



# *Understanding Homeless Encampments: A Look at Encampment Interventions in Three Los Angeles Communities*

## *Report on Early Implementation*



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## About This Report

To understand and document the implementation of place-based encampment interventions in Los Angeles, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation engaged Abt Associates in late 2022 to evaluate the efforts of organizations implementing encampment interventions in three Los Angeles communities. This report summarizes the first six months of the encampment interventions (January 2023 through June 2023), describing key activities, progress with engaging people living in the encampments, and the challenges encountered. The report then summarizes key themes observed across the interventions.

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## 1. Introduction

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In the Los Angeles region, the largest share of people experiencing homelessness do so in an unsheltered setting. Though unsheltered people are found in many types of locations, concern is growing about the increasing number and size of encampments where people experiencing homelessness cluster night after night.

In response to the increase in encampments across California, the State of California authorized the Encampment Resolution Funding (ERF) Program, providing grant funds and technical assistance to local governments to design and implement encampment resolutions in their communities. The design of the ERF grants offers communities flexibility to create responses that address the needs and characteristics of their local encampments. To develop a more robust response to homeless encampments, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation in 2022 provided direct funding to several homeless service providers in Los Angeles County to design and implement specific encampment interventions in their local service areas.

To understand and document place-based encampment interventions in three Los Angeles communities, the Foundation engaged Abt Associates in late 2022 to evaluate the efforts of organizations that had received ERF or Foundation grants (or both) to implement their encampment interventions. This report summarizes the first six months, January 2023 through June 2023, of the encampment interventions, describing their key activities, progress with engaging people living in the encampments, and the challenges encountered. The report then summarizes themes observed across the efforts in the three communities.

## 2. Encampment Interventions in Three Los Angeles Communities

This chapter describes the early stages of the encampment interventions in Long Beach, the San Fernando Valley, and the Los Angeles River basin. The formation of encampments in Los Angeles is fluid, as are the resolutions and strategies used to clear encampments and rehouse encampment residents. Often homeless service providers act quickly when financial and housing resources become available. As a result of this fluidity, it can be challenging to define in advance the precise boundaries of an encampment and the components of the intervention.

The research team has already observed that the interventions are changing over time. As resources and housing availability ebb and flow, we will adapt our approach to this evaluation as needed.

### 2.1 City of Long Beach

The Anaheim Corridor encampment is one of the City of Long Beach’s largest and oldest homeless encampment sites and one that poses health, safety, and environmental risks to both the people staying in the encampment and patrons of the park, library, and other community space. The goal of the intervention is to immediately offer 40 people living in the Anaheim Corridor encampment access to a motel room so they can access safe housing and connect to other services and long-term housing with support from a case manager.

<b>Encampment Location</b>	East Anaheim Street Corridor in Cambodia Town, including MacArthur Park and the Mark Twain Library. The area surrounding the encampment has a mixture of multi-generational homes, single-family apartments, and small businesses.
<b>Size of Encampment</b>	Approximately 40 people, most of whom identified as Black men, were staying in this encampment as of December 2021.
<b>Funding Sources and Amounts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• State of California Encampment Resolution Fund grant (non-congregate shelter, case management, support from other city departments including Parks and Public Works): \$1,322,281.41<sup>1</sup></li><li>• Conrad N. Hilton Foundation three-year grant (mental health clinician, substance use counselor, and retrofit of mobile van): \$1,300,000</li></ul>
<b>Lead Organization</b>	Homeless Services Bureau (HSB), City of Long Beach
<b>Key Elements of the Intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No-barrier non-congregate shelter in a nearby motels</li><li>• Connection to permanent housing and other resources via a case manager</li><li>• On-site services from a mental health clinician and substance use counselor who visit in a mobile van</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.bcsb.ca.gov/calich/documents/erf\\_intent\\_to\\_award.pdf](https://www.bcsb.ca.gov/calich/documents/erf_intent_to_award.pdf)

#### Key activities

The City of Long Beach accelerated the timeline for its encampment intervention when rooms became available in a motel that could temporarily house the people staying in the encampment. The Hyland Inn motel participated in California’s Project Roomkey program and approached the City about continuing to contract for the use of its rooms. The City decided to use the ERF grant to pay for the Hyland Inn rooms, and HSB staff began moving people from the Anaheim Corridor encampment into the motel in mid-October 2022. Since the Hyland Inn only had 26 rooms, a small number of participants moved into crisis beds in other motels operated by the City.

Although a stepped approach had been planned, HSB moved all 40 encampment residents to the motel at once, rather than moving them in small groups. An HSB case manager completed check-in paperwork for the people coming from the encampment and conducted assessments of their needs for services. The HSB case manager meets with the program participants weekly during their stay at the motel. The goal of this case management is to help the former encampment residents secure permanent housing.

In addition to offering non-congregate shelter in the motel, HSB will create a customized van to provide encampment residents with a neutral space for mental health and substance use counseling. As of early July 2023, plans for the layout of the van were underway, and the City is accepting applications for a mental health clinician and a substance use counselor. In the meantime, the City deployed its Restorative Engagement to Achieve Collective Health (REACH) team to provide services to encampment residents. The REACH team includes a public health nurse, mental health counselor and two outreach workers.

At the time the 40 encampment residents were moved to the Hyland Inn and other crisis motels, HSB posted notices in and around the MacArthur Park area that encampments would be cleared on November 17, 2022. Despite 40 people moving into interim housing and the subsequent clearing of remaining belongings, people experiencing unsheltered homelessness have repopulated the Anaheim Corridor area. HSB staff continue to conduct weekly outreach in this area, but no additional people are being offered rooms at the motel. A group of local community organizations joined together to host Mondays Matter, which provides bi-weekly support to people staying at this location including food, water, clothes, other supplies, and showers.

### **Progress**

As of early July 2023, nine people from the motel had moved into permanent housing and one person had been removed from the motel for safety concerns. Staff reported that two households have challenges with obtaining identification so staff moved them to another interim housing site. As of early July, 32 people remain at the Hyland Inn and other crisis motels.

### **Challenges**

The intervention planned to offer six months of housing assistance to participants as they exited the motel for permanent housing. However, the City of Long Beach currently lacks sufficient sources of temporary subsidies such as rapid re-housing or long-term subsidies such as federal housing vouchers. Initially, HSB intended to use Emergency Housing Vouchers to re-house them. However, the Housing Authority of the City of Long Beach (HACLB) achieved 100 percent lease-up soon after the encampment intervention began, and those vouchers were no longer available.

As of July 2023, HSB staff were searching for sources of housing subsidies. Meanwhile, HSB was able to reallocate some of the ERF funding for HSB staff to extend the motel lease for another four months (through October 2023). HSB stated this extension will allow it to ramp down the intervention and create a housing plan for the remaining participants. The City anticipates that approximately 70 permanent supportive housing units will come online in August 2023 and that some of the participants can be matched with these new units through the City's coordinated entry process. HACLB also has committed their allocation of Stability Vouchers to ERF participants.

On January 10, 2023, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors declared a state of emergency on homelessness. This declaration has led to increased demands on HSB staff. Currently, the encampment intervention has a single case manager funded by ERF for the approximately 40 participants in the motel.

HSB staff also stated that the five percent of the ERF grant allocated for management is insufficient for the routine monitoring and reporting, as well as troubleshooting related to the intervention.

Because the mental health clinician and substance use counselor are new City positions, it took several months for the City to create job descriptions, obtain union approval, and open job requisitions. The City posted the substance use counselor and mental health clinician positions in early July 2023. HSB anticipates that filling these positions will be difficult because of the perception that counseling people who have experienced unsheltered homelessness is especially challenging. However, hiring challenges are not unexpected given the overall challenges that homeless service providers that operate within the Los Angeles homeless service system report in recruiting and hiring new staff.

## 2.2 San Fernando Valley

In the San Fernando Valley, LA Family Housing (LAFH) and West Valley Homes YES (WVHY) lead related but separate encampment interventions using targeted outreach to build trust among encampment residents to encourage them to take up interim and permanent housing opportunities when they are available. LAFH and WVHY work together to target various encampments across the San Fernando Valley. LAFH primarily targets tent encampments and WVHY primarily targets RV encampments. Each approach is described below.

### LA Family Housing

<b>Encampment Location</b>	Multiple encampments across Service Planning Area 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tent encampment around the Metro Station in North Hollywood</li> <li>• Tent encampment at the intersection of Roscoe Boulevard and Interstate 405</li> <li>• Tent encampment on Old Depot Road in Chatsworth</li> </ul>
<b>Size of Encampment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Metro Station in North Hollywood: approximately 40 people were staying in this encampment as of January 2013, most of whom identify as Black men</li> <li>• Roscoe &amp; I-405: even numbers of men and women ages 30-55 in need of mental health support and substance use treatment services</li> </ul>
<b>Funding Source and Amount</b>	Hilton Encampment Resolution Funds: \$1.5 million
<b>Lead Organization</b>	LA Family Housing (LAFH)
<b>Key Elements of the Intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted outreach in encampments identified as priority because of location, size, or acuity of the population</li> <li>• LAFH outreach workers provide street-based housing focused case management to connect encampment residents to housing vouchers, time-limited subsidies, or permanent supportive housing. If permanent housing options are not available, staff try to connect encampment residents with interim housing with a focus on securing permanent housing in the long term</li> <li>• LAFH sets a 90-day target date for either securing housing or developing a concrete housing plan for encampment residents</li> </ul>

### Key activities

LAFH targets tent and makeshift encampments, which can spread over multiple blocks or be heavily concentrated in one area. LAFH identifies encampments based on information gathered by outreach teams and will often engage City Council districts to coordinate encampment resolution strategies. LAFH has

developed relationships with City Council offices in the San Fernando Valley to prevent encampment sweeps or other tactics used to clear an encampment and force encampment residents to move. LAFH identifies encampments for targeted outreach from information gathered by outreach teams and once an area is identified, LAFH begins to work with encampment residents on a housing plan, with the goal of moving encampment residents to interim or permanent housing.

LAFH deploys an outreach team comprised of four outreach specialists and one housing stabilizer. The housing stabilizer is focused on “post lease up” and is familiar with the complex network of affordable housing options in Los Angeles and how to navigate the eligibility and application processes of the Housing Choice Voucher program. The outreach specialists are trained as housing navigators and focused on building rapport with individuals in the encampments, identifying documentation needs and feasible housing matches. Once LAFH identifies an encampment, the outreach specialists visit the encampment and start meeting with the encampment residents and assessing the needs of each resident and the dynamics of the encampment.

For this specific encampment resolution approach, the outreach team focuses on one encampment for up to 90 days. The goal at the end of those 90 days is for all encampment residents to have moved into interim, shared, or permanent housing or to be on a defined pathway to housing (i.e., closely working with the LAFH staff to obtain a housing placement or next on the list to be offered a housing placement). After the initial round of outreach and resident assessments, LAFH sets a “cutoff date,” the date on which the list of people they are working with is set (also known as the “by-name list”). If a cutoff date is identified or a by-name list established, the outreach specialists work solely with clients in that encampment and refer new encampment dwellers to other outreach teams working in an area for support and referral assistance to avoid leaving individuals without assistance. After this date, LAFH will not add any additional people to the list. Setting this cutoff date is important because often encampments grow and re-populate as the original encampment residents are housed.

### **Progress**

LAFH began its tent encampment intervention by responding to an encampment located adjacent to the North Hollywood Metro Station. It conducted outreach activities at this encampment for 90 days, from January 2023 through March 2023. The encampment’s original population as defined by the by-name list was fully exited to interim and permanent housing within the target 90 days.

LAFH began its outreach and rehousing efforts at the intersection of Roscoe Boulevard and Interstate 405 in April 2023. Initial outreach at the site determined that more than 40 people lived in this encampment. This site was prioritized because it is a dense and busy intersection of a major street and interstate. Encampments are also prioritized for outreach when a council district contacts LAFH about the area often due to resident or local business complaints. This encampment largely consisted of Black men with high rates of substance use, according to outreach workers. As of April 28, LAFH had engaged 24 people with outreach and were connecting them to supportive services and interim and permanent housing options. However, in May 2023, this site was cleared without LAFH’s knowledge. LAFH does not know what entity cleared the encampment or where the encampment residents relocated.

### **Challenges**

LAFH stated that it was difficult to begin outreach at the Roscoe and I-405 encampment because of gang activity in the area. Outreach teams noted that often gang violence is not an issue stemming from encampment residents but from others – external to an encampment – who see encampment residents as



vulnerable and easy victims to target. LAFH’s entrance into the encampment was delayed as they worked to understand key individuals within the encampment to build trust and rapport. LAFH does not directly engage law enforcement as part of their efforts to maintain trust building with encampment residents. Once LAFH began engaging people in the encampment, other challenges arose, such as lack of available housing and priorities that differed from those of City Council members.

**West Valley Homes YES**

<b>Encampment Location</b>	Multiple encampments across San Fernando Valley (Service Planning Area 2) in City Council Districts 6, 7, and 12 and County Supervisorial Districts 3 and 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• West of Interstate 405</li> <li>• Desmond</li> <li>• San Fernando Road</li> <li>• Tent, makeshift and RV/vehicle encampment Paxton Park in Pacoima</li> </ul>
<b>Size of Encampment</b>	Ranges from 11 to 65 cars, trucks, and recreational vehicles (RVs), plus tarps and tents; mostly male
<b>Funding Source and Amount</b>	Conrad N. Hilton Foundation grant: \$620,000 Supervisorial District 3: \$90,000
<b>Lead Organization</b>	West Valley Homes YES (WVHY)
<b>Key Elements of the Intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted outreach specific to people staying in vehicles and RVs</li> <li>• Connection to homeless service providers to assist with housing navigation</li> <li>• Assistance with selling or dispossessing vehicles and RVs</li> <li>• Continued support during the transition into housing</li> </ul>

**Key activities**

West Valley Homes YES (WVHY) conducts outreach in encampments specifically where people experiencing homelessness are staying in cars, trucks, or recreational vehicles (RVs). Its experience working with this population has made it the lead organization in Service Planning Area (SPA) 2/San Fernando Valley for engaging with people living in such settings.

An encampment is identified for outreach when WVHY is contacted by a City Council district office, local partners, street outreach workers, or the City of Los Angeles. The RVs are typically immobile and in general disrepair (e.g., plumbing and electricity do not work). The outreach team begins by establishing trust with the residents by distributing food and water to the encampment community, pumping waste and water from their RVs, and connecting them to local homeless service providers including LAFH. The goal of this outreach is to move encampment residents into interim or permanent housing and prepare them to relinquish, sell, or store their RVs.

WVHY enrolls the residents into its program once they are ready to move inside. WVHY’s approach includes storing their vehicle at a garage until the resident is ready to sell (if in working condition) or dispose of it (if inoperable). WVHY helps them arrange the sale, and the full amount of the sale goes to the owner. If the resident has no paperwork demonstrating they are the owner, or if a vehicle does not have license plates and a VIN number, it must be disposed of. Once the vehicle is gone, WVHY provides the resident with \$500 in gift cards, in addition to continued case management.

## Progress

At the Pacoima RV encampment, WVHY conducted outreach within one month because the City Council district office scheduled a tree trimming in hopes that would clear the encampment. In the event of scheduled street or landscaping maintenance all encampments need to be cleared. All Pacoima RV encampment residents were successfully housed in February 2023. WVHY now is working at the San Fernando Road encampment. When WVHY began outreach, the site had approximately 65 vehicles; now it has approximately 15 vehicles. WVHY has also conducted outreach at Paxton Park (in Pacoima) and some areas in Sylmar and Chatsworth.

WVHY does not set defined timelines for its encampment engagements and conducts outreach at multiple sites simultaneously. It considers building trust and rapport with encampment residents critical to success in rehousing and therefore does not set target dates or rush residents into housing before they feel ready.

## Challenges

The largest challenge that WVHY experiences is the lack of interim or permanent housing options in some City Council districts. Because of funding restrictions and City councilmember oversight, some people experiencing homelessness in one City Council district cannot be placed in housing in another district, even if interim housing beds are available. This dynamic is especially challenging in SPA 2 because there are many Council districts but limited housing resources.

WVHY staff also explained challenges from City delays in processing and tagging vehicles that encampment residents want to surrender. Once a vehicle is processed by the City and identified for removal by the City and tagged, City staff or Department of Transportation take it to the Police Garage or the scrapyards for disposal. A delay in tagging and removal makes vehicles more likely to be re-populated by people who think the vehicles are empty.

### **Collaboration between LAFH and WVHY**

LAFH and WVHY work together and have discussed approaches to outreach in encampments in SPA 2 through an informal working relationship built collaborating across other programs. Due to the targeted encampment approach, LAFH and WVHY had not yet worked on the same site. The two service providers would like to develop a strategy for systematically referring people experiencing homelessness in RVs and other vehicles to WVHY. As of late June 2023, the two organizations were collaborating at an encampment at Paxton Park in Pacoima.

### **Meeting the Needs of Unhoused and Undocumented People**

Both LAFH and WVHY reported a rise in people experiencing homelessness who are immigrants. Encampments in Pacoima have the highest concentration of residents from Latin America. WVHY noted that other service providers in SPA 2 are witnessing an influx of people from Venezuela and Guatemala. WVHY described this as a challenge because the types of services these people can need are inaccessible to them because of their immigration status.

## 2.2 Los Angeles River Basin

People experiencing homelessness along the Los Angeles River are some of the most difficult to serve in the Los Angeles region. Encampments in this geography are located along steep concrete slopes and the river itself, often hidden from sight, making access by outreach workers difficult. As a result, these encampments have largely been ignored. The dangers for people living in encampments along the river are significant, especially from flooding. The goal for the Los Angeles River Basin encampment intervention is to ensure people experiencing homelessness there are offered (1) interim housing/shelter,

(2) case management, and (3) help with securing identification so they can transition to permanent housing if a rental subsidy becomes available.

<b>Encampment Location</b>	A 19-mile stretch along Los Angeles River Basin, divided into three zones: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zone 1: LA River starting at Fletcher Drive, ending near the Griffith Park tennis courts</li> <li>• Zone 2: LA River starting at Los Feliz Boulevard, running north until the 134 Freeway</li> <li>• Zone 3: Forrest Lawn Drive, paralleling the LA River and the 134 Freeway, through the Warner Brothers lot, ending at Olive Ave</li> </ul>
<b>Size of Encampment</b>	Approximately 60 people at the start of the project (November 2022)
<b>Funding Source and Amount</b>	State of California Encampment Resolution Fund (ERF) grant: \$1,747,385
<b>Lead Organizations</b>	Los Angeles City Council District 4 (CD4) People Assisting the Homeless (PATH)
<b>Key Elements of the Intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer of interim housing for people staying along the LA River</li> <li>• Case management</li> <li>• Connecting people with long-term housing options</li> </ul>

### Key activities

This intervention aims to help approximately 60 people from the encampments along the Los Angeles River Basin beginning east of Interstate 405 in the neighborhood of Sherman Oaks through Glendale and ending near the Silver Lake neighborhood. The initiative will focus on the portion of the river within the borders of City Council District 4 (CD4). The intervention is led by CD4 staff, in partnership with local homeless service provider People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) and volunteers from SELAH Neighborhood Homeless Coalition and NoHo Home Alliance.

In September 2022, PATH began outreach to encampment residents in the Los Angeles River Basin. CD4 and PATH divided the intervention area into three zones. Outreach to encampment residents in Zone 1 ended in February 2023; outreach to encampment residents in Zones 2 and 3 ended in March 2023. Any encampment resident located in these zones was eligible for assistance, which included placements in motels or other interim housing, food, and connections to mental health and other supportive services. To spend down the ERF grant, PATH and CD4 incorporated an additional area into their outreach efforts. That area included approximately 50 RVs near the River Basin. Outreach to this area continued through spring 2023.

### Progress

Through these encampment resolution efforts, PATH has successfully housed a large percentage of people living along the river. By the end of June 2023, PATH had placed more than 50 people in motels and an additional 16 people in interim housing programs, with the ultimate goal of securing permanent housing. Approximately 20 of these encampment residents were placed in permanent housing with time-limited rent subsidies funded by ERF.

During their outreach efforts, PATH and CD4 staff noticed an increase in the number of RVs being used for housing in the river area. In response, PATH in March 2023 began to explore creating an RV buyback program. However, it ran into challenges finding land or a parking lot to store the RVs short

term. Furthermore, RV encampment residents were hesitant to relinquish their RVs without a clear path to permanent housing. Moving forward, the RV buyback program will be a large focus of CD4's outreach efforts and proposed city encampment resolution budget.

### **Challenges**

CD4 staff expected to have a motel as part of the Mayor's Inside Safe Initiative open in their district by March 2023, as the motels it operates were reaching capacity. However, there were delays and challenges finding a motel to accommodate more than 50 encampment residents, and therefore it did not materialize. CD4 staff also reported having a limited number of rental subsidies and housing navigation resources.

### 3. Overall Themes

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Across all organizations leading encampment interventions, the City of Long Beach, LA Family Housing (LAFH), West Valley Homes YES (WVHY), Council District 4 (CD4), and People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) note similar challenges and experiences in implementing their planned efforts, including staffing challenges, difficulty finding interim and permanent housing and navigating jurisdictional boundaries across Los Angeles County.

#### **Staffing challenges**

The City of Long Beach has experienced delays in trying to hire staff to fill the new positions for substance use and mental health counseling that are part of its encampment intervention. Though the City's Homeless Services Bureau was ready to move forward as soon as it secured the grant from the Hilton Foundation, steps in the City's hiring process delayed the job announcements. When the positions were finally posted, the City received few applicants. CD4 and PATH have both experienced challenges in staffing outreach positions. LAFH has experienced challenges in retaining outreach staff.

In discussing challenges related to staffing, WVHY noted that some candidates come with preconceived notions about people experiencing homelessness. As a result, WVHY recently has tried to hire candidates with experience outside of the homeless service system, in areas such as social work and social justice.

#### **Challenges finding interim and permanent housing options for encampment residents**

All grantees expressed a need for more interim and permanent housing options for encampment residents. In some areas of Los Angeles, City Council members have created protocols for who can access interim housing within their districts. This creates challenges when one interim housing facility might have beds available, but encampment residents are from a neighboring Council district and are not eligible. In Long Beach, the City was able to transition encampment residents into a motel but found there are limited housing resources to transfer them to permanent housing.

Mayor Karen Bass's Inside Safe Initiative was created in December 2022, after grantees in this study developed their place-based encampment interventions. LAFH, WVHY, PATH, and CD4 have tried to work alongside Inside Safe operations, but efforts look different depending on the Council district. The City of Long Beach is not part of the City of Los Angeles, and therefore is outside of the jurisdiction where Inside Safe operates. More interim and permanent housing resources are needed if grantees are to be successful in moving people from encampments indoors.

#### **Multi-jurisdictional challenges**

The service providers and local City offices leading encampment resolutions experience challenges in navigating the complex multi-jurisdictional landscape across Los Angeles County. Encampments that are spread across jurisdictions often require multiple entities (e.g., County departments, City departments, State transportation offices) to coordinate outreach and encampment resolutions. Furthermore, service providers and local City offices have competing priorities and approaches for how to respond to encampments and help the people residing in them.