, and we should not deprive ourselves of this opportunity to better the lives of Hollywood residents out of fear that the Park will simply become another homeless encampment. We should welcome the Park as an important part of the effort to end homelessness in Hollywood, and it starts with pushing County and City officials to aggressively adopt the “housing first” model that has proven itself time and time again—including here in Hollywood.