

HPD P.I.P. June 20, 2013: Houston's Homeless Initiative

At the June Positive Interaction Program, it was reported that there was little change in crime rates. Robbery and Theft are slightly decreased; Burglary is a little increased.

Our program presenter was Mandy Chapman Semple, who was appointed by Mayor Parker in January to assist with the new initiative to reduce homelessness. Semple explained that Houston is in the top 10 of USA cities by our number of homeless, and she is charged with building an infrastructure by bringing the variety of systems to the table that can help to make positive changes.

The first phase of the initiative is to deal with the chronically homeless - those who have a disability due to mental illness and/or substance abuse. These are the ones who are most vulnerable, as well as the most expensive because of repeatedly cycling through jails and emergency rooms. If we can move them from the street to stabilized housing with support services, the cost to the community is greatly reduced. This approach has proven to be effective in other cities; Salt Lake City has reduced their homeless population by 78% with this approach. Semple is working to insure better behavioral health care through our City Health Department, Harris County, health system, Medicare, and MHMRA so that support staff can quickly get clients to behavioral health care before issues become emergencies. Another concern, which she is working on, is be sure that the most vulnerable people are the ones getting the initial assistance.

The second phase of the initiative will focus on the families and homeless youth. 80% of these do not require the higher level of intervention and investment. HUD requires an annual night of census by the Coalition for the Homeless to assess the extent of the problem. The downtown area has been censused; our neighborhood will be censused soon. If you are aware of any disturbed homeless in immediate need of stabilizing, I can get that information to Semple.

P.I.P will take a two-month summer break, and meet next in September.