
Responding to Chronic Homelessness Project Profile

Focus on: **Prevention: Discharge Planning**

Serial Inebriates Program San Diego

Activity Description

Why: San Diego has documented a revolving door syndrome with criminal processing of homeless chronic inebriates, arrested on average 7 times per month, whereby 180-250 chronic homeless alcoholics annually cost the City and County about \$3 million with little or no effect on getting the offender off the street and into treatment. Police placed individuals into a detox center for a 4-hour period in lieu of jail; the detox center rejected individuals who had been through intake 5 times in one month; those rejected for chronic abuse were then booked into jail only to be released 4 – 24 hours later with no pending criminal charges; the City Attorney did not prosecute “drunk in public” arrests because the offender was released from jail with no future court date.

What: A collaborative of County, City and nonprofit agencies developed an intervention and treatment program whereby chronic inebriates are offered alcohol treatment and wraparound services with transitional living and permanent housing placement assistance in lieu of jail to reduce the number cycling through detoxification centers, County jail, local emergency rooms and treatment.

Partners: County, City and nonprofit stakeholders in systems which “serve” chronic inebriates:

- ↑ City of San Diego City Council
- ↑ City of San Diego Police Department
- ↑ City of San Diego Fire Department/Emergency Medical Services
- ↑ San Diego City Attorneys Office
- ↑ San Diego Office of Public Defender
- ↑ County of San Diego Alcohol and Drug Services
- ↑ County of San Diego Sheriff's Department Detention Facilities
- ↑ County of San Diego Superior Court
- ↑ San Diego Inebriate Reception Center (Detox)
- ↑ San Diego Health and Human Services
- ↑ Medi-Coast Counseling Services
- ↑ Mental Health Services, Inc.
- ↑ One Day at a Time Sober Living Homes
- ↑ St. Vincent de Paul Village

Significant Program Design Features:

Justice system processes

- Individuals found to be drunk in public are arrested and transported to Detox
- If records indicate chronic use of the facility, the offender is booked into jail; otherwise Detox accepts the offender.
- Police department booking procedures changed so offenders were no longer released after 4 hours; offenders remained in jail until arraignment
- All in-custody arrest reports were sent to the City Attorney with SIP stamped on front for special handling; City Attorney brought all cases meeting the elements of drunk in public to trial
- Upon conviction, the court offers an option of rehabilitation; the offender must volunteer to be assessed to determine eligibility
- Mid-Coast Counseling Services performed in-custody assessments to determine willingness to enter treatment
- If accepted the Court releases the offender to treatment; if the offender refuses the treatment program or is determined ineligible, s/he remains in jail and ordered to attend an in-custody alcohol treatment program.
- Based on first year's experience, in year 2 of program, the City Attorney issued "notify warrants" to SIP for drunk in public arrests when the offender was admitted into the emergency room

Treatment and housing

Mid-Coast Counseling Services provides treatment sessions and case management:

- Medical treatment
- Employment and education services
- Referrals

One Day at a Time Sober Living Homes provide housing

Participants can stay in the program for up to 9 months; the average stay is 6 months

Once a participant has income, s/he pays 1/3 for program expenses, 1/3 into a savings account for emergencies and permanent housing

Funding Sources

- Tobacco settlement funds
- County of San Diego
- Nonprofit agency fundraising
- Client fees

Outcomes

In operation since 2000, for participants in the program:

- ↑ 32% completed treatment
- ↑ EMS contacts were reduced 88%
- ↑ Emergency room visits decreased 92%
- ↑ Hospital costs decreased 80%
- ↑ Arrests decreased 58%

The U.S. Interagency Council lauds this project as an “innovative practice” in Homelessness

Places Where Similar Work is Underway

This project is a variation of a Drug Court model; some other Counties using Drug Court models toward ending homelessness are:

- Los Angeles
- Orange
- San Bernardino
- San Francisco
- San Joaquin
- Santa Barbara
- Santa Clara
- Yolo (Juvenile Violence)