Homeless in Long Beach:

A Study of the Causes of Homelessness and the Help Available to the Affected

A Field Research, Interview, and Text Research Project

By

The research team of

Jose Camacho and Susana Montijo

For

Dr. Adrian Novotny

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Introduction

This paper is an assessment of the city of Long Beach in its efforts to resolve its homeless problem. Since the study is about homeless people, a clear definition of homeless and other terms used throughout this paper must be provided. Homeless is any person who lives either on the streets or in a homeless facility. Those people who have been homeless for a year or more or several times in the past few years are defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development as chronically homeless. This study is limited to the city of Long Beach and all the data and affiliations mentioned are local and only apply to this city.

Interviews, case studies and text research are the methodology for this assessment. To be able to give a grade to the city on its ability to handle this problem, we needed to know about the organization and facilities available to the homeless, as well as the services they offer. The organizations researched for this paper include the Christian Outreach In Action, The Multiservice center, and the Long Beach Rescue Mission. In order to make the assessment as fair and balanced as possible, we also contacted and interviewed various homeless people, who we will call subjects in this paper, to get their point of view and their opinion about the help offered by the city. Interviews from several city officials and descriptions about some of the facilities that we toured are also included.

Initially, it was difficult to contact key people. We reached answering machines or got referred to others. It seemed everyone was busy. With a lot of perseverance, however we were able to make contact. One of the successful strategies involved personal contacts. We found going to the places and calling by phone beforehand to be the most effective. Emails only work once in a while. Overall, we found that this issue was assessable and not purposefully secretive. Almost everyone we talked to was willing to give information and help to obtain more
information. A major challenge was that we seemed to be calling during a busy time of the year because most organizations are filling all the paper work needed to receive grants from the government. One of our interviewees, the director of Human services in charge of the homeless count this year, was especially busy. Being persistent in calling did pay off.

There have been time constraints because of school and work. One needs to have all the questions and work organized in order to be able to better utilize time. We have worked our way around this by doing most of our work together on Fridays, which is our only school-free day during the weekdays and by finding time to call people between classes. Another obstacle was working on the paper while doing other classes' homework and studying for tests and quizzes.

**Demographics**

Statistics

The City of Long Beach 2004 Homeless Assessment provided us with most of the demographics and other statistics mentioned in this section. This assessment has two parts, the "City of Long Beach 2003 Homeless Count" and the "City of Long Beach 2003 Homeless Survey." The homeless count was conducted on the 12th of March, 2003, from 5 am until early evening. The count was done through the streets, homeless facilities, and in non-residential homeless programs throughout the city. The people counted were those residing in their cars, the park, the sidewalks, abandoned buildings, emergency shelters, and in transitional housing. The count was made by the Department of Health and Human Services who consulted with the Institute for Urban Research and Development, a research organization. More than 300 volunteers also helped, as well as many other current or formerly homeless people to help with the count on the streets. Also, about 100 more persons representing the many shelters and food
programs in the city, counted homeless persons at those sites. All this culminated in the first citywide
homeless count of Long Beach and the data collected is summarized in the following paragraphs.

Long Beach is the 5th largest city in California with one of the highest homeless populations of about 5,845 homeless people on any given day, but since many of them fall in and out of homelessness, the actual number of people who became homeless during one calendar year is about 20,176 people. Some of them are only in transition, but others are in a state called chronic homelessness, which is when a person is homeless for many months or years and more than one time a year. 3,776 of those people are adults while the other 2,069 are children. Men make up 71.5% of all homeless adults or about 2,699 people. On the other hand women only represent 28.4% or 1,072 people of the adult homeless population of Long Beach. Children under the age of eighteen are 35.4% or 2,069 people of the homeless population. Usually these children are part of the nearly 795 families homeless in Long Beach on a given day.

The majority of the adult homeless population or about 45.7% or 1,726 people are African American. Whites make up 29.4% or 1,110 people, while Latinos comprise 15.9% or 600 people. 3.2% or 121 are Asian and only 2.5% or 94 were recorded as Native Americans or Alaskan Natives. The remaining 3.3% or 125 people stated other on the count. Although the majority of the adults counted were baby boomers, 359 were young adults between the age of eighteen to twenty four, and 227 were seniors of sixty two years of age or older.
Causes of Homelessness

The second part of the 2004 homeless assessment is the "City of Long Beach 2003 Homeless survey" which was done during the four month period of April through July in 2001. It was administered by thirteen persons, including five members of the Long Beach based Community Action Network, a group made up of homeless persons, three graduate students from Cal State Long Beach, two students from Long Beach City College, and three community residents. 1,018 homeless adults were surveyed, giving a representative sample of the different sub-populations of Long Beach. The findings from the survey are described below.

About 58.7% of the survey respondents are residents of Long Beach, which means that more than 40% of the city's homeless are from nearby cities and probably from other states. The survey also found some of the main reasons why so many people are without a home in this city. These reasons include lack of income, domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, and being release from foster care.

About forty percent of the city's homeless had a monthly income of $224 or less which is far less than the cost of rent for single room occupancy. Nearly all the respondents earn less than $800 a month, which means that to rent a home, most of these people would have to spend all their money in rent and they wouldn't have money to eat or pay for utilities. According to the government, affordable housing is defined as costing less than thirty percent of a household's gross income. Of all the homeless people surveyed, only seventeen percent answered that they didn't have any income. One third said that they lost their last job because they were laid off, another third said that they lost it because of medical conditions and other similar reasons, while the other third answered that they lost it because either they quit or got fired.
About 38.3% of the women surveyed acknowledged that they had been abused or mistreated by a spouse or intimate partner and/or by a parent or relative. A few men also acknowledged being abused or mistreated, but in their case nearly half by a parent or relative. One of the biggest problems in Long Beach is probably mental illness. According to the survey, nearly 27.3% of the homeless adult population reported symptoms of mental illness. The people under this category experience psychotic symptoms, mood disorder, depressive symptoms, or bipolar symptoms. The symptoms are in some cases alone and in others it is a combination of a few of them. Almost 85% of the people with psychotic symptoms are not being treated at the moment.

Another big problem in the homeless population is alcohol and substance abuse. About 60.6% of all respondents are currently using alcohol and/or drugs, while another 25.6% stated that they used alcohol and/or drugs in the past but were not using them now, and only 13.8% said they have never used any drugs. The need for healthcare is both a cause and a consequence of homelessness. This is because without any health care, chronic health problems go untreated and it prevents the person from getting or keeping a job (Assessment, 37). People with any serious health problem are the most likely to become chronically homeless because their health problems impedes them from getting off the streets (Assessment 38). About 30.4% or nearly a third of the respondents had "persistent" health care needs, but only 23.5% had received treatment in the past year when the survey was administered. Dental care is even scarcer, with only one out often respondents answering that they receive dental care during the past year. There are about 3.1% of homeless adults and teenagers that are HIV+, and although 71.9% of them have received services for their disease, more is needed.
Although the above data are accurate, they only reflect the people counted and surveyed at a specific time in 2003. In order to have a more accurate count that reflects the homeless people in Long Beach, periodic counts such as the one made this year (2005), should be examined and compared to the data collected on the 2003 count. If more counts occur in the future, they should also be taken into consideration and they might reflect how well the city is really doing to help resolve this issue of homelessness. In other words if the number of homeless decreases, the city is doing a great job, but if it increases, there is a problem. Another factor is the time the count is performed because the 2005 count was done during rainy days so it was very difficult to find homeless people since they were hiding from the rain.

Information more recent than the count is information we have gathered from people who work with the homeless issue. The major reason for homelessness as we have gathered from them is the lack of living wages and affordable housing.

**Organizations/Interviews**

Christian Outreach in Action

There are many organizations whose main focus is to help the homeless of Long Beach, but since there are still thousands of people not being helped by these services a lot more is needed. The Christian Outreach in Action was the first of the organizations that we contacted. They were really friendly and approachable. We didn't even have to make an appointment, because we arrived one day and waited until the Executive director that we were going to interview finished some paperwork and the interview started. It happened so fast that we were a little unprepared, but we managed to ask important questions. From the interview we learned of all the services that the COA offers. They give breakfast meals and dinners Monday through
Friday. On Tuesday and Thursday there are grocery distributions for families with low income, and they don't have to be homeless. On Mondays and Wednesdays there are clothing distributions and every month they receive 300 Metro tokens to distribute for the homeless.

The Christian Outreach in Action also offers a Men's Transitional Housing program which ministers up to six men who have been homeless or incarcerated (Re:Action). These men live in a small house next to COA and besides receiving counseling to find out what they need and a twelve step program to help them get through, they are also the work force in the COA, serving the meals, distributing the clothes and groceries, and fixing anything that needs fixing around the shelter. This is a great program that can take men off the street and give them the push to stay off of them forever. More programs like these should be implemented by the government. A similar transitional house program is also offered for women with children. Many of these women have been abused and need help to get back on their feet and this program offer them with that opportunity.

The COA receives most funding from donations from private organizations, churches, and individuals, as well as some grants by the government. Sometimes they receive forgivable loans, which don't have to be paid after seven years if the organization keeps working to help the community and its homeless people. Finally we learned that most of the people the COA helps are referred to them by many churches. In the end of the interview, she gave us a newsletter of the organization as well as some statistics and her business card in case we needed to ask her anything else about COA.
Long Beach Rescue Mission

Although the Long Beach Rescue Mission was one of the first places we located, we didn't interview anyone or tour any of their facilities. The reason for that was because when we went to one of their locations, the Samaritan House, without an appointment, the receptionist told us that if we wanted to speak with anyone we needed to make an appointed by phone. We called several times but we only reached answering machines, so we shifted our focus towards other organizations. Almost at the end of our research, we were given two phone numbers and names of people from the LBRM that could help us, but due to our time constraint we couldn't contact them. Fortunately, they have a website with some important information about them.

The Long Beach Rescue Mission has two locations in Long Beach, the Samaritan House and the Lydia House. The Samaritan House was created in 1972 in response to the increasing homelessness in the community. In 1983, it was replaced with a clean, two-story building that offers 120 beds, dining tables, kitchen, bathrooms with showers, clothing room, laundry, chapel, counseling and administrative offices, and an outside patio (LBRM website). Lydia House was established in 1973 and became the city's first shelter for homeless women and their children. It was replaced by another two-story building which provides beds, a playroom for the children, bathrooms, living room, dining room, counseling office, kitchen and an outside patio (LBRM website). It is only for women who have been battered, mothers with children, and women that need help to overcome their personal problems. These two facilities have helped thousands of people over the years and their funding comes from private donors in the community.
Multi-service Center

The Multi-service Center is actually a collection of fourteen different nonprofit agencies that provide various homeless services. We managed to get a tour of the facilities as well as some interviews with the coordinator of the Multi-service Center. The facilities are very well kept and they offer some services such as showers, laundry, and transportation as well as many other services through the fourteen agencies residing inside. The Department of Health and Human Services provides services such as street outreach, intake reception, housing coordination services, supportive case management, and comprehensive assessment. The Atlantic Recovery Services helps youth and adult in drug and/or alcohol recovery to find permanent housing. Beyond Shelter helps family with transitional and permanent housing services, life-skills training and homeless prevention. Goodwill Industries provides employment preparation training courses, vocational assessment and job placement. The Institute for Urban Research and Development is working on the Project Achieve, which is supposed to be a fifteen-nine-bed year-round shelter. The MHA or Mental Health Association is there to help people with mental problems by giving them treatment, and housing placement for the chronically mentally ill. The New Image Emergency Shelter provides HIV services, motel and food vouchers, and other services. The Department of Health and Human Service provides health education and screening for adults and testing for STD and HIV. The SAF or Substance Abuse Foundation is a detox program to help those people that abuse drugs and alcohol. The Children's Clinic provides childcare for homeless families, as well as healthcare for children. Some of the services available for veterans include transitional and permanent housing, work reentry programs, and an employment center, all provided by the US Veterans Initiative. Those are some of the agencies available at the Multi-service Center.
Overall most of the agencies and organizations we researched were very helpful and cooperative. For the most part, they didn’t seem to withhold information and were very helpful in recommending more people for our research. I would give the city a “B” on cooperation. While most if not all of the agencies we looked at seemed to be doing a good job at helping the homeless, their biggest obstacle is funding which comes from government grants and private donations. The best programs, such as those that provide transitional housing as well as counseling and skill training for homeless seem to be the best choices to help the homeless but these programs can only accommodate a very limited portion of the homeless in Long Beach. But to make a reasonable assessment of any of these agencies, we need to listen to the people they are trying to help, the homeless.

Case Studies

When doing research on the homeless situation in Long Beach, it would be incomplete if we didn’t include their voices. To understand their situation better and to receive another point of view about the city’s efforts to solve this problem, we interviewed six homeless persons of diverse backgrounds and with completely different stories. All of them were really nice and cooperative and very willing to share their stories. To keep them anonymous, they will be referred to as subjects.

Subject 1 is an African American adult in his late 20s or early 30s. He has been homeless since December of last year. He usually attends the Long Beach Rescue Mission for food and shelter and he believes that the shelter is doing an okay job. He studied in Political Science in Cal State Long Beach. He was a Real Estate Loan Officer when he lost his job and ended up on the street. He says he gets three meals a day and if there was something the city could do to help,
it would be to build a year round shelter since right now almost none are open throughout the year.

The second subject we interviewed was a middle-aged white man who had been homeless for about a year. He said he didn't like shelters because they were too "stuffy" and "crowded" so it wasn't a surprise that he rated their services as bad. He graduated from high school in 78'. When he was young his left eye had to be operated on and he lost part of his vision in that eye. He used to work on shipping and delivering products until he got laid off. Then his identifications were stolen on the street so he couldn't get a job without the proper identification. Now that he has multiple sclerosis and other health problems such as pain in the hips and shoulders, as well as some bleeding feet due to all those problems it is nearly impossible for him to get a job and keep it. He believes that what the city should be doing to help him and others is creating housing assistance. Then he added that the city should also clean up the parks where they stay because he usually sees a lot of trash and that those aren't living conditions for people. He gave the city an overall grade of D- or F.

Our subject three was a friend of subject two and he started talking to us. He was also a middle-aged while male. He has been homeless for the past thirteen years straight and for the last twenty three in and out of homelessness. Since he was in the penitentiary he had found it almost impossible to find a job because he says that if he lies about being in jail and the employer finds out he will get fired and if he tells them they won't hire him. He believes that "shelters are worst than the street" and that he can't leave any belonging for a second because they might get stolen, and that the food in there makes people sick. He also said that shelters are "rip-offs" because, according to him, the coordinators of these centers take a lot of the money and spend it on themselves. In his opinion, Long Beach is a very "rich and wealthy" city and that the mayor
keeps most of the money. He had just come back from staying at a hotel but his money had run out. He told us many stories. One of those was the one about the first Grand Prix in Long Beach in 1992. He said that the police rounded up the homeless. They city made a lot of money that year and that none of it went towards the homeless. He believes that many of the buildings constructed should be made into shelters or affordable housing instead of selling them to "rich corporations". He seemed to have many conspiracy theories, but some of them could be true.

Our subject four is a fifty-one-year-old white woman that has been on and off homeless since 2001. Said she rather not talk about how. She stays at no shelters, but only goes to eat at them. She says the COA is okay. She said that instead of building these new areas downtown, they need to build shelters. She's an 11th grade drop out. She says that it's hard to get a job because of her age and health problems. "Rent is ridiculous," she says. There's no rent control in Long Beach. She has two sons locked up who she would probably be staying with if they were out. In response towards our question about police treatment of the homeless she said that some of the police are okay, some are not, while some don't care. One guy out there at the park got beat, only because of things he had done in the past. Another of her friends got stabbed last year and died. The killer got eighteen years to life. She also says that sometimes she eats all day and sometimes a few times a day. She says that the money they are using to build condos they need to use to help them. She says they don't want homeless people but that they don't put up places for them. She does say though that Long Beach has a lot to offer even for them. She says its not easy being homeless. She says most people there stick together, and that is the way it should be. When it rains she runs for cover. She got soaked recently. It was a bad experience but now she can look back and laugh about it. She says that they are not really allowed to sleep anywhere but if you know where to go, it's safe. She says that it's not all bad, there are good things too. She
said she's had some fun times. She says you get close with people. You learn how to love your fellow man and that most of the time you do have money, but it's not enough to live in housing. She says that some people have it all and then lose it. Her grandma sold the house and then this is what happened. When she was talking about the good experiences she had as a homeless person, she started crying probably because no matter how good she tries to put it, it is still a really harsh situation.

Our fifth subject didn't say much. He was a Latino man in his middle thirties. He had been homeless for two years. He goes to Samaritan house. When rents got high, he was living at Redondo Beach with his wife, but then she got sick and she wasn't able to work. She died and her three boys were all grown up. He got his I.D. stolen and has tried to get it back to find a job. He has no bad experience in Long Beach. There should be more shelters. He seemed pretty mellow and explained that all he does is wander around in the park and talk to the friends he makes.

Our last subject was a black woman from New York. She came for a dying relative and run out of money so she couldn't afford a hotel or plane ticket back to New York City. She has a ten-year-old daughter and a twenty-year-old son. Her daughter is back in New York and she is trying to take her back from the government. When we were interviewing her she was getting ready for an interview but she was worried because her identifications were stolen. She gave the city an F but, she's only been a month out here, so it is not necessary a justifiable grade.

For the most part, it seemed that the people we interviewed were not at any risk of dying of hunger, but for the most part their spirits were suffering. It seemed that the longer they had been homeless, the worse their opinion of the city, which is reasonable since they had been trying for years to get on their feet without any success.
Future of Homelessness

The city is working on a "Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness." This plan "will establish a community-wide infrastructure that will include a Steering Committee" and "a Working Group (http://www.homeless-research.com). The Steering Commute will be co-chaired by "both public and private sector leaders" and the Working Group will be made up of community representatives. Both groups will be working towards the goal of ending homelessness in Long Beach. Focus Groups will be held whose purpose it is to "build an infrastructure of communitywide participation." This plan will include the "Closing the front door and Opening the back door approach. The former includes plans to keep people from falling prey to homelessness and the latter refers to plans to help remove people off the street by re-housing them and placing them in permanent affordable housing (http://www.homeless-research.com).

Another issue that the city and various organizations within the city such as ICO have been working on, is a 59 bed shelter for the homeless. According to our sources there was resistance to this shelter because of NIMBY or "Not in my Backyard" mentality of the residents. This shelter as we understand it will be a night shelter where the homeless can sleep It will be an all year shelter. They will have to be bused there and back from the Multi- Service Center. This shelter has been a long time in the making and finally all things have been straightened out, except for the latest we have heard on the issue on the 15th of April, which is that the shelter had no contractor. These issues are important in the struggle to help the homeless and so they need to be watched closely over the next couple of months to see what kind of progress they are making.
Conclusion

The 5,845 homeless adults and children in the city of Long Beach have some options on where they could get help. From the Long Beach Rescue Mission's two locations, the Samaritan House and the Lydia House, to the Christian Outreach in Action, and the many agencies at the Multi-service Center, this offers the most complete service that any homeless person might need, from childcare, showers, HIV care, and many others. First of all when grading the city many aspects need to be taken into consideration. On cooperation, I would give the city a "B", only because it was somewhat hard to contact some people in charge of some shelters, but overall most people involved in this issue were very pleasant and helpful. The shelters on paper seem to give a somewhat satisfactory operation. Given the fact that there are many more homeless people than there are spots at shelters and other facilities related to this issue I couldn't give a completely satisfactory operation grade. Since the grade is given to the city's ability to handle and deal with the homeless problem, many topics have to be taken into consideration such as affordable housing and overall wages. Housing seems to continue increasing so the city won't get a good grade on this area. Long Beach is the 7th poorest city in the country, which is one of the reasons for the high homeless rates. Also the city is not only composed of the government officials, but of its citizens too, so the lack of cooperation of the people of Long Beach to accept a new shelter that would give many new people a bed to sleep will lower my grade a bit. Taking into consideration that about 40% of the people in Long Beach came here after they had become homeless, it could mean that the city is doing something good that is attracting nearby people. The city is taking steps to end the homeless issue but as the "Ten Year Strategy to End Homelessness" is just beginning more time is needed in order to evaluate it, and see what progress they are making, and to see if it is being effective. So to summarize the city will receive
a "Ct' grade. It is a satisfactory grade but the city in general needs a lot of rethinking, which not only includes helping the homeless but keeping more poor people from becoming homeless.

**Recommended Future Research**

For future research on this subject, the main thing that should be done is to use the homeless counts that the city of Long Beach is making. After a few counts, a trend can be observed either for good or for bad. Another thing is to research more in depth the agencies featured in this assessment as well as a few new ones until all the shelters and agencies are taken into account. Many more case studies of the homeless people should be made so that we could gain a greater understanding into their lives and their needs. We didn't get too much specific information on funding, where it comes from exactly and how it is being spent, so those are some areas that need more investigation.

**Appendix**

Overall, we felt that the media does pay attention to the homeless. Recently a few articles in the Press-Telegram talked about the Homeless count but only because it was an important event in the community, besides that it is usually mentioned on the newspaper attached to an article about an important person. There were a couple of articles written about the homeless last year mainly concerning the fifteen nine bed shelter. The homeless get into the news mostly when there is big event happening.

Some of the articles that we did find about homelessness in Long Beach talked about the homeless count, police brutality, and the progress or lack of progress concerning shelters. Here are some articles concerning the homeless that have appeared in Long Beach newspapers:


• "Jury says stabbing was no accident. Court: Jeffrey Thomas convicted of killing fellow transient." The Long Beach Press Telegram 18 Mar. 2005


"Help for Homeless." Lone Beach Press Telegram 27 Jan. 2005

• "Winter Shelter for Homeless Finds Home." The Gruinion Gazette 27 Jan. 2005

• "L.B Gets Record $3.9M Federal Grant to Fight Homelessness." Long Beach Press Telegram 26 Jan. 2005

• "Long Beach HUD Grants Broken Down by Program." Long Beach Press Telegram 26 Jan 2005

• "Volunteers to Count Homeless." The Gruinion Gazette 20 Jan. 2005

• "Comments Justified." The Gruinion Gazette 6 Jan. 2005

• "Homeless Are Out In The Cold. L.B Shelters Due To Open This Winter Still Closed. Some Shipped Elsewhere." Long Beach Press Telegram 28 Dec. 2005
Reference Cited

"The City of Long Beach 2004 Homeless Assessment"
2004

Homeless Research Institute for Urban Research and Development Website:
http://www.homeless-research.com
