

Fullerton Launches Task Force with Goal to Fill Gaps in Mental Health & Homeless Care

The Fullerton City Council created a task force on homelessness and mental health services on Sept 20, 2011 to survey services currently available. The lifespan of the group will be 6 to 8 months, after which it will make recommendations to the council on how our city can better meet the needs of the severely mentally ill and homeless men and women on our streets.

The first meeting of the task force took place at the Fullerton Public Library on Thursday, Oct. 20. Speakers included Fullerton Interfaith Ministerial Association representatives Rev. Darrel McGowan and

Rabbi Ken Milhander; Kerry Gallaher of OCCCO; and Pam Keller of the Fullerton Collaborative discussing existing services, unmet needs, challenges and possible actions cities can take to improve the system of care.

Fullerton resident Rusty Kennedy of the OC Human Relations moderated the event and laid out the roadmap for future meetings which will be held on the first and third Thursday of each month, from 4pm to 6pm at the Fullerton Public Library Community Room.

All meetings are open to the public and include a time for public comment.

Upcoming meetings will include the following speakers and presentations:

•Nov 3: Shelter and Food providers' assessment of existing services, unmet needs, challenges, and possible actions cities can take to improve the system of care. Pam Lee, FIES; Larry Haynes, Mercy House; Natalie Tropay, Corp for Supportive Housing; and others

•Nov 17: Parent, family, and first responders' perspectives on mentally ill and homeless members. Ron Thomas, Janice DeLoof, Suzanne Serbin, Cpl. John DeCaprio, and others.

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At Left:
*Near the
Spray Pool at
Lemon Park,
a man rests
on a bench.*

*Many
homeless
people utilize
local parks
and libraries
during the
daytime -
awaiting the
seasonal
shelter's
opening at
sundown.*

PHOTO T.
DEMOSS

Task Force Seeks to Fill Gaps in Current Mental Health and Homeless Services

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•**Dec 1:** Lived Experience. Homeless and mentally ill people will share their life experiences.

•**Dec 15:** Behavioral Health Care assessment of existing services available, unmet needs, challenges, and possible actions cities can take to improve the system of care. Mary Hale, Mark Refowitz, Annette Mugrditchian and an independent psychiatrist.

•**Jan 5:** OC Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness and OC 2020 Commission. Kelly Lupro, Karen Roper, Barbara Jennings, Carolyn McInerney

•**Jan 19:** Deliberation on Recommendations Begins

•**Feb 2, Feb 16:** Meetings will continue as needed to finish a report to the City Council.

The October 20th meeting began with introductions of each audience member and each staff member present and then introductions of the task force members. Mr. Kennedy invited each member to dedicate the work they would be doing in honor of someone. Ron Thomas began by dedicating his work on the task force in honor of his son. As the introductions and dedications moved around the group, it was discovered that each task force member had a family member to dedicate their work to, including Kennedy.

Guidelines were established to maintain an atmosphere where progress could be made on the serious issues at hand. Civility is expected from all participants in all meetings at all times. Those who resort to yelling, profanity, personal attacks, or disregard of Robert's Rules of Order as exercised by the convener will be asked to leave.

A power point presentation laying out the objectives and participants was viewed. A suggestion to have Sgt. Jay DeCaprio who works with the homeless population added to the task force was considered. Objectives included: 1. Host forums to solicit public input; 2.

Prepare a base assessment of homelessness in Fullerton and survey mental health services available to residents of Fullerton and surrounding Orange County communities, including services offered by the City, the County of Orange, non-profit organizations, the faith based community, and other public or private organizations; 3. Identify best practices relative to homelessness and mental health currently observed in other communities; 4. Identify possible steps the City could take to build upon the homeless and mental health services already available.

5. Make recommendations to the City Council for further action.

Attendees at the first meeting included representatives (most of

Christian Church; Rabbi Ken Milhander, Temple Beth Tikvah; Barbara Johnson (retired founding director of FIES); Pam Keller, Fullerton Collaborative; Ellen Ahn, Executive Director, Korean Community Services; Kerry Gallagher, Organizer, OC Congregation Community Organization (OCCCO); Barbara Jennings, OC 2020 Board to End Homelessness; Theresa Harvey, Executive Director, Fullerton Chamber of Commerce; Additional Community Appointees include Ron Thomas, father of Kelly Thomas; and Fullerton residents Kitty Jaramillo; Janice DeLoof, NAMI OC; and Suzanne Serbin, Governors Commission State Mental Health Hospitals.

Also present were city staff members Al Zelinka, Rob Ferrier, Capt Alex Bastreri, Eloisa Espinoza, Joe Felz, Dan Hughes, Marueen Gebelein, Janelle Pasillas, Karen Morad, and Sylvia Palmer.

Kelly Thomas' mother Kathy was in the audience of about 15 community members. Mayor Pro-tem Don Bankhead and his wife Carol also attended.

Community Listening

Community Listening Conferences led by FIMA, OCCCO, and the Fullerton Collaborative will be convened as one of the first steps. The upcoming session will be at 2pm on Sunday Nov. 13 at Temple Beth Tikvah, 1600 N. Acacia, co-sponsored by Unitarian Universalist Church of Fullerton.

The sessions will include reflection about what our responsibility is to prevent homelessness and protect the mentally ill; discussion about what we are doing as individuals, organizations, governments and what we can do; and brainstorming about the ideal and what the city and county might be able to do.

Online Forum

A MindMixer online community forum will be set-up to gather input from interested individuals, including ideas, feedback, and discussion.



Folks line up at the Armory shelter on Brookhurst, run by Mercy House, for a hot meal, shower and shelter for the night.

PHOTO JERE GREENE

whom are also Fullerton residents) of groups which currently serve Fullerton including: Annette Mugrditchian, OC Behavioral Health; Pam Lee, Executive Director, Fullerton Interfaith Emergency Services (FIES); Carolyn McInerney, Administrative Manager, OC Executive Office; James Brooks from Armory Shelter, Mercy House; Fullerton Interfaith Ministerial Association members Rev. Darrel McGowan, First