

Petaluma Health Care District and Community Partners Launch Collaborative Program for Petaluma's Most At-Risk Homeless

Petaluma Sober Circle Offers Streamlined Services for Chronically Intoxicated Homeless to Break Cycle of Addiction, Hospitalization and Incarceration

PETALUMA, Calif., Mar. 14, 2016 – [Petaluma Health Care District](#) (PHCD), in collaboration with the Petaluma Police Department, the Committee on the Shelterless (COTS), the Petaluma Fire Department, the Drug Abuse Alternatives Center, the Petaluma Health Center, Sonoma County Behavioral Health, St. Joseph Health, and the Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Santa Rosa, announces the implementation of Petaluma Sober Circle (PSC). Designed to build upon efforts to address the needs of the city's homeless population through sheltering, treatment and other necessary services, PSC takes a critical step further by dedicating resources to direct outreach to this vulnerable population. On Feb. 25, PSC received a grant to round out the program's funding and ensure implementation of a two-year pilot project.

"PHCD has been serving as the backbone organization to support and align local community efforts to address the myriad needs and underlying causes of Southern Sonoma County's homeless residents, and we are thrilled that the hard work our dedicated partners have put in has resulted in the launch of Sober Circle," said PHCD CEO Ramona Faith. "We know this program is already working and is allowing us to reach so many more community members in need. The ultimate goal is to increase the chance of recovery, improve the quality of life, and decrease homelessness, and we hope that our success will serve as a catalyst for an eventual Sonoma County-wide program."

Approximately 21 homeless people have died in Petaluma's streets or by its waterways since 2010, and the Petaluma Police Department identified this as a critical issue in its community.

"We routinely meet with groups to discuss and work on issues affecting our citizens and the safety of our community, coming up with strategies for solutions and better services. Officer Bill Baseman was one of the early voices to get the conversation going about a better way to help get intoxicated homeless – the people with the greatest need – the resources for a path to sobriety, shelter, and a promising future," said Petaluma Police Lieutenant Ken Savano.

Through their combined efforts, PSC collaborators are committed to connecting clients to services to prevent such lonely deaths and guide them on a path to sobriety. Grants from St. Joseph Health, Kaiser Permanente and Partnership HealthPlan of California, along with the expansion of Catholic Charities' Homeless Outreach Services Team program will support efforts to proactively reach out to those in need as soon as possible.

The Petaluma Police Department has committed a full-time homeless outreach officer, and a new position created with the funding is also operating out of COTS. Officer Ryan DeBaeke and Outreach Lead Randy Clay are working in tandem to make contact and build relationships with potential clients, offering everything from socks, medical appointments, transportation to drug and alcohol treatment, services, shelter and, ultimately, housing.

"Any delay is like an eternity when you're ready to seek treatment," said COTS CEO Mike Johnson. "Joining forces with our community partners to get PSC up and running allows us to offer help and hope right away to those in Petaluma who need it the most. Drug and Alcohol treatment beds are set aside in the community for the program so that no one who wants

treatment is denied. Once out of treatment, a participant is guaranteed a bed at our Mary Isaak Center and full access to the center's programs, including the housing program."

PSC is modeled after San Diego's incredibly successful Serial Inebriate Program (SIP). At the onset of the program in 2000, 887 homeless individuals were identified as chronic inebriate and accounted for 3,483 arrests. Today, San Diego has seen a 78 percent reduction of chronic inebriated homeless in the city. Approximately 700 people have benefitted from the program and are no longer entering a sobering center or jail. Also determined through studies over the past 15 years since SIP's inception, each client that has accepted the program results in a \$73,000 savings per month in health care costs alone.

With San Diego's documented success as an indicator, PSC is expected to save the city of Petaluma, Petaluma Police Department and Petaluma Valley Hospital precious time and financial resources that might have otherwise been dedicated to emergency room services and arrests and incarceration.

"We are happy a multitude of organizations recognized the seriousness of the problem and the importance of our collaboration," Lieutenant Savano said. "We express heartfelt thanks to our community partners for helping to fully-fund and launch PSC so we can get people into treatment and start rebuilding their lives. This will ultimately reduce incarcerations, improve public safety, and reduce the impact on local police, fire, and emergency medical services."

PSC is a community effort. If you see someone you think needs help, please contact COTS Outreach Lead Randy Clay at 707-765-6530 x126 and he will attempt to make contact promptly.

About Petaluma Health Care District

The Petaluma Health Care District (PHCD) is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of the Southern Sonoma County community through leadership, advocacy, support, partnerships and education. Its vision is to foster a healthier community, a thriving hospital and local access to comprehensive health and wellness services. PHCD has served the health and wellness needs of the community for 70 years and is a public agency managed by the community for the community. For more information, please visit www.phcd.org.

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