

# San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department

## Homeless Outreach Proactive Enforcement



### 2016 Herman Goldstein Award



**John McMahon**  
**Sheriff - Coroner**

## **MISSION**

**The mission of H.O.P.E. is to balance proactive outreach with enforcement of the law, while connecting members of the homeless population with resources that may help them transition from homelessness. The ultimate goal is to reduce the rate of recidivism, incarceration, and reduce the current costs associated to homeless related crime.**

## **VISION**

**The vision of H.O.P.E. is to increase the quality of life for all citizens of San Bernardino County by reducing crime associated with the homeless population and subsequently saving tax payer costs and resources.**

## Homeless Outreach and Proactive Enforcement (HOPE)

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### Summary:

San Bernardino County has been experiencing a drastic increase in homeless individuals over the past ten years. Calls for law enforcement service have been skyrocketing and money spent in relation to the growing homeless problem continue to grow as well. Sheriff John McMahan identified that this issue should be addressed as it directly relates to quality of life concerns for the county's citizens. In January of 2014, McMahan assembled a team of sworn law enforcement to primarily focus on homelessness and a better way to deal with quality of life crimes from the law enforcement perspective.

The typical law enforcement approach to homelessness was to conceal the problem, rather than work on a solution. Over the years, it was the norm to receive the transient call for service, respond to the scene and arrest the subject for one of a variety of misdemeanor or infraction violations, and subsequently take the subject to jail. The subject would then spend approximately four to six hours in the jail and be released with a promise to appear at a future court date. The subject would then return to the same location and engage in the same behavior. This was a cycle that repeated itself over and over. The subject would then miss the scheduled court date, and the judge would issue an arrest warrant, thus causing the cycle to continue as well. The subject would receive a fine, which they could not pay, or serve several days in jail as punishment, where the county would then absorb the costs to house and feed the incarcerated subject.

The HOPE team analyzed the costs of this vicious cycle that only continued to perpetuate the problem. Nothing improved in the community. The homeless subject is no better off, just a cog in the wheel

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of justice. The cycle of recidivism continued with both law enforcement and the homeless repeating the same day over and over. The money that is spent to continue this method of policing could instead house the homeless, and eliminate the repetitive catch and release practice currently used.

It is the HOPE team's mission to conduct the outreach and collaborate with the service providers in the county to better link the homeless community to resources. This approach can and has reduced the county's homeless population through a smarter practice.

### **Description:**

#### **A. Scanning**

Homelessness is an extremely complex social issue and there is a very fine line when it comes to criminalization. Across America homeless affects all communities. In San Bernardino County homeless has had a small decrease over the last few years, but an increase of calls for service for law enforcement. This could be due to the struggling local economy, poverty effecting a large population, and not having affordable housing. Which remains an ongoing crisis in San Bernardino County.

Most often the community relies on law enforcement to deal with situations and with that law enforcement responds to many quality of life type calls for service. These calls can range from loitering, trespassing, and at times more serious calls for service. This often ties up law enforcement for long periods of time and offers no options besides incarceration. Using a non-traditional community policing approach it returns patrol deputies to the street.

Sheriff John McMahon implemented a pilot program of the HOPE model in July of 2013. A deputy sheriff, with the assistance of two reserve deputies, were tasked with addressing the homeless issues in the greater San Bernardino area. A significant rise in calls for service in regards to panhandling, drunk in public, loitering and other minor offenses were noticed and addressed. This pilot

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program then transitioned into a full time team to address the homeless population county wide. The current team consists of a Sergeant, Corporal, and two Deputy Sheriffs.

Calls for service from concerned citizens and local politicians brought this issue to light, with the perception of the areas not wanting to be known as a haven for transient activity. The initial thought was the homeless population was growing in the area and that they were now spilling onto the streets, engaging in criminal behavior. Many whom have fallen into chronic homeless due to drugs, alcohol, and mental health diagnosis.

Looking further into homelessness it was determined that in several areas of the county petty crime rates were higher where there was a higher population of homeless inhabited. Often this population commits crimes such as theft to survive. Based on statistics from 2012 there were nearly 20,000 calls for service related to transient population.

### **B. Analysis**

Through implementing the H.O.P.E. team it allowed the team to focus on areas of homelessness throughout the county. One of the biggest growths was the panhandling problem that had escalated in the previous year which led to the bigger question and concern on whether the homeless population had also grown. Through simple observation, it was also apparent that the homeless in this general area of the county was also growing, or becoming more visible to the public. The general consensus, however, was the majority of panhandlers observed did not coincide with the homeless subjects seen on the streets and in the alleyways.

The panhandlers that were observed on a regular basis and those that the deputies contacted had become increasingly aggressive in their approach. This was the main concern of the citizens calling in the incidents.

The subjects were approaching vehicles stopped at the traffic lights and coming up to the window demanding money instead of simply asking or

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waiting. This is where the criminal investigations increased, due to the general public being in fear for their safety.

After the program began dealing with these problematic subjects, it was discovered many of these aggressive panhandlers were indeed not homeless, but instead were capitalizing on the quick cash making opportunities available at these prime locations. The initial estimate was approximately sixty percent of the panhandlers encountered not being homeless. This helped identify the panhandling problem in the area was not directly related to the homeless problem.

What was learned is the perception of the community did not realize the underlying conditions of homeless individuals and assumed the panhandlers were homeless. Once the problem was addressed it was found that the chronic homeless population was often dealt with as criminal activity and offered no resources to move beyond homelessness. The focus then moved into two directions to better serve the homeless population and to share with the community to not enable panhandlers.

### **C. Response**

The HOPE team set a series of goals in order to better address both the problems causing a quality of life issue in the community. The team set out to first identify the resources available to help the homeless in the area. By contacting these service providers, HOPE was able to assess each organization's specific areas of assistance. For example, some groups could assist in housing, while others focused primarily on food and clothing. Working in conjunction with resources provided several options when contacting homeless individuals in the county.

HOPE team members set up meetings with all of the homeless service providers to explain the Sheriff's perspective on addressing homeless related issues from the law enforcement perspective. Many resources were apprehensive at first, due to the long and often tenuous relationships known to

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occur between law enforcement and the homeless population.

Partnering and collaborating was key to building these relationships. Upon researching the existing community policing programs addressing homelessness throughout the country, it was clearly apparent collaboration was the top priority to become successful. When bringing this philosophy to the county Interagency Council on Homelessness, it was also clear that collaboration had not existed previously. The county listed over 350 homeless service providers available, however, only about ten actually communicated outside of their own organization to help address the problem. Also, another obstacle that the HOPE team quickly realized was that the team was the first to address the homeless issue from the law enforcement perspective at a county level instead at the city level. Another barrier being that San Bernardino County is the largest in area of any county in the United States. The county encompasses over 20,000 square miles that covers vast desert regions, mountain communities and densely populated urban environments.

One of the first tasks of the HOPE team was a simple outreach mission. Going out into the field and actually finding and identifying the homeless was crucial. The homeless were not going to come find us or services. One of the benefits of the HOPE team, instead of the typical patrol officer, was the softer approach. The HOPE team was not looking for homeless subjects to arrest or harass into moving on, instead it was simply an identification process where key attributes were identified. By learning that a homeless subject was a military veteran, or had a history of mental illness, or an addict all helped find the subject the proper program or resource specifically designed to their needs.

Partnering with various non-profit organizations, faith based groups, and government entities was crucial in linking the homeless to available services. The chronic homeless subjects we encounter are not actively searching for help or services. If the HOPE team can facilitate as the middle man in linking these hard to connect folks to appropriate services, it is a win-win for both the homeless and the agency offering the assistance.

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During the implementation process in the beginning phases, the most pressing difficulties encountered by the team was simply learning all of the service providers and resources spread throughout our 20,000+ square miles and truly discovering the actual services they provide. Many of the providers have been working in a silo and not collaborating. The team led several meetings to bring these providers together to better serve the needs of the population. By doing this it assisted in offering services and speeding up the process for homeless to move beyond homelessness.

Working with other programs around the county it was apparent the law enforcement had to take the lead and set the example. With over 60% of the homeless population suffering from mental health issues, drug addictions, and alcoholism it was important to immediately team with non-traditional partners. The team worked with County Behavioral Health to build a team of psychologist, clinicians, and case workers to best serve the community. This lead to an ongoing partnership with Behavioral Health that rides together in the field with the team.

### **D. Assessment:**

Since the implementation of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department HOPE team homelessness in the county has dropped over 20%. Having a dedicated team to provide outreach to the chronic homeless builds ongoing relationships and trust to assist the individuals to move beyond homelessness. Often homeless population deters from taking services because they do not know where to start, are embarrassed, or have no trust in the system.

Throughout the county there are over 20 contract cities and eleven police departments. The HOPE model has worked beyond the traditional barriers of Sheriff and Police and have built relations to offer services in each city within the county. Since HOPE began eight of the police departments within the county have implemented their own teams and work in collaboration with the Sheriff's Department.

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One of the most successful operations was in the City of Victorville area where over seventy five homeless lived along the Mojave River. This area was where traditionally homeless were asked to inhabit over the past twenty years. Over a year and a half the HOPE team continually identified and offered services to the homeless population. Working with numerous agencies nearly all the population was offered housing or other services. During the last six months we began closing areas of private property from inhabitation and worked with the city to clean up the debris.

As the closures continued all of the population were continually offered resources at outreach events. These events were held in a nearby park where the resources were brought to them on a weekly basis. In the end only 22 remained homeless from the original 75 identified. Approximately 30 were housed through various housing programs and 23 returned to family to move beyond homeless. The areas that were cleared still remain free of homeless inhabitation and encampments today.

The stating of all contacts has been instrumental in showing the effectiveness of using a non-traditional community policing method. Since inception the team has contacted over 2100 homeless individuals, assisted over 1400, and housed over 500 homeless individuals, which is over 20% of all contacts made.

The dedication of the HOPE team has assisted the county in numerous ways. Not only connecting homeless but partnering resources. In December of 2014 the HOPE team was instrumental in bringing the veteran service providers together. With the federal focus on Ending Veteran Homelessness it was proven that to reach this goal partnership were essential. This led to the San Bernardino County Homeless Veteran Workgroup, the workgroup consists of service providers, VA, County VA, elected officials, and law enforcement. After the workgroup began in July of 2015 the County Board of Supervisors signed a proclamation to End Veteran Homelessness within one year. The goal was met by December 31st, 2015 and over 400 homeless veterans were identified and housed.

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The HOPE team continues its efforts on a weekly basis. This is a paradigm shift for law enforcement and teams are beginning around the nation. Building relations with community have proven in San Bernardino County that it can be effective in reducing homelessness. The time and efforts focused on building relationships with law enforcement and the homeless population has changed hundreds of lives, saved lives, and built a better way of community policing. The outstanding work of the HOPE team has led to being recognized by the California Attorney General, California League of Associated Counties, and National Association of Counties.

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**Agency and Officer Information:**

**San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department  
655 E Third St  
San Bernardino, California  
92415  
909-387-3545**

**Sheriff John McMahon**

**Captain Frank Bell**

**Lieutenant Robert McCoy**

**Sergeant Matt Yost**

**Corporal Reginald Pahia**

**Deputy Jeffrey Collins**

**Deputy Michael Jones**

**Deputy Branden Davault**

**Deputy Aaron Halloway**

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### Appendices:

### H.O.P.E. Statistics Thru 2015

#### Total Stats County Wide

Jan 2014-Dec 2015

Contacts	1401	
Male	945	67%
Female	454	33%
Mental Health	511	36%
Veteran	175	12%
Assisted	767	54%
Referred	461	33%
Housed	267	19%
Resource Guide	1023	

#### 2015 Total Stats County Wide

Contacts	985	
Male	585	59%
Female	400	41%
Mental Health	345	35%
Veteran	95	10%
Assisted	542	55%
Referred	291	29%
Housed	214	22%
Resource Guide	649	

Self-Resolved From 2014 385

#### 2014 Total Stats County Wide

Contacts	487	
Male	360	74%
Female	127	26%
Mental Health	166	34%
Veteran	80	16%
Assisted	225	46%
Referred	170	34%
Housed	53	10%
Resource Guide	374	



**Mr Cravens was contacted over 15 times by the HOPE team. The continued contacts helped Cravens connect with the VA and ultimately after over 10 years of homeless get a house of his own.**

**Mr Butler was a habitual transient in Rancho Cucamonga. Butler was homeless for 23 years. Over the period he had been arrested over 500 times for drunk in public. The HOPE team made several contacts before Butler agreed to receive help for his addiction. Butler relapsed but the Hope team continued contacting him and he is now housed and has remained sober for over six months.**



**One of the most successful parts of the program is the collaboration with other agencies and our elected officials. Being able to contact and assist throughout the community is a major part of the success.**



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### PRESS RELEASE

DATE/TIME: April 13, 2015/ 0800-1400

INCIDENT: Mojave Riverbed Closure

LOCATION: Mojave Riverbed, south of Stoddard Wells Rd., west of Interstate 15

SUSPECT(S): N/A

VICTIM(S): N/A

**SUMMARY:** On April 13, 2015, the Victorville City Police Department, Code Enforcement Division, and the Sheriff's Department Homeless Outreach Proactive Enforcement (H.O.P.E.) team enforced the closure of the Mojave Riverbed west of the I-15 freeway and south of Stoddard Wells Rd. The closure was in response to serious public safety concerns and complaints from private property owners and other residents regarding the enormous amount of trash, RV trailers, abandoned vehicles, and other structures that have accumulated in the area. The closure was preceded by 12 months of collaborative outreach by the Sheriff's H.O.P.E. team and other service providers that focused on linking the riverbed homeless population with housing vouchers and other available resources. With the closure in effect, approximately 25 people that had been unlawfully camping in this private property section of the riverbed left voluntarily, removing approximately 15 RV trailers with them. Four vehicles were towed from the riverbed and one subject who refused to leave was arrested for PC 602 - trespassing.

Victorville City Code Enforcement posted "No Trespassing" signs, and erected gated entrances restricting access into the riverbed in an effort to deter vehicle traffic from entering the area. With the closure in effect, the collaborative effort will shift to maintaining enforcement of the closure and removing the large amounts of trash and debris that had been collected and left behind by the homeless population. The existing condition of the riverbed, with its extensive sanitation, biohazard and trash issues, will be the primary focus now moving forward with the pending clean up, with the goal being to restore this area back to its previous beauty.



Board of Supervisors  
County of San Bernardino

JOSIE GONZALES  
SUPERVISOR, FIFTH DISTRICT



**To: The Herman Goldstein Award Committee**

**This letter is in support of County of San Bernardino Sheriff's Homeless Outreach Proactive Enforcement (H.O.P.E.) team. The purpose of the H.O.P.E team is to engage the homeless population through positive proactive enforcement. As the first mobile homeless team of its kind in the State of California, the H.O.P.E. team has served as a local, state, and national model, thus setting a standard for other counties to follow.**

**Since its inception two years ago, the H.O.P.E. team has had contact with over 2,100 homeless individuals, assisted over 1,400, and housed over 500 through partnerships with community based homeless providers, faith based organizations, and other non-profit agencies. The H.O.P.E. team has proven itself to be an effective and sustainable model in reducing the homeless population throughout the 21,000 square miles in the County of San Bernardino.**

**As Chairperson of the San Bernardino County Interagency Council on Homelessness, I can attest to the fact that the H.O.P.E. team has made substantial contributions in assisting the County of San Bernardino achieve a twenty percent reduction in our chronic homeless population. They exemplify all that is best about problem-oriented policing through community partnerships, and dedication to evidence based practice, including the "Housing First" model supported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.**

**The H.O.P.E. team has my wholehearted support. Their visionary approach has proven to be very successful. I urge you to recognize them for their good work.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josie Gonzales".

**Josie Gonzales  
Fifth District Supervisor**

