

Support Sharon Byrne and City Net for a Montecito Homeless Solution

BY JIM WITHERELL | OCTOBER 13, 2020

Solving tough community problems requires committed people coming together to build effective coalitions. Congratulations to **Sharon Byrne**, executive director of the Montecito Association, for her courage in launching “Hands Across Montecito,” a community-based homeless outreach project, scheduled to roll out this month in Montecito.

Homelessness in Our Area

The State of California leads the nation in homelessness. As of January 2019, our state had an estimated 151,278 homeless people who sleep on the streets each night due to economic hardship, loss of jobs, substance abuse, mental health problems, or other issues. California has almost 25 percent of the homeless population in the United States.

The City of Santa Barbara has not been immune to this humanitarian crisis. The number of persons experiencing homelessness has reputedly averaged around 951 since 2011. More recently, the 2019 Point-in-Time Count physically identified 887 homeless individuals living in Santa Barbara. The economic devastation caused by COVID-19 in 2020 has likely pushed these numbers much higher. There are some 366 shelter beds available to the homeless in the city. There is no licensed long-term care for the diagnosed mentally ill or veterans.

One area of special concern is the influx of the city’s homeless population to sheltered Montecito encampments along the Union Pacific railroad’s right-of-way, stretching all the way from the Andree Clark Bird Refuge to the Rosewood Miramar Beach Resort. When requested by the County Sheriff’s Department to vacate

encampments along the Union Pacific right-of-way, the homeless simply relocate from one area of Montecito to another, often returning to their original encampments when the eviction request expires.

Homeless sightings in the Upper Village have declined somewhat in the last year, while homelessness has increased along Coast Village Road, especially near the John Price Chevron Station and take-out Point Market, adjacent to the Highway 101 pedestrian underpass from Butterfly Lane and the railroad tracks to Coast Village Road.

What is City Net?

Byrne's "Hands Across Montecito" plan is to partner with City Net, an established organization with successful experience in building multi-agency solutions to house the homeless and remove dangerous encampments. Byrne became acquainted with the power of City Net in 2018 through its recruitment by **Alan Bleecker** of Capital Hardware after Byrne had worked in partnership with the Milpas business community in 2014-2016 to reduce homelessness on Milpas Street.

City Net already has a contract with the City of Santa Barbara to administer a program called "Santa Barbara Connect Home," a partnership between the City of Santa Barbara, City Net, Cottage Health, and Santa Barbara Restorative Police. The program was made possible by a \$2 million grant from the California Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) and will remain in effect until June 30, 2021.

The Santa Barbara Connect Home team collaborates with various community resources including, the Santa Barbara Fire Department, Home for Good/AmeriCorps, and the Downtown Ambassadors. In addition, City Net offers a dynamic team of outreach and engagement staff and case managers who facilitate services on State Street and other high-density homeless areas within the city.

Hands Across Montecito

Hands Across Montecito, in partnership with City Net, plans to provide an outreach team to establish relationships with some of the most vulnerable members of the community. They hope their approach will be successful in navigating homeless individuals in Montecito to permanent housing, relocating chronically unsheltered individuals from the streets to safe and supportive transitional shelters, and building relationships with individuals who are willing to engage in case management services.

A Montecito contract with City Net will be expensive, costing some \$80,000 a year for our community. An effort will be made to secure funding grants and

contributions from homeowners amounting to \$100,000 to fund the contract and related expenses in year one. It is hoped that the program will be so successful that it will be taken over by County Social Services and funded through County homeless funds, grants, and private donations in subsequent years.

Community Outreach

The owners and other occupants of the 113 Montecito homes in Bonnymede, the 100 homes in Montecito Shores, and the 28 homes in Sea Meadow, with their access to Hammond's Trail and Butterfly Beach, need to join with all 38 other Homeowner Associations in Montecito in voluntary support of "Hands Across Montecito."

As President of the Bonnymede Homeowners' Association, I urge our 113 homeowners, as well as the entire Montecito community, to support the "Hands Across Montecito" partnership effort with City Net to address this growing problem of homelessness in Montecito. We must respect the rights of the homeless and disadvantaged, while addressing homeowner concerns over the health and safety of all residents – those living in safe homes, as well as those living in nearby homeless encampments.

City Net is a 501(c)3 organization. Donations are tax-deductible and can be sent by

City Net is a 501(c)3 organization. Donations are tax-deductible and can be sent by check to City Net at PO Box 146, 133 East De La Guerra, Santa Barbara, CA, 93101. Please include "Montecito" in the memo section of the check. Another alternative is to donate through the Montecito Association website to make an online gift to City Net.

<https://www.montecitojournal.net/2020/10/13/support-sharon-byrne-and-city-net-for-a-montecito-homeless-solution/>

Transient camp gets a closer look by city, county and homeless leaders on the Santa Barbara/Montecito line

By [John Palminteri](#)

FOLLOWFOLLOW "" TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATIONS ABOUT NEW PAGES ON "".

May 13, 2022 11:43 am

Published [May 13, 2022](#) 11:34 am

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Share on LinkedIn](#)

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. - An area known for large homeless camps, fires and drug use has been visited by top Santa Barbara and Montecito leaders to see first hand, what problems they have been dealing with for years.

They have also laid out a plan for solutions.

The walking tour was organized by Sharon Byrne the Executive Director of the Montecito Association.

It included Santa Barbara city and county representatives, fire chiefs, and Santa Barbara Sheriff's deputies.

The site chosen was on the line where Santa Barbara meets Montecito off Los Patos Way across from the Andree Clark Bird Refuge.

They walked past an abandoned shopping cart from a store three miles away, assorted trash, clothing and there was a smell of waste.

Byrne said, "We know we have folks moving back and forth but everybody's jurisdiction line stops at their jurisdictional line right?"

The group is working to collaborate on clean up operations, while solving the relocation of the homeless from the freeway and railroad corridor where encampments have been a longtime health, safety and fire concern.

"When we do 'move them along strategy'. the city of Santa Barbara set people adrift and then they migrate to another jurisdiction and somebody else has to pick them up and deal with them," said Byrne.

Recently near the site of this tour, a vegetation fire broke out in the area of a camp loaded with belongings including numerous bikes.

The non-profit Heal the Ocean has been involved with mapping the camps using drone images and has made that effort available to the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors. It is also paying for a start up company to clear the sites using workers, some who were formerly homeless, to bag the trash and remove it from the problem areas.

A concern about jurisdictional lines is also blurring the response efforts because the homeless have crossed back and forth, causing issues for those reaching out to them for relocation and other services.

Supervisor Das Williams said more is being done today to address the problem than what he saw years ago, but housing solutions lag behind. "We need more temporary housing spots that's number one, it is some place to get people."

He's encouraged saying, "now there's a lot more political will and a lot more willingness to use our funds, state funds to solve the homeless problem."

Byrne agrees, saying "what we want to see is more support for housing and more support for temporary shelter for people to get them ready for housing and a lot of that can be done with successful public private partnerships. "

Along the way, Byrne said she has not had success with Union Pacific to be part of this effort and the train track route is often used by the homeless to move about and set up camps.

Caltrans is helping by providing large trash bags for the clean-up crews, and removing what is set aside near the freeway. The agency is also doing its own clean-up projects on a regular basis, mainly on on and off ramps, and known camps where fires have taken place.

Since 2020 the Montecito Association has been working with various groups on the Hands Across Montecito outreach effort. Several agencies are involved including the Department of Behavioral Wellness and City Net in addition to the ongoing local services.

Two Santa Barbara City Councilmembers were on the tour. Oscar Gutierrez who represents the Westside where homeless issues are significant, and Kristin Sneddon who is the councilmember for the district where the tour site is located. She said, "some of them lessons learned from things that worked well, what didn't work well, but we are all in it trying to think creatively and are on board and trying to work together."

The city is getting new directions on homeless solutions with Mayor Randy Rowse who wants more collaboration with the county in several areas, and he also does not want the parks to be places for food and wellness services for the unhoused.

Rowse favors other areas of the city for those services.

While no specific numbers have been posted recently annually the area is spending millions of dollars on homeless issues, and recently \$3-million went towards a State Street hotel project to relocate homeless people who were in high fire areas.

Nearby in the City of Goleta a Super 8 motel was recently purchased specifically to be remodeled into homeless housing. The project was funding by Goleta and the County along with other sources.

Williams believes if a similar situation came up in Santa Barbara, that plan might also be supported by the county.

<https://keyt.com/news/2022/05/13/transient-camp-gets-a-closer-look-by-city-county-and-homeless-leaders-on-the-santa-barbara-montecito-line/>

The Hands Helping Homelessness

[BY SHARON BYRNE](#) | NOVEMBER 22, 2022

You've read in these pages about Hands Across Montecito, a very successful homeless outreach and placement team of the Montecito Association, made up of Montecitans, Sheriffs, Montecito Fire, Behavioral Wellness, and City Net. Our first client, **Andrew Verlikanje**, really hates litter, so he picks it up. Andrew impressed Heal the Ocean when he wanted to clear an old campsite out at Haskell's Beach. He then started Earthcomb and hired people experiencing homelessness to help him. For Montecito's Beautification Day, Andrew brought an energetic team to clear abandoned camps, and paid them a living wage. Montecito Association members enthusiastically supported this project.

Andrew is on the Hands team for outreach in Montecito and clears abandoned camps we encounter. When we moved one senior gentleman indoors, who was living near the Butterfly Lane tunnel on the railroad tracks, Andrew hired him to disassemble and clear his camp. Caltrans loves this project.

Last Friday, **Harry Rabin** of Heal the Ocean was determined to remove the recurring camps on the beach under the cemetery. King Tides are coming, creating a danger where the camps wash out into the ocean. Hands team member **Tracey Wilfong** alerted the County to these camps months ago, but the County process took a long time, though the inhabitants had police records, and one had an out-of-state warrant. They consistently refused services, so the sheriffs issued the vacate order, and Heal the Ocean and Earthcomb cleared the beach, only to watch it get re-occupied by these same individuals.

Harry was beyond frustrated, rightfully. On Friday, a crew of sheriffs, Earthcomb, and Harry convened to clear the beach yet again. I joined them and interviewed two of Andrew's hires. I want to share their story with you. Both gentlemen worked Montecito's Beautification Day and the beach clean-up a week later.

Kory

Now 42, **Kory** grew up in Oxnard, near Silver Strand Beach. He fell into meth addiction in his 20s, and it plagued him for a decade. His addiction made it very hard

to hold down a job, so he spiraled down into living in the Santa Clarita River bottom. A friend of his was then murdered there. “That freaked me out,” he said, shuddering. He bounced to Santa Barbara, working temporary jobs while living on the railroad tracks behind Chase Palm Park. **Heike Hyson**, with AmeriCorps, engaged him. She referred him to New Beginnings, who housed him at El Carrillo leveraging an emergency housing voucher HUD issued in the pandemic. Thanks to terrific footwork by **Emily Allen**, our County was highly successful in placing people in housing using those vouchers. Los Angeles, in comparison, let thousands of housing vouchers expire, with 67,000 people experiencing homelessness.

Kory loves working with Earthcomb, though the work is part-time, and he wants full-time employment. I watched him clear trash, and then carry chairs for ladies setting up a wedding on Butterfly Beach. He hasn’t seen his family since he was seven. He was raised by his grandmother. His mother likely couldn’t afford to raise him, he thinks, but he’s not able to connect with her.

He understands the camp scene he just cleared. “People want to be able to just go, on a moment’s notice, somewhere they can use drugs – but then you get stuck in a rut and it becomes impossible to get out. I’m so glad I’m housed, after 15 years out here.”

David

David is a cautiously friendly guy one month shy of his 40th birthday, and not in a good place. He was extradited from Oregon to Santa Barbara a week ago, as he’s on parole here for assaulting a man. He has five months to go on his sentence. David had a job and a place to live in Oregon. Here, he just has the clothes on his back and nowhere to live, again. One wonders what the heck his parole officer was thinking. He first experienced homelessness at age 15. “I was born and raised here. I don’t want to be here. Most of the people on the street are not good people. They’ll drag you down, strung out on drugs.” His voice trembles, “You just can’t trust anybody on the street.”

He doesn’t want to go to the shelters in Santa Barbara. Fights are common among shelter residents who have previously had trouble with each other, now jammed together in a congregate setting. “I don’t need any more trouble.” He’s sleeping in a park in Santa Barbara instead.

City Net consistently asks for non-congregate shelter because of experiences like David’s. We had non-congregate shelter with Project Roomkey, when Governor **Newsom** funded placing people experiencing homelessness in vacant

hotels during the pandemic. The community would need to sponsor a hotel room now, a costly and temporary solution.

We were able to solve one of David's problems on the beach. I called **Adam McKaig**, of Adam's Angels, a Montecitan who is truly an angel. I asked if he had any men's clothes available, and he did, but couldn't get to his storage unit until the weekend. About 30 minutes later, Adam texted me pictures of clothing he just bought at Costco for David. When I delivered them, David teared up, and hugged me. I'll ask David's parole officer about letting him return to Oregon, where he has employment, and can afford his rent. The law may be the law, but the community would not welcome people being forcibly relocated here to be made homeless. The Hands Across Montecito team can help get David to a better place in his life.

In our outreach, we have observed a significant increase in individuals experiencing homelessness in the 25-to-45-year age range – young Gen X and Millennials. The issues they struggle with are harder for the Hands team to solve. There is no medically assisted detox treatment for meth addiction, very widespread here. Criminal justice involvement is tough to navigate in trying to get someone out of homelessness.

This is the start of a conversation we need to have as a community, and we hope to share more voices like David's and Kory's. It's easy to become unhoused in a too-tight, too-expensive housing market, like playing high-stakes musical chairs. Nextdoor hosts constant "in need of a place to rent" posts from people who apparently never make any noise, have no pets or kids, and work at professional occupations. It's not hard to see how someone less together in their life will fall completely out of that housing game.

If you'd like to support Hands Across Montecito, please contact us at info@montecitoassociation.org.

Sharon Byrne is Executive Director of the Montecito Association

<https://www.montecitojournal.net/2022/11/22/the-hands-helping-homelessness/>

LOCAL NEWS

Montecito Asks City, County to Collaborate on Homelessness

BY EILEEN READ | MAY 24, 2022

It's noon, about five hours later than Hands Across Montecito's (HAM) usual monthly hike to locate and aid our village's hidden population of unhoused individuals. We generally arrive just after dawn to find folks barely awake in their bivouacs around freeway entrances, in gullies near the railroad tracks and cemetery, along creek beds, and on the beach. As I park on Los Patos Way near the bird refuge on the Montecito-Santa Barbara border, I also notice a huge increase in our outreach team, with **Sharon Byrne**, Montecito Association Executive Director, standing at the center of about two dozen people, including local dignitaries: Santa Barbara city council members **Kristen Sneddon** and **Oscar Gutierrez** and Fire Chief **Chris Mailes** (deep in conversation with Montecito Fire Chief **Kevin Taylor**); and S.B. County District One Supervisor **Das Williams** and his Chief of Staff, **Darcel Elliott**. I notice colleagues from the Montecito Association's partner nonprofits, including **Harry Rabin** and **Hillary Hauser** from the environmental group Heal the Ocean; social workers from the homeless-outreach organization City Net; and **Andrew Velikanje** from Earthcomb, a newly-created nonprofit that cleans camps' debris. Rounding out the numbers are three county sheriff's deputies, volunteers including Montecito residents **Jennifer Perry** and **Ron Sickafoose**, and MA Vice President **Doug Black**.

"Let's see why we need to work together," Byrne tells the group as we set off. "We want you to see that homeless people move around and might be in Goleta one day, and Carpinteria the next. They and their problems don't stop at jurisdictional borders. They migrate, sometimes along the railroad tracks. "It becomes a process of continually clearing out camps that then recur," she yells as we snake up a narrow path sandwiched between the roaring freeway and the restaurants adjacent to the bird refuge – perilously close to the Union Pacific tracks. There's detritus

everywhere, from shopping carts to tents. We find only one individual in residence, a skeletal middle-aged woman who we learn is known to outreach workers throughout South County, but has never been successfully persuaded to accept treatment and shelter.

This reminds Byrne of another homeless woman whom several jurisdictions unwittingly were trying to help at the same time. “We found her in Montecito in February and started a case file to get her on a waiting list for housing. It wasn’t until she suddenly got an apartment just two months later – an unheard-of speed – that we learned Goleta had put her on the wait list for housing several months prior to February. We were duplicating efforts. It’s happening a lot, with outreach workers run ragged, and one agency that doesn’t know what the other is doing. And whose nickel pays for what?”

Despite the freeway noise, Byrne’s remarks stimulate a lot of discussion about the public’s false perception that agencies handling homelessness already are cooperating regularly across jurisdictions, much as local fire departments do in dealing with dozens of fires in homeless encampments annually. “All the time, constantly, we have to work together, and with the police,” says Chief Taylor, with Chief Mailes nodding in agreement. Yet even the efficiency of our fire departments couldn’t stop a homeless, drug addicted individual from allegedly setting the Loma Alta fire last May – although it undoubtedly kept the fire from spreading further. In the aftermath, handling homelessness became an emergency, and the county offered dozens of housing vouchers through a grant from the federal Housing and Urban Development agency, while the city housed many formerly homeless people at the 40-room Rose Garden Inn on upper State Street for six months. The project was plagued by residents’ arguments requiring police intervention, including one incident in which a formerly homeless individual pulled a gun on a terrified City Net social worker, according to Byrne. (The individual, a recent arrival from Orlando, Florida, was put on a bus headed back.) The temporary housing solution might have helped skew last winter’s homelessness count, which was inexplicably down in several places in South County, including Montecito. The motel project seemed like a viable, though at \$2.8 million, an expensive, solution for a while, including several homeless individuals who had been camping in Montecito – though all residents were suddenly evicted when funding ran out.

The Rose Garden Inn is a major topic on our hike, with many wondering, should the goal be to house the unhoused in motels again? While Elliott from the county first district says “closure of the hotel was devastating to me because we don’t have

enough supportive housing units,” Byrne derides the project as “warehousing” because it brought together too many formerly homeless individuals without life skills or adequate supervision. Councilmember Gutierrez says he wants to get more churches involved in providing beds and volunteers. Supervisor Williams, describing the absence of affordable housing as “the elephant in the room,” says he’s looking forward to seeing 33 individuals find places in the Dignity Moves “tiny house” project underway on Santa Barbara Street, and to expanding the city’s partnership with the nonprofit New Beginnings to support people forced to live in their cars because of eviction or other financial problems.

The bright, and to the officials present, surprising spot in our walkaround, is the progress being made by Montecito’s HAM project in addressing homelessness – what Byrne calls the “Montecito model.” What’s different, she explains to the fascinated group, is the multi-disciplinary team approach emphasizing that “outreach comes first, not enforcement. Outreach first, and the agencies follow.” Meaning, the team visits individuals living outdoors and handles them on a case-by-case basis, with City Net funneling information to the county’s Behavioral Wellness agency via a shared spreadsheet, enabling the agency to follow people making their way through various stages of assistance: drug and alcohol programs, veterans’ services, moving into shelters, returning to their families in other parts of the country, or in some cases, incarceration. Byrne’s ‘model’ includes convening monthly meetings with the entire team, including volunteers, to share information confidentially, and to brainstorm possible solutions. And on a daily basis, everyone involved keeps an eye out for panhandlers, campers, and other signs of unhoused folks in Montecito, and texts information to Byrne, who routes it to the right person or agency. This approach is similar to those used successfully in small cities throughout California, notably in Santa Monica and Pasadena. However, both of those localities have an advantage that is missing in Santa Barbara; they can enforce anti-camping/anti-tent laws because they have available enough shelter beds to offer anyone living on the streets a place to sleep indoors.

Yet Byrne too puts her advantages to good use. She sits on the county’s Behavioral Wellness Commission, formerly as its chair, where she’s acquired a deep understanding of how the current homeless-services system works, as well as its limits. She also has a keen interest in the dual goals of helping homeless people work through their problems, while serving the Montecito community by ushering unhoused people away from our village, and continually cleaning up camps. She’s been gratified to learn that “Montecitans are sophisticated about the limits of government” and therefore don’t expect success without three extra-governmental

elements: collaboration with nonprofits, solicitation of funds from private and institutional donors, and personal involvement. This understanding and willingness to roll up our sleeves, she says, “might make Montecito the most unique place for handling homelessness. The community is willing to donate flexible dollars for things like temporary housing, food, and clean-up, and some of those same villagers have been willing to come out and see for themselves what our homeless problem looks like.”

Of course there are limits to what Montecito can accomplish, as anyone can attest who has encountered people on Coast Village Road determined to remain outdoors – such as the elderly woman who appears to reside on a bench in front of the Point Market, and the couple perennially panhandling at Starbucks. (And by the way, Byrne implores residents not to give money to panhandlers.) Yet as word of Montecito’s progress has spread, Byrne has been invited to the County Supervisors’ Forum for Elected Leaders on July 8 to present the nearly two-year-old history of Hands Across Montecito, and to delineate her vision for how its approach might be scaled throughout the county. She plans to tell them about a private-public breakthrough that occurred during our hike: Currently when the folks at Earthcomb clean up a camp, they have to pay waste hauler MarBorg Industries to rent dumpsters and to cart away debris, using donated private funds. But during our hike, Byrne persuaded both Councilmember Sneddon from the city, and Supervisor Williams from the county, to add these clean-up costs to their jurisdictions’ contracts with MarBorg – freeing Montecito donor funds for more creative purposes. She says, “It’s a win-win.”

Master Gardener and environmental advocate Eileen White Read, a former Wall Street Journal reporter and retired nonprofit CEO, has spent 27 years in Santa Barbara County, the past decade at the beach at Montecito’s Bonnymede with her husband, Charles, an energy lawyer. She co-chairs its Landscaping Committee, which is spearheading a renaissance of the condo community’s environmentally fragile 11 acres.

<https://www.montecitojournal.net/2022/05/24/montecito-asks-city-county-to-collaborate-on-homelessness/>