

The NAEH Winter Convention, by Dr. John Kitchin, Ph.D., Publisher, San Diego Homeless News. *Photos by the author and are Public Domain. Story Copyright 2015, All Rights Reserved.*

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NAEH, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, had its national winter convention in San Diego, with an emphasis on Family and Youth Homelessness, on Feb. 18 to 20th. NAEH is a government nonprofit, linking HUD (United States Dept. of Housing and Urban Development) and USICH (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness) to many nonprofits and government agencies, and is the leading agency for dealing with US homelessness. Just under a thousand people attended.



I fought to be invited, as I have always maintained that **to solve any problem, the first step is to understand that problem entirely**. As an intelligent homeless person, I add depth and perspective to the general understanding of the topic. Typically, in San Diego's MAPSS think tank, the Metropolitan Association of Providers of Social Services, I am the only homeless person in the group, and can field answers that require intimate knowledge of homelessness. This is my function, as well as reporting the news, my newspaper column basically being the Minutes of the meeting. I also perform these functions for the Girls Think Tank, another nonprofit dealing with homelessness. I was possibly the only currently homeless person at this \$500 a ticket sold-out event, but they give over a dozen free tickets to current or former homeless.

WEDNESDAY, Feb. 18, there was a meeting of the **Funders Forum on Vulnerable Populations**, where the funding organizations, backed by the world's billionaires, discussed how to get the best value for their donations in solving the homeless problem. I steered clear of it to avoid getting in the way or becoming a distraction. I was once worth millions, but never billions, so I am in the wrong social class. Represented were United Way, the

National Coalition For the Homeless, Grantmakers, the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), the Jewish Communal Fund (JCF), Manynet, Building Changes, the Hilton Foundation, the Melville Charitable Trust, Voices Foundation, the Denver Foundation, USICH (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness), CAEH (Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness), Homes For Families (Boston), Jacobs Center, the Joan and Irwin Jacobs Fund, the Butler Family Fund, and several philanthropists that asked not to be mentioned.

THURSDAY, Feb. 19, a 13-hour day for the convention, began with **Todd Gloria**, San Diego City Councilman, former Interim Mayor, and Former Chairman of the City Council (running for Mayor) informing us all that the PITC (Point-In-Time-Count) identified 8500 homeless in San Diego, making us third in the nation in homeless, behind New York and Los Angeles. No one mentioned that NYC has 8.5 million in its general population, while San Diego has only 1.3 million. Los Angeles City has 3.8 million. We claim that makes San Diego America's Homeless City, not in total number, but in numbers per capita, easily. Hence, holding a homeless convention here makes sense. As you may know, we San Diego homeless claim that there are 330,000 of us in San Diego County, up from 310,000 a year ago. Our count is of the Great Homeless Rotation, and there is some science behind it, but that will not be presented here.

The next speaker was **Nan Roman**, CEO of NAEH, who said that the annual counts are a good indication of relative trends in homelessness, up or down, each year. As you know, we claim that these counts are a good indication of **homeless visibility and how well we can hide**, not how many we are. As we get better at hiding, based upon how Repressive a given area is for us, there become fewer of us visible. For San Diego, the visible numbers are way down, but the actual numbers are way up. Roman said that we need a stronger crisis system that can quickly get needed resources (such as housing) into the lives of families. We strongly agree. We also agree with her statement that we need to efficiently use resources. She said we need to focus on our housing crisis, with a coordinated entry and exit into the system. Absolutely, and I have been screaming about these things for 25 years.

She said that the chronic homeless need permanent supportive housing, freeing up our emergency shelters for crisis only. "It's on us to do something **smarter** to end family homelessness." Way agreed on all points, and she's obviously preaching to the choir, or in my case, somebody who sleeps under the pipe organ. Nan Roman said we need to minimally double the number of beds for at-risk youth,

and we agree that same would cut down on sex-housing and child prostitution.

She said that couch-surfers were not counted because there is no practical way to count them. We strongly disagree, and can propose valid psychological paradigms to do this which are scientifically valid. This is psychology, not census, as over two-thirds, and approaching three-quarters of all homeless do not admit same. And, we are counting a population that is actively hiding from us, and extremely good at it. **Trickery is needed.** We elderly psychologists remember the 1960's, where we really DID want to know some of these things, and developed experiments to find out the real numbers. Nowadays, we want to slant the truth instead of know.

In closing, Roman said we must have better information and resources, because we are not finding, and then not helping, the homeless. We agree.

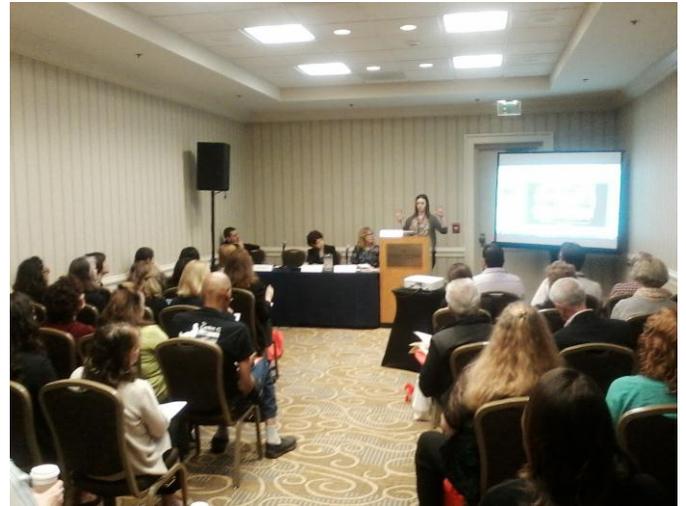
Typical workshop at the NAEH Convention.



On to the Workshops, more than 55 in 2 days, classes of 33 to 200 participants in each one, nine classes at a time in six different time slots. Each class 90 minutes in length. Very close to a university setting, taught at the lower Graduate School level, perhaps a year more advanced than a B.A. This did not present a problem for the many with less education than that, as they hold jobs dealing with these things, and years of experience. Without my Ph.D. and 30 years as a homeless advocate, I would have been lost.

My first workshop was on **The Role of the Press in Ending Homelessness.** It featured 3 great writers on the homeless issue, and I am a fan of all three. They are more famous than me at that, too, and very few are. **Kelly Davis**, from San Diego CityBeat, arguably the best homeless issues reporter in history so far; **Gale Holland**, of the Los Angeles Times; and, **Kelly Bennett** of Voice of San Diego. All gave case histories of articles and coverage, to tutor the press, which included Michael McConnell and David Rolland. There were also other press heavyweights, undercover, that I cannot name.

CityBeat once had a column called "Homeless Person of the Week", but nowadays there are so many abuses that very few of us grant interviews. We get kicked in the head and things like that, later, when we do. **Kelly Davis** described the "Big Silence" that reporters experience when talking with elected officials on homeless issues, if we are "reality" reporters instead of the usual "propaganda" press. We frighten government officials with the truth. What she had to say was well-stated, and I enjoyed every minute of it.



Kelly Bennett mentioned that San Diego has the 3rd largest homeless population, but is only 18th largest in funding. She also mentioned that most homeless do not like Catholic Charities nor initially PATH, called Connections Housing in San Diego. The Los Angeles Underground Press came to San Diego to help block PATH, because of how awful their facilities are in LA. I helped, editorializing on their "Homeless Prison" being New Auschwitz. We need to remember that Hitler's first Death Camp was called the Berlin Homeless Shelter. We homeless exercised such immense political, social, and media pressure that PATH San Diego grew into a great place to live, not awful like in some cities. Responsible press. Bennett mentioned the 25 Cities Program, and how San Diego refuses to participate. Jokingly, it's because the Mayor's friends don't get all that taxpayer money.

Mark Stevenson, a social worker, said that nowadays it is okay to give a client a case of beer when that might keep them off narcotics and to help them sleep in the downtown noise. Do what it takes is the motto of today. Back when I studied Social Welfare Psychology, we were told that things like that would get our butt kicked.

The entire panel said that there are many cities where the media are automatically e-mailed when any new program comes out. It is news, and also of interest, so they can use it to sell via their advertisers. Kelly Davis tells the inside story of one San Diego Union-Tribune reporter that routinely got information supplied by a homeless man on the sidewalk. The reporter violated ethics, by giving cash, cigarettes, and other payments, but always got great information. At one point, the homeless

man was arrested, and then killed in jail. The UT refused to let their reporter cover this, so Davis did. Kelly Davis has done a lot of reporting on our record numbers of mysterious prison deaths, especially press-related.

The panel proposed a Media Training Packet. Find a reporter you trust and can spend time with, and explain to them the homeless situation. The CoC (Continuum of Care, HUD's name for help agencies) needs the media to have knowledge.



LUNCH followed, and **John Kuhn** tutored on the psychological theory of Abraham Maslow. I consider it to be the best theory in history. I dined with another Psychologist, who initially doubted my credentials, until we discussed some highly complex things. Was she sent to check me out? No matter. If the triangle of Maslow is being used to end homelessness, it has a great chance of working, with maximum happiness for clients as well. That is win-win. I cannot go into Maslow's Triangle, but if you Google it, it is both simple and elegant. It does not require you to be a Psychologist to understand.

The next Workshop Class was on Rapid Re-Housing, which is currently replacing the old Transitional and Supportive Housing models. It is a program individually tailored for each individual or family, with no pre-conditions. It uses the intelligence of the caseworker instead of massive books of regulations. Every case is different and complex, and the caseworker knows way more about the situation than the government rule-makers. Rapid Re-Housing solves the current red-tape jungle of "must be mentally ill", "cannot be mentally ill", "must be a substance abuser" and all that. All you need to be is homeless. We are NOT your church, your mommy, nor are we in charge of you. We are here to get you housing, with no lectures and no qualifications or other hoops to jump through.

In Rapid Re-Housing, social service agencies recruit landlords, establish a relationship, and send them tenants. There are huge advantages for building owners, and I go into that later in this article. A different workshop went into the "advanced" information.

Okay, once we have some landlords, we send them some of our tenants who need housing. We pay up to a year rent for our tenants (it can sometimes be 2 years), plus a generous Security Deposit, moving expenses, and an allowance for damage either from a previous tenant or caused by the tenant we supply. The landlord is guaranteed payment, plus always on-time. A client is in housing the same day. Rapid Re-Housing is part of Housing First, which says that finding a job is tough when you live on the sidewalk and smell really bad. The system is holistic, with no cookie-cutter restrictions to jump through. This makes it flexible enough to cover all persons and situations.

Gradually the client must pay some, and finally all, of their rent, but not until they have some income. Since the caseworker uses their intelligence instead of a rule book, **this system works, resulting in 92% never needing further housing help.** This frees up emergency shelter beds, no longer places a burden on emergency ambulance and police services, has the client paying their own rent, and working at a job, and only 8% return to homelessness within 2 years. We only have 2 years of data on this program, so we can only guess at additional years of time. **All this makes Rapid Re-Housing less costly than any other program.**

ESG Funding (Emergency Shelter Grant, or Emergency Solutions Grant) is essential to begin the Rapid Re-Housing process, and is best explained by the Melville Charitable Trust, which is the largest foundation in the U.S. for obtaining funding to abate homelessness.

www.MelvilleTrust.Org

Friday, Feb. 20: Home Aid was the next workshop, a coalition of builders and construction management companies in Orange County that donates buildings and money to nonprofits that conquer homelessness. They have 16 chapters in 11 states, and Alexis Parker is chair of their San Diego branch.

Here's how they do it: If your group needs a \$50 million building, and you have bids on that amount, Home Aid will give you a 50% discount, so it is only costing \$25 million, the other \$25 million being a donation to your nonprofit. You see, construction is seasonal, and they need to retain their employees during slow periods, rather than paying them Unemployment. They also generate massive tax write-offs for the wealthy folks who own the construction firms. This also works out well for your nonprofit, where you can claim and document a very real \$25 million donation. There are no losers here. Imagine what you can do with that on Matching Funds.

Home Aid is part of BIAOC, the Building Industry Association of Orange County, and

they do construct drop-in centers, rehabilitation centers, affordable housing, nonprofit offices, and even combinations of the above. Imagine having a drop-in shelter on the first floor, case worker offices on the second floor, and several more floors of affordable housing.

The next presentation was on **LGBTQ Regulations and Approved Operating Practices**. This all stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and "Queer" (no identification with any sex, "Decline to state".) For example, it is unlawful for any Family Housing Program to serve only male head-of-household or female head-of-household clients, and any family program must also serve two-parent families, with heads-of-households of any sex. This could be 2 males, 2 females, or a male and female. They cannot be sent to a different shelter, unless your shelter is full, and families cannot be split up, sending the male spouse to one place and the female to another. You must serve a "Q" (no sexual identification) in either a male-only or a female-only singles shelter, and a Q may be in a family shelter as a family member or head of household, too. Boyfriends and girlfriends are, for our purposes, considered the same as a husband or a wife, as this is a family. The same holds true for same-sex couples. The biggest thing to remember is that two-parent families (any sex or sexes) must ALWAYS be admitted to any family shelter, unless it is full.

Changing the Formulae: In the old way that housing was administered, we used an emergency shelter, then transitional shelter, and then permanent housing. The new formula involves emergency shelter, then an ESG grant, and then Rapid Re-Housing to a permanent place to live. **This requires that both a Housing Assessment and Resource Needs Assessment be done at time of intake.**

Some cities use a Connections Point, a clearinghouse for information and a wait list for homeless families. In any case, it is **unlawful to use hotel vouchers** under ESG funding unless all appropriate shelters (male singles, female singles, and families) are full.

Since homelessness is a **HOUSING** problem, real estate agents are needed to help solve it. It is suggested that every homeless-housing-related nonprofit have at least one such agent on-staff, to recruit landlords and speak to them in the language of real estate. It was suggested that those with both a Caseworker and Real Estate certification would be ideal for housing and in high demand. One attendee said that the University of Oregon currently has such a course program. Imagine complaining to your social worker that you just got an eviction notice, and finding out that they are an expert on real estate, and how to fight it. **Many agencies now have real estate agents on staff doing all of their housing placements.**

Expensive? Well, 80-90% success versus 10-15% success may be worth a few nickels more. This is being used because it is more cost-effective. The bottom line is that persons who are dealing with real estate, by being caseworkers housing families, should have real estate licenses. You are dealing with families, and their needs, but also solving their real estate problems if you specialize in homeless issues.

Lunch involved a speech by Julian Castro, United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, who gave a pep-talk. Media were present, but only interested in this one item. They were especially interested in avoiding me, a homeless person at the event.



The next workshop is on how to deal with **Few Housing Vacancies and High Housing Costs**, like San Diego. The core components are to recruit landlords, show them the advantages of doing business with you, and establish a relationship and trust. From there, overcome their concerns over drug abuse, mental illness, tenant qualifications, income, and possible short-term tenancy. Each homeless housing placement office **MUST** have a placement specialist who is a real estate agent.

Creative options are also used, such as our new tenant will repair damage caused by the previous tenant, or clean and paint the unit, or act as your gardener, or clean the hallways, or help with building repair. Some deals even had the tenant working as a caregiver, nanny, stable hand, cook, or tutor. Imagine the formerly-homeless violinist giving instruction to the children of the landlord.

Keeping the landlords happy is key, and there must be fast and effective mediation with any tenant problems, and even the ability to write a rent or Security Deposit check, 7 days a week. Most nonprofits only process checks once or twice a month, so that needs to be upgraded. The advantages to the landlord in our Rapid Re-Housing program is that we can reduce or eliminate his/her cost to advertise for new tenants, and we can schedule several prospective tenants to view the property at the same time for him to choose one, and we can

get him a check the same day, and he will always get paid on time no matter how bad the tenant's Credit Score is. The landlord also gets problems with repairs, either before our tenant or caused by our tenant, and mediation of any problems, done by a real estate professional. There are also generous Security Deposits, and the landlord is helping to take families off the sidewalk and rent them housing, helping to end homelessness. All of this means housing stability, which helps the whole community as well as the family. This also gives the landlord some income stability, because payment and security is guaranteed.

Landlords must understand that this is NOT Section 8 Housing, and it has nothing to do with the 30% tenant-paid subsidy. Our focus is to increase the tenant's income to where they can pay all of their rent. So, now our focus is on employment. Often tenants are forced to choose smaller and cheaper apartments than they wanted, for cash availability reasons. The Rapid Re-Housing time limit is 2 years, but tenants can then re-apply.

Many cities use an "Updated Vacancies List" to inform homeless housing specialists what can be had, because it is necessary to move fast or it all gets rented before you know about it. In Washington, D.C., most Rapid Re-Housing clients need all of their rent and utilities paid the first year, but no longer, and then 87% do not re-enter needing funds for at least 2 years. There is no data beyond 2 years, as the program began only 2 years ago. In the Bay Area (San Francisco, San Jose, Oakland), the average Rapid Re-Housing grant involves 18 months of paying rent and utilities, and FMR (Fair Market Rent) values are not used to compute the value of real estate rentals. A process called "Rent Comparable" amounts is used to determine fair rents. In all cases, exploring the small "mom and pop" landlords is critical, especially folks who may only own 2 or 3 units.

Advertising for these landlords should be in small newspapers, grocery stores, church bulletins, and even with eviction agencies. Public Service broadcasts would be ideal. Keep a landlords data-base.

The latest type of grant is called **Housing Fast**, and has no restrictions whatsoever upon what it is used for. We are using the educated brains of our Social Workers, instead of volumes of books on regulations. Typically, the money is used to pay past rent and/or utility bills defaulted on, or clean up tenant credit records, especially regarding a previous eviction. If the client shows a past eviction, but that landlord collected 100% in the end, is this such a bad risk?

Summaries and Conclusions:

Housing the homeless is taking new turns, emphasizing existing real estate instead of having the expense of building or buying new buildings. In San Diego, for example, we have way, way more housing than we need to house everyone. The new ESG and Housing Fast grants can be used for just about anything, even getting the client a haircut to get them housing, if that is the only objection that the landlord has. Typically, old utility bills are paid with this money. One new trick is that since Transitional and Supportive Housing clients are not technically considered "homeless" (whatever that means), giving them an ESG grant automatically makes them a homeless person. Then they qualify for Rapid Re-Housing.

Once qualified, they get rent and utilities for up to two years including arrears, rental application fees, security and utility deposits, last month's rent, moving costs, housing placement, housing case management, landlord mediation, legal services related to housing, repair of credit, help finding and keeping employment, and repairs necessary because of a previous tenant.

All housing, including for those currently homeless, is a REAL ESTATE issue, and a job for real estate agents, not social workers and caseworkers. It is housing, not substance abuse nor mental illness support. Always let the appropriate experts do the work in their fields. He needs his car fixed so he can get to work? That is why there are ESG and Housing Fast grants.

We need a universal intake and questions system, able to respond instantly to crisis; better information, more resources, better use of our present resources, and a better count of the homeless. We must educate the news media with the truth about homelessness, have them spread this information to the public, and, of course, we need to recruit landlords for Rapid Re-Housing. An on-line listing service for landlords would be helpful.

If we take a Humanistic and Holistic approach to the homeless issue, clients are happier, and this is a very easy psychological system to administer. It is only after first having basic needs and resources that anyone can prosper.

Often builders can be recruited to donate housing or contribute money, generating massive donations-matching proofs for nonprofits. Whenever an ESG grant cannot be used, a Housing Fast grant can. President Obama has approved a lot of funding, but is unlikely to get any of it from our present Congress, and we will get a new President and Congress late next year.

Suggestions and Criticisms:

We need college courses on becoming both a real estate agent and a social case worker at

the same time, cross-trained. We need a database of landlords who want to work with Rapid Re-Housing. We need housing listings, on-line, updated daily. We need a 24-hour Intake Center, especially for families and battered spouses. We need a Press Corps that educates journalists on homelessness. We need a count of the homeless that establishes the size of the rotation, and the turnover rate in the un-housed homeless. We need a definition of homeless that can form categories of **how** homeless people and/or families are, to be used in triage and funding priorities. **Above all, we need to remember that ending homelessness means having people earn more money, or reducing rent prices, or both. Such a simple problem.** United States Senator Bernie Sanders (Independent, Vermont) has numerous ideas on Facebook as to how to do these things. Some people want Sanders to run for President.

Political entities, such as ASD (Activist San Diego) and even Occupy Madison (Wisconsin) have housing help programs, too, and they are not nonprofits. Sometimes the political folks are more effective.

As far as the event, the hotel provided excellent service, security, attention, and food, but I would like to see coffee available between sessions, as the Starbucks price was over five dollars. Starbucks has had many an article written about it, too, as a chain that has subjected the homeless to a lot of problems.

Perhaps fewer workshops should be all taught at the same time, because there was a lot of trouble with wanting to be two places at once. This would involve more sessions. It would also make it necessary to provide for time out, or recreation, or whatever, for those times when nothing taught is on your particular agenda. Four days, unlimited enrollment, and at a slower pace, using a larger venue?

I get to brief MAPSS, San Diego's Metropolitan Association of Providers of Social Services, on the event Feb. 25, because their homeless guy, me, was the only one at it, due to cost. And, as for me, I suppose I should be writing Grant Proposals, since I've written newspaper editorials for years, and persuasion is key to both. For the moment, I will continue to inject the expertise of a real homeless person into the process of solving the homeless problem.

Dr. John Kitchin, Ph.D., Publisher of the San Diego Homeless News



Some San Diego flowers at the convention look like birds.



Sometimes, like today, I get to co-mingle, but most days I get placed into that other category.



Dr. John Kitchin, NZ9F, Ph.D., operates a Food Pantry, Soup Kitchen, small university specializing in homeless issues, publishes two newspapers, and maintains a Search Engine website for the needs of the San Diego poor and homeless, which he has been one of for seven years. He is active in the Girls Think Tank, and the Metropolitan Association of Providers of Social Services.