



City of Arts & Innovation

News Release

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City of Riverside Reaching Out to Incarcerated People to Prevent Homelessness

Project Connect pairs people scheduled for release with services to keep them off the street

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – The City of Riverside has begun meeting with individuals incarcerated at the Robert Presley Detention Center downtown to arrange services to people who are scheduled for release and at risk for becoming homeless. The program known as Project Connect is believed to be the first city-led jail in-reach program in Riverside County.

“Project Connect provides a creative solution to one of the most pressing issues gripping our city,” said Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson, who championed the program, working with Gov. Newsom and a statewide coalition of mayors to fund the effort. “Project Connect will become a model and best practice for other cities throughout California.”

The Point in Time count of individuals experiencing homelessness in 2022 found 20 percent of homeless people had previously been involved in the justice system. In 2023, it was 17 percent.

“When I became Mayor, I launched a multi-pronged approach to the homeless crisis -- an approach that includes intervention as well as prevention,” Lock Dawson said “If we can focus on preventing people from becoming homeless, we’ve addressed the issue at its core, and Project Connect does just that.”

The city’s Office of Homeless Solutions partners with local non-profit Victory Outreach to assess people to determine what services they will need when released to keep from becoming homeless.

Victory Outreach, which has been working with formerly incarcerated people for decades, develops a re-entry plan for each inmate, including referrals for services, help with preparing documents they may need to seek employment once released, and, when possible, reunifying people with their families.

“We are really, really blessed to partner on this program,” said Dr. Dell Castro, senior pastor of Victory Outreach. “That is our heart – to reach out to these people and give them hope that there is an opportunity to change.”

The City Council approved an agreement with Victory Outreach earlier this year. Project Connect launched on May 2 with the goal of matching the unique needs of each person with applicable resources and services, said Homeless Solutions Officer Dr. Lorissa Villarreal.

Studies show the more often a person goes to jail, the longer they are likely to be homeless, Dr. Villarreal said. Arranging for services before a person is released can reduce such recidivism.

So far, the program has reached out to 25 people and completed needs assessments on 13 of them, Dr. Villarreal said. The other 12 either transferred out of the facility, declined the opportunity to meet or live in a city other than Riverside.

Victory Outreach has contacted 19 individuals and offered service to 10 people. Of those 10, five accepted services and 5 did not, a 50 percent success rate, which is impressive in this type of work.

“This is a critical piece of our city’s Homelessness Action Plan, which launched in Oct 2022,” said Mayor Pro Tem Erin Edwards, who chairs the City Council’s Housing and Homelessness Committee. “I look forward to hearing more exciting outcomes as the program continues.”

City Councilmember Chuck Conder said: “This is a very important program. That’s the best way we can help them – to give them hope and follow up with the services they need.”

Video of Riverside officials discussing the program can be found here:

https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=608407601133352