

# THE HOMELESS OUTREACH PROGRAM

The City of Fort Lauderdale was experiencing a dramatic increase in the number of individuals who were suffering from a crisis of homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health. These crisis', whether real or perceived, were impacting the quality of life for the residents of the City of Fort Lauderdale along with the crisis individuals. The Fort Lauderdale Homeless Outreach Unit was created and Officer Jaime Costas and Officer Steven Kraft were tasked with the objective of improving the quality of life conditions for both the residents and those individuals affected with a given crisis.

Although the objective was to improve the quality of life for area residents, businesses and tourism, consideration had to be sensitive to the respect and dignity of those individuals who were actively in a crisis.

The following list of problems were recognized and needed to be addressed:

Panhandling in major intersections that created fear among drivers and exposed panhandlers to accident injuries or deaths.

- Tourist beaches frequented by homeless individuals sleeping and camping.
- Homeless camps openly created on public and private property.
- Disorderly intoxicated individuals sitting at business entrances.
- Open use of alcoholic beverages in public.

- Petty crime to support alcohol and substance abuse issues.
- Abuse and assault upon homeless individuals whether by area youth or other homeless individuals.
- Lack of social service support.
- Difficulty with gaining entry to alcohol/substance abuse programs.
- Lack of housing assistance upon jail release.
- Lack of understanding and education within the residential, business, and police community in terms of crisis recognition, de-escalation, and assistance.

Faced with the wide diversity of issues, it became obvious that partnerships and teamwork would be necessary for a solid program foundation in order to achieve a successful outcome. Many private, county and state agencies had been addressing these issues unsuccessfully for years due to a lack of communication and partnership. A vast amount of funding, resources, and knowledge is available through compassionate programs, but success will require a knitting of these efforts. The true success of these partnerships will be evident in the reduction of issues with quality of life, petty crime, and misused social services, and will further be enhanced with the teamwork of private, county, and state agencies.

The Homeless Outreach Unit began building partnerships, and realized that the first step would need to be the documentation and tracking of these crisis

individuals along with the services rendered. A partnership was created between the non profit Task Force For Ending Homelessness, Inc., (TFFEH), and the neighboring Palm Beach County who had a quality HUD data program. The TFFEH, Inc. agreed to supply a social worker while Palm Beach County created and supplied and adapted HUD tracking program. The Homeless Outreach Unit created a shelter services pickup location, and sent flyers to the medical hospitals, behavioral health hospitals, social service contractors, and area detention facilities. Additional partnerships were created with detoxification programs and substance abuse programs in order to navigate individuals from discharge to an awaiting shelter program. The Homeless Outreach Unit along with the TFFEH, Inc. created documentation for disbursement to individuals in need of assistance which included information and directions to veteran services, social security, food stamp assistance, mental health medication and elderly services. At this point, The Homeless Outreach Unit along with the TFFEH, Inc., began monitoring the streets, alleys, and wooded locations for crisis individuals. The program began in the year 2000 with 2300 individuals contacted and 1300 placed into shelter assistance. As the years continued, the numbers of homeless and mental health consumers increased to the year 2007 which resulted in 5,800 individuals contacted and 4,000 placed into shelters. The Fort Lauderdale Police Department saw not only a tremendous decrease in the recidivism of municipal ordinance arrests, but the quality of life issues began to diminish to a more manageable rate. The Homeless Outreach Unit began step number two, in which it was believed that education would be a very important feature to bring

understanding of the conditions and situations involved with individuals in crisis to those that are directly impacted. The Homeless Outreach Unit partnered with the National Alliance on Mental Illness and became a coordinator for the Crisis Intervention Team, (CIT), in order to educate the police agencies in Broward County. The Homeless Outreach Unit was successful in partnering with agencies across the state by assisting and directing them into their own homeless outreach program. The Homeless Outreach program began actively engaging in community speaking forums for local churches, businesses, and home owner associations with the expressed purpose of education and understanding of the scope of homeless/mental health crisis. The Fort Lauderdale Police Department further implemented a brief classroom block into the police officer's annual in-house training for the sole purpose of informing them of the homeless/mental health crisis, and additionally required all new police recruits ride along with the Homeless Outreach Unit.

The Homeless Outreach Unit is continuing to move forward to impact individuals in crisis through a new program titled, "Missing Link", in which businesses offer financial assistance for reunification and job assistance. The local shelters have progressed beyond offering only sleeping quarters. By adding dental reconstruction, hygiene preparation, job skill training, and counseling to their list of services.

The success of this program has not only reduced jail recidivism and quality of life issues, it further enhanced the direction of police work within the police department by assisting and serving individuals at a time of true crisis. This was confirmed when the Fort Lauderdale Police Department was recognized as the number one city in the country for homeless assistance by the National Coalition for the Homeless.



*Venice of America*

CITY OF  
**FORT LAUDERDALE**

---

**HOMELESS OUTREACH UNIT**

**OFFICER JAIME COSTAS  
OFFICER STEVEN KRAFT**

Over the last 12 months, the members of the Homeless Outreach Unit have made contact with 5,884 homeless individuals in the City of Fort Lauderdale through both proactive interaction and at your outreach contact location. Through your hard work and determination, you were able to place 3,998 of these individuals into various shelters throughout the City and Broward County.

The above referenced statistics are but one avenue through which the Homeless Outreach Unit made positive and effective contributions to the City and its citizens. Throughout the year, your unit taught classes, held lectures, addressed the individual concerns of citizens and assisted in the training of other local and out of state law enforcement agencies in the area of homeless outreach. Furthermore, the Homeless Outreach Unit continued to further the implementation of the Missing Link Program, uniting homeless persons with their family.

Because of your determination, compassion, professionalism and dedication to duty, you were able to reduce the number of homeless individuals and families on the streets. Your efforts have provided the possibility for some to have a fresh start on life. Keep up the great work!

Franklin C. Adderley  
Chief of Police

**POLICE DEPARTMENT**

1300 WEST BROWARD BOULEVARD, FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA 33312  
TELEPHONE:(954) 828-5700, FAX (954) 828-6001

[www.fortlauderdale.gov](http://www.fortlauderdale.gov)

