



## Community Meeting Summary Focus Strategies Baseline Report and Short-Term Action Plan

September 11, 2019

The County of Santa Cruz has engaged national consulting firm Focus Strategies for provision of homeless system assessment consulting services. The first deliverable of this engagement was a Baseline Assessment report of the current local response to homelessness; which outlined the existing system's strengths and challenges. Included in the report were recommendations for short-term strategies to undertake concurrent with the next phases of work to build out an aligned Homeless Crisis Response System, described below.

On September 11, 2019, the Homeless Service Coordination Offices (HSCO) convened a special community meeting at which Focus Strategies presented the Baseline Assessment report and gathered reactions and feedback on next steps. Forty-three people attended and participated in the meeting; including representatives of local government, homeless service providers, advocates and people with lived experience of homelessness, as well as other community stakeholders.

Participants generally concurred with the findings of the Baseline Assessment report and its identified strengths and challenges to current homelessness response and asked clarifying questions on the content of the report itself.

### Short-term Action Plan Strategies

Though the full scope of system analysis and design work is still in process, Focus Strategies provided the community with four suggested initial strategies, and initial action plans that could be undertaken immediately to help jump-start improvements to the homeless crisis response while the next phase of analytic and system redesign work is taking place. These include:

1. *Implement a systemwide diversion practice to reduce inflow* and move forward with efforts to re-tool Smart Path coordinated entry.
2. *Build capacity of emergency shelters to deliver housing-focused services and supports* and speed up the rate at which they are helping residents exit to housing.
3. *Coordinate and standardize outreach efforts* by bringing together outreach teams and their key funders to develop agreements on a coordinated approach across all outreach efforts.
4. *Relaunch and complete work on a new governance structure* to answer critical questions and reach agreement on a new structure.

Participants at the community meeting were asked to prioritize these four areas of work and provide feedback on whether it was advisable or feasible for all to be undertaken now. Participants were also asked their opinion on what it would look like to fail to do this work well. Responses were gathered from

feedback given during a large group report out as well as written notes from tabletop discussions. This feedback is summarized below.

### **1. Community Capacity**

Participants had mixed reactions about taking on all four areas of work at the same time, but overall were optimistic about trying; even if all the work could not be completed in a short time frame. Chief among the feedback include concern for the importance of looking at the HMIS data in connection with this work, the need to focus on funding for these activities to be successful, and concerns about too many meetings. Many felt that all four areas of work were important to address and could be covered if there is dedicated leadership for each topic AND strong coordination across the topics. Problem Solving/CES and Outreach were noted to have leads in HSA and HSD already, which alleviates concerns with dedicated leadership. The Governance study committee could also be relaunched and some work combined with the Policy committee to further build out local leadership.

### **2. What Would Failure Look Like?**

Participants were asked to consider the issue inversely regarding what the community would have to do that would make efforts unsuccessful. Feedback included continue to work in silos and remain fragmented in homelessness efforts, feel paralyzed by the issues that need to be solved and do nothing, under-communicate with one another, continue having a lack of accountability for the work, and experience increases in homelessness despite efforts.

At the end of the meeting participants were asked to rank order their choices for which work area was highest priority. Rankings were very close with the top two choices being governance and housing-focused shelter and the next two choices being diversion/problem solving and outreach.

### **Next Steps**

The Santa Cruz County Human Services Department has agreed to convene a process to begin implementation of the recommendations relating to systemwide diversion and refining the Smart Path Coordinated Entry system. An initial meeting was held on September 11th and future small group conversations are planned; to be followed by a larger group input process prior to implementation.

The Baseline Assessment report will be presented to the County Board of Supervisors on October 8th. Following this presentation it is anticipated that the Governance committee will reconvene; with Focus Strategies facilitating this process and HSCO serving as the group's convener. The community seems very interested in moving forward with the recommendations on housing-focused shelter, so HSCO is exploring whether there is an entity that can convene a workgroup on this topic, with facilitation and technical assistance provided by Focus Strategies. Implementation of the recommendation on outreach may be deferred or could fold into existing County-led efforts on coordination of outreach.

The next community meeting will be held in December when results of the Focus Strategies System Wide Analytics (SWAP) process on system performance will be presented to stakeholders.