

Home is where the solution is.

Public Education and Engagement Toolkit



Pasadena Partnership



Why is unified messaging needed around homelessness?

Typical messaging around homelessness, while well-meaning, has inadvertently contributed to several deeply entrenched stereotypes. Messaging often implies that people experiencing homelessness are responsible for their current condition due to some inherent character flaw or poor decision-making situation. Often, the root causes of homelessness such as broken systems, structural and institutional racism, and misguided policies that create and perpetuate homelessness are ignored. In truth, homelessness is a temporary condition that does not define any individual.

Pasadena has made significant progress addressing homelessness compared to many other cities, but as times change, the challenges will change as well.

Since 2011, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Pasadena has decreased by more than 50%.

Without a safe, decent, affordable place to live, it is next to impossible to achieve good health, positive educational outcomes, or reach one's economic potential. Real progress is happening in our community, even in these unprecedented times. With your help, Pasadena will continue to lead the way.

97% of Pasadena's supportive housing residents remain successfully housed and do not return to homelessness.

What exactly is this campaign designed to do?

By partnering with and empowering like-minded community groups to help spread the messages of this integrated education and engagement campaign, we can effectively reach a higher percentage of Pasadena residents. Together, we can encourage the community to change its perception about supportive housing. By addressing the issue of homelessness directly, and authentically, we can help dispel entrenched perceptions, generate awareness, and offer real, effective solutions.

Okay, so how are we going to do this?

To help reach the primary audience of Pasadena residents, we are engaging with, and empowering Pasadena's homeless service providers, city departments and officials, faith-based organizations, interested nonprofits, and the local media to help disseminate information in a myriad of ways, all using one consistent voice and message to create synergy. Together, we can communicate what the real solution to homelessness is—stable homes.

The shift begins from a place of humanity.

As current events have reminded us, we are all human, and we all can relate to the need for a place to call home. People experiencing homelessness in Pasadena are not from somewhere else; they are not someone else; they are us—our neighbors.

What percentage of people experiencing homelessness in Pasadena are from the area?

10%

58%

21%

Fact is, over 58% are your neighbors.



Encouraging Supportive Housing through Multi-channel Communications

In addition to paid advertising, the Communications Toolkit offers all interested stakeholders the ability to support the Pasadena Department of Housing's efforts to promote Supportive Housing through the use of key messages, talking points, images, and graphics. With consistent use by City departments, local media, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and other engaged entities, we will be able to expand the reach of our message.

Online Assets

Pasadena Department of Housing has developed new banner graphics and a new webpage, and downloadable assets on Pasadena Partnership:
www.pasadenapartnership.org

City-based Communication Channels

We have created materials for use in City of Pasadena communication channels, including:

- Bus Shelters
- Departmental Newsletters
- InFocus Newsletter
- Various Social media channels

Paid Advertising

The backbone of our efforts is an advertising campaign to create millions of impressions in a wide array of online and offline mediums; these include:

- Geofenced Banner Advertising (geofencing allows the ads to be seen in only Pasadena zip codes)
- Pasadena Now, banner ads, articles, newsletter, Facebook posts
- Pasadena Star News, ads to appear in both print and online
- City of Pasadena bus shelters

All stakeholders speaking with a singular voice amplifies our key message.

Communicating our message clearly, concisely and consistently will help instill the message into our community's collective consciousness. These key messages share both the successes that have been achieved as well shine a light on the truths surrounding pervasive misconceptions.

“People experiencing homelessness in Pasadena are, more often than not, our long-time neighbors.”

More than half (54%) of people experiencing homelessness were Pasadena residents before their housing crisis and lived in the City for an average of 21 years.

“Homelessness is not always related to mental illness or substance use.”

While people experiencing homelessness have a higher prevalence of mental illness/substance use than the general population, the trauma of the experience of homelessness and the stress of meeting basic needs for survival can trigger or exacerbate these disorders that may not have been present before their time of housing loss.

“Homes solve homelessness.”

In 2019, 291 people (166 households) who were formerly homeless in Pasadena were permanently housed through programs in Pasadena and throughout the County.

Actually, less than 5% of people who enter permanent housing fall back into homelessness.

“No, homelessness is not a choice.”

Nobody enjoys sleeping outdoors, on sidewalks, or in business entryways. People experiencing homelessness want to come inside and have a source of stability, and stability starts with a home. People are homeless because they cannot access affordable housing, not because they choose to be or enjoy the lifestyle.

“We are continually investing in solutions that work.”

Over the last five years, Pasadena has actively increased the production and supply of low barrier supportive housing for chronically homeless families, single adults and transitional aged youth.

“It’s not too expensive to provide people with homes.”

A RAND Corporation analysis found that for every dollar Los Angeles County invested in the Housing for Health program, it saved \$1.20 in reduced health care and social service costs in other county departments. Another study found that the typical public cost for residents in supportive housing is \$605 a month and the typical public cost for similar homeless person is \$2,897.

The stabilizing effect of housing plus supportive care is demonstrated by a 79 percent reduction in public costs for residents of supportive housing.

“In fact, homelessness is not increasing in Pasadena.”

Based off of the City’s annual Homeless Count data, homelessness is currently at the lowest point since 2010. Despite increases seen elsewhere in Los Angeles County and the State, Pasadena’s numbers remain largely unchanged and have trended downward for the past 10 years.

The work of homeless services is slow because the demand for housing exceeds the current resources and remains largely invisible because the inflow of people falling into homelessness is moving at a faster rate than the system can move them out.

The City has increased our investments in homelessness prevention programming to stem the inflow into homelessness.

“Systemic issues perpetuate real and ongoing challenges.”

While our community has invested more heavily than ever in the homelessness response system, it continues to bear the challenges and failures of other existing systems, chief among them being the region’s ongoing affordable housing crisis perpetuated by the rising cost of housing which far outpaces fixed incomes and stagnant wages.

“Homelessness is a symptom of a legacy of racism and discrimination.”

The 2020 Homeless Count reveals persistent and deeply rooted racial inequities, with 31% of people experiencing homelessness identifying as Black or African American, despite representing just 10% of Pasadena’s general population.

Homelessness is oftentimes precipitated by historical and structural oppression, which contributes to the high prevalence of Black people experiencing homelessness, including the effects of longstanding racism in rental housing, higher rates of poverty among Black families, and the overrepresentation of Black people in the state’s incarceration and child welfare systems.”

“Our model is working. And getting noticed.”

Homelessness has generally declined in the City since 2011 and our investments are yielding steady progress. Pasadena has a reputation of being a leader when it comes to homelessness, and many cities look to us as a model to replicate what we do in their jurisdictions. We continue to be an early adopter of best practices (i.e. supportive housing and Housing First) and we need to continue doing more to reduce homelessness in our community.

“People are not homeless simply due to poor choices or personal failures.”

Homelessness is a result of many greater system-wide problems and cannot solely be attributed to personal failures. The descent into homelessness is not necessarily the direct result of “choices” but is also driven by many systemic and structural factors (high rents, low wages, strained social safety net, and lack of support and services for people exiting institutions like hospitals, foster care and jails.)

We've got all the tools you need to help you connect with your audience.



Fact Sheet



Yard Sign



Button



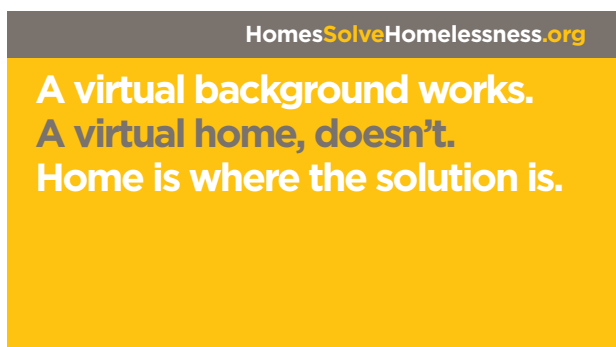
Grocery Bag



Web Banner



Social Media Graphics



Zoom Backgrounds

There's what people may think. And then there's what we actually know.

Sometimes, even more detrimental than the actual issues surrounding homelessness, are the preconceived notions that some people in the community may believe are fact. By providing substantive, quantifiable facts to counter these misconceptions, we help lay a foundation of empathetic understanding—a critical first step in changing minds and attitudes.

Why even try to help people who are homeless? They're there because they choose to live on the streets.

ACTUALLY: People living on the streets want to live in safe, stable housing and find respite from the outdoors. Nobody enjoys living without their own home—homelessness usually starts with a series of traumatic events and failures of existing systems. People are homeless because they can't access housing, not because they enjoy the lifestyle. While some people experiencing homelessness may decline the option of crowded, unsafe shelters, people do not decline housing in general. Although unsheltered homelessness persists, this does not support the fallacy that people want to sleep outdoors or prefer the streets to a permanent home.

Isn't it true that most people are homeless because they made bad choices or don't want services?

THE TRUTH IS: Everyone makes mistakes, but the descent into homelessness is not necessarily the direct result of choices. Estimates reveal that the large majority of people who are unsheltered are engaged with the homeless system of care, have been assessed by a case manager, and are eligible for housing, but are still waiting to be matched to a voucher for housing.

People experiencing homelessness are lazy and don't want to work, why don't they just get a job?

IN FACT: Surviving on the street takes more work than we realize, and people experiencing homelessness are often sleep-deprived, sick, and living with disabilities. Without the safety and stability of a home, it is exceptionally challenging to take care of basic needs, let alone hold a job or manage debilitating health conditions. Many folks living on the street are affected by disabilities or other barriers to employment and are no longer able to work.

Aren't most homeless people dangerous and out committing crimes?

IN TRUTH: Homeless people are far more likely to be the victims of violence than the perpetrators. They are also more likely to have interactions with the criminal justice system primarily because many of their daily survival activities are criminalized, and they can be arrested for minor offenses that build a criminal record.

How are people who are homeless with mental illnesses or substance use disorders ever going to succeed in housing?

IN REALITY: Existing Pasadena permanent supportive housing projects that largely serve individuals with mental health conditions have a 97% success rate, meaning the residents are able to retain their housing for at least a year after they move in without falling back into homelessness. These folks are provided with on-site intensive case management services providing people with a safe, stable, permanent place to live once they are in their home. Individuals are also connected with clinical services that help them navigate day-to-day challenges.

Isn't it true that most people on the street are mentally ill or have substance abuse problems?

THINK ABOUT IT: Simply having a mental illness or substance use disorder does not cause people to become homeless. Often times, these disabilities surface after people fall into homelessness because they are struggling to survive the traumatic experience of being homeless. People who struggle with mental illness or substance use disorders are the most visible face of homelessness because of their higher service needs.

Aren't most of the people experiencing homelessness coming from outside of Pasadena?

ON THE CONTRARY: People tend to continue residing in the communities where they became homeless, likely because of the familiarity of surroundings, sense of belonging, personal connections, knowledge of local resources, and feelings like the area is still their home.

A recent survey showed that 58% of the people experiencing homelessness were Pasadena residents before they became homeless. Only 5% of people experiencing homelessness in Pasadena reported being from outside of LA County or the state and it's theorized that the other 37% may have ties to Pasadena (family, work, services, grew up, or retired here).

Utilizing our Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), we see if a client has a history working with other homeless providers within the county and we can work to reconnect them with their home community by referring them to services in those areas.

It looks like more people than ever are experiencing homelessness in Pasadena, isn't it a lost cause?

ACTUALLY, NO: A comprehensive framework of long-term, practical and effective solutions is needed to reverse the housing and humanitarian crises that have been in the making for decades. The services and community of Pasadena have made a real difference. Homelessness is down 56% from ten years ago.

Implementing Housing First best practices by providing access to permanent housing without preconditions, along with optional supportive services as needed, ensures that people experiencing homelessness can obtain housing, even those who have experienced homelessness for long periods of time or have severe disabling conditions such as serious mental illness or substance use disorders.

Homelessness is such a complex problem; how do we even begin to solve it?

While it's true, homelessness is a complex issue with many influencing factors; there is one indisputable solution we know works: Homes. Providing people with a safe, stable, permanent home to live is a proven solution to ending homelessness. Getting there isn't always simple, but it is achievable. Here are some of the programs and strategies that have consistently proven successful in Pasadena and many other areas:

Housing First: Providing access to permanent housing and services without preconditions as a basic foundation allows people to rebuild their lives in a safe and stable environment where they can pursue and achieve personal goals.

Supportive Housing: Supportive housing is an intervention best suited for people with higher service needs. Supportive housing provides a safe and stable living environment coupled with on-site services for as long as people are living in their homes. People living in supportive housing contribute 30% of their income towards rent, with the remainder subsidized.

Rapid Rehousing: Quickly re-houses people through time-limited financial assistance and targeted supportive services. It is designed for those who do not necessarily need ongoing supportive services to exit homelessness and regain stability.

Affordable Housing: A lack of affordable housing and the limited scale of housing assistance has contributed to the current homelessness crisis. The inability to afford housing costs is a key driver of the increases in homelessness. We know that without enough affordable housing, people will continue to cycle in and out of homelessness.

Coordination and Collaboration between Systems: Research has shown that people engaged with multiple public systems, such as criminal justice, health and behavioral healthcare, foster care, and child welfare, are more likely to experience homelessness. These systems need to work together to strengthen their exit strategies and discharge planning activities to link people to the appropriate resources and supports whenever possible to avoid transitioning from these systems to the streets.

Targeted Homelessness Prevention:

Homelessness prevention programs help to support those who are at imminent risk of becoming homeless by providing temporary financial assistance, eviction prevention, and/or short-term case management to resolve housing crises and instability. Diversion programs utilize a problem-solving approach which identifies and connects people to alternative housing pathways that do not require a dedicated permanent housing resource or subsidy. By strategically targeting assistance to those who are most at-risk of homelessness, programs are able to maximize the limited available resources for homelessness prevention.

Homelessness requires a multidimensional approach. There are many societal issues that also need to be addressed to help reduce homelessness:

- Safe, affordable housing integrated into neighborhoods
- Low income jobs and racism within the employment sector
- Equal housing opportunities for everyone, regardless of race or background by acknowledging and taking steps to overcome institutional racism
- Strong educational opportunities for all, such as public schools, and community college
- Coordination between the emergency response system (i.e. police, fire and hospitals) and homeless service providers
- Trauma-informed and harm reduction approach in all programs that serve people experiencing homelessness
- More low-barrier, readily accessible bridge housing and emergency shelter
- More Supportive Housing and Rapid Re-Housing opportunities

Increasing public support for permanent housing projects is key.

We must: Dismantle the term “homeless housing” — once people are housed, they are not homeless, they are simply our neighbors and dispel myths and stigmas, that housing brings bad or dangerous people into the neighborhood, decreases housing values, and is dangerous to our children.

It is important to understand that homelessness is a temporary state. No two people experience homelessness the same way. Some have a mental health diagnosis; some do not. Some are living with addiction; others are not. Some spend each night in a shelter, while others sleep in doorways, cars, or encampments. Yet, everyone experiencing homelessness shares one thing in common: they do not have a safe or appropriate place to live.

There is no evidence that housing for people who previously experienced homelessness leads to increased crime/drugs. While evidence does show that Supportive Housing and scattered site housing communities provide people with safe housing opportunities while improving neighborhoods. In fact, when built right, Supportive Housing increases neighboring housing prices.



Cynthia Kirby

I HAVE BEEN TO CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS, HAD ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS WITH COUNCIL MEMBERS, SPOKEN WITH THE MAYOR—AND WHO AM I? I’M A CITIZEN. AND A COMMUNITY MEMBER, AND MY VOICE MATTERS.

My name is Cynthia and I just turned 50! I am a wife, a mother, a student, a leader, and an advocate and a BIPOC female who formerly experienced homelessness. At age 28, I was placed on permanent disability and went from making \$60K a year to less than \$1,000 per month. The strain of my disability ended my first marriage. My parents provided some support until I wound up in an abusive relationship that exposed me to criminal elements and crystal meth. The fallout from this dangerous liaison caused me to lose my home and custody and visitation with my daughter for many of her formative years. I spent the next decade in and out of homelessness, struggling with my addiction and domestic violence. I slept in my car, stayed in abandoned houses, and at one point I even paid rent to live in a drug house with no electricity and running water just so I could have a mailing address. The night I turned 40 I spent in a grocery store parking lot, afraid to fall asleep. Amid this era of brokenness, I met my current husband, relapsed after 8 years in recovery. I had been exposed to 12-step recovery but struggled with the program’s spiritual emphasis. I was curious about how my husband had come to believe and he shared the Word of God with me. Still life seemed hopeless, so I leveled an ultimatum at whatever higher power might exist: It had one year to convince me to continue living. In that year, even though my mom died, my husband was incarcerated, and

I waited for him desperately alone on the streets of Pasadena, God wooed me and built the foundation of my relationship with Him. I moved from motel to motel, traveled the length of Colorado Boulevard, and found there a world that was vastly different from the one you see on television every year on January 1st. During this time, I connected with an amazing group of homeless students from Pasadena City College and they all began calling me “Mom” which filled my shattered heart. These kids challenged and inspired me. They too had lives that were forged in brokenness, abandonment, disability, disenfranchisement, and untold traumas yet they were clawing and fighting toward the light in whatever ways they could.

At the one-year mark, my husband was released from jail and I took it as a sign that God listened. We wanted to get married and find housing but had few options on disability income. Amazingly, God used connections we had made on the street and in recovery to help us achieve stability. My husband was accepted into Union Station Homeless Services’ adult center. Three months later, we were married, and I was invited into the program. We received a housing voucher, which included permanent supportive services—people helping us to rebuild our lives— though it took nearly a year to find an apartment because of the affordable housing crisis.

Today, I have more than 8 years of sobriety, am a student at PCC and have nearly a 4.0 GPA! I work part-time at my church, First Baptist Church Pasadena, and am the director of our children’s choir. My daughter and I have reconciled, and I am getting to know the amazing young lady she has become. I am a member of Union Station Homeless Services’ Lived Experience Advisory Panel and Making Housing and Community Happen, a local non-profit agency, and have had the opportunity to share my story at community education events, Town Halls, with the media, and in various faith communities. It has been a blessing to advocate for permanent housing solutions, to be a part of direct democracy, to realize that my voice is powerful. I have been to City Council Meetings, had one-on-one meetings with Council members, spoken with the Mayor—and who am I? I’m a citizen. and a community member, and my voice matters.

Although gratitude for a life I never thought I would have and my amazingly intimate relationship with God carry me, my heart still hurts when I think about the young adults I met along Colorado. Did they make it off the street? Are they finally safe and at home? I may never know what became of my “kids” but their stories fuel my fight against all the broken systems that brought us together on the boulevard so that together we can rise, like the phoenix, from the ashes of discontent.



Angela M. Sanchez

TODAY, ANGELA IS A TWO-TIME GRADUATE OF UCLA, EARNING HER BACHELOR'S IN 2013 AND MASTER'S IN EDUCATION IN 2015. SHE ALSO NOW SERVES ON THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR SCHOOL ON WHEELS, INC.

It was the week before Thanksgiving in November 2007, at the onset of the Recession, when Angela and her father were evicted from their home. At the time, Angela was 16, a high school junior, and it was the only home she had ever known. Angela and her family motel-hopped for a couple months until her father's credit ran out. Ultimately, Angela and her father stayed in a cold winter shelter in Pasadena, eventually arriving at the Union Station Family Center.

At the family shelter, Angela recalls the Los Angeles-based nonprofit, School on Wheels Inc., as "a breath of fresh air." School on Wheels matches volunteer tutors with K-12 students experiencing homelessness. "My tutor didn't just see me for my circumstances," Angela says, "but as a girl who still had hopes and aspirations beyond that." When most people think of homelessness, they

don't think of children—who comprise 25% of all people experiencing homelessness. In Los Angeles County, the estimated total is as high as 68,000 youth under 18.

"Since I never told anyone at school that I was homeless, the only other people I really talked to about it were the kids at the shelter," Angela says. At 17, Angela was the oldest minor at the shelter. "I'd tutor some of the kids when they were around or we'd hang out and draw. A lot of the kids were bright and irrepressibly optimistic about their futures. It kept me going." Angela still keeps in touch with a couple of the friends she made at the shelter.

In April 2009, Angela and her father secured permanent housing with a Section 8 voucher.

Today, Angela is a two-time graduate of UCLA, earning her Bachelor's

in 2013 and Master's in Education in 2015. She also now serves on the board of directors for School on Wheels, Inc. Professionally, Angela works in the philanthropic sector, focusing on college success for communities that have been marginalized by the postsecondary education system and meeting students' basic needs (housing, food security, mental health, etc.). Angela has also written and illustrated two picture books, *Scruffy* and *the Egg* and *Scruffy and the Egg: Adventures on the Road*, to represent the experiences of children and families grappling with homelessness and help housed families better understand how to discuss this difficult circumstance. Angela has been featured on KPCC Radio's "Take Two" and NBC as well as *The Los Angeles Times* and *LA Weekly*.



William Jackson

NOW, HOUSED FOR 8 YEARS AND HAVING ACHIEVED WONDERFUL THINGS IN MY PERSONAL, PUBLIC, EDUCATIONAL, CREATIVE, BUSINESS, LOVE, AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

I was homeless for 4 years. Not because of drugs or alcohol or a history of wrong decisions, but because of a family member and not being able to find any decent employment. I was college educated, certified in the science of Holistic Medicine, yet still, opportunities for self-sustainability eluded me, compounded by lack of family understanding for my struggle mixed with vindictiveness.

My 4 years on the streets took me many places, from all around Los Angeles to beyond and back. And in my forced travels seeking work and stability I learned much about myself, human nature, and brutality. I learned about horror and violence and pettiness. Addiction and pestilence. Disease and cunning. I learned about the night. I learned about tribes formed in the darkness and the infallible brightness of alcohol. I learned about the stubbornness of life. Lessons were learned in blood and laughter, and I laughed a lot.

During my sojourn through the Purgatory that is homelessness, I made friends and allies—most of whom have moved on—either to another State, or state of existence. Some are still on the streets (or returned to the streets, such as from survivor's guilt), never having broken that chain that keeps them identifying as homeless instead of someone who experienced homelessness. And thus, even after they were housed, and without the support of the community to keep them there, in a place that they deserve, they returned to what their mind knew them to be, without a home.

Trekking the road from homelessness to permanent housing can often times feel like trying to untangle a sparking and crackling ball of frayed wires still plugged into a socket, while wolves snarl at your neck and dogs bark at your ear while documents demand signing. All this to see whose survived long enough to deserve a home. It can drag you down. It is perpetually exhausting. Even when I found work it wasn't enough to cover the deposit on a place, so my living situations remained unstable, marked by autonomous communities that were a jigsaw of vice, fornication, communal meals, and violence.

Now, housed for 8 years and having achieved wonderful things in my personal, public, educational, creative, business, love, and spiritual life, including building my own organic functional-foods company (Medighee), being a part of a Holistic medical practice in a historically black-neighborhood of LA (Leimert Wellness), being a consultant on two films dealing with homelessness (one of which went to the NY Film Festival, "Homeless: A Los Angeles Story"), becoming a published author, becoming a public servant as Chair of the Homelessness Committee for Koreatown Neighborhood Council, to actually working in the field of homeless outreach and housing (Housing Works CA), I take my experiences from, and transcendence of, homelessness with me into that world of the unhoused and my client's lives. All of this making me a more powerful and effective advocate and case manager for all those within the invisible nation I meet. I am there to support their upliftment and transcendence of their seemingly insurmountable conditions.