

Coachella Valley approach to solving homelessness has proven results so far

V. Manuel Perez and Les Zendle, Special to The Desert Sun Published 8:00 a.m. PT Sept. 22, 2018



(Photo: Omar Ornelas, The Desert Sun-USA TODAY NETWORK)

A 55-year-old man who ended up homeless amid a family dispute gets connected to social services, reconnects with his daughter and finds stable housing.

A young family in Indio — living on one income and dealing with rising costs from the unexpected birth of twins — falls behind on rent. With a little help, they avoid the prospect of living on the streets or searching for emergency shelter.

A couple, also in their mid-fifties, finds themselves in a Desert Hot Springs homeless encampment after their RV breaks down. With assistance, they move their repaired vehicle into an RV park with full services.

Just before Christmas, a pregnant woman, with other kids at home, gets help avoiding eviction.

EDITORIAL: [The valley should accelerate Housing First effort \(/story/opinion/editorials/2018/05/25/riverside-veteran-homelessness-win-coachella-valley-housing-first-expansion/646106002/\)](#)

These are real stories of people who have been helped through CV Housing First, and they're powerful reminders of the successes that can happen when we come together as one Coachella Valley.

But you don't have to just trust our assessment of it: An independent analysis by the Health Assessment and Research for Communities (HARC, Inc.) was just released. Between July 1, 2017, and June 30, CV Housing First served 401 clients — and more than eight out of every 10 people exited the program to permanent housing. Another 11 percent went to temporary housing.

And they're completing the program with better financial situations, too, as HARC found that clients' average monthly income more than doubled from \$629 to \$1,496.

We're ending homelessness for people of all backgrounds. According to the study, the average client is 38 years old, but the program has helped a 94-year-old as well as infants. About half of the clients are female and about half are Hispanic/Latino. Some 18 percent have experienced domestic violence. And most CV Housing First clients — about 70 percent — have been homeless for more than 12 months out of the last three years, indicating long-term homelessness.

CV Housing First is based on the philosophy that if someone has a stable housing situation, they can instead focus their attention on issues like maintaining employment, addressing addiction or keeping their family together. It includes an array of services — such as rapid re-housing, homelessness prevention and special needs services — so help is customized to the person's needs.

The shift away from a shelter-based model was introduced by the late Riverside County Supervisor John J. Benoit, and it is a philosophy that we've been proud to champion. This program wouldn't be possible without the leadership by the Coachella Valley Association of Governments Homelessness Committee and the work of the nonprofit Path of Life Ministries, which is contracted for CV Housing First and is leveraging related services.

This is a true collaborative effort. Recognizing that mental health and homelessness have direct ties, the Desert Healthcare District/ Foundation stepped up with an unprecedented dollar-for-dollar match of CVAG members that contributed at least \$103,000. To date, CVAG has secured over \$2 million in funding — allowing the program to expand beyond initial expectations.

With continued community support and funding, we will continue to hear success stories from CV Housing First.

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