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## San Bernardino County exceeds goal of ending veteran homelessness

*By Joe Nelson, The Sun*

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San Bernardino County met and exceeded its goal of housing all its homeless veterans identified in last January's point-in-time homeless count, county officials announced Thursday.

But there is still work to be done, as roughly 100 more homeless veterans have been identified since the county embarked on its mission in July.

"We will stand by the commitment we've made to our veterans by finding them permanent housing," Board of Supervisors Chairman James Ramos said in a written statement Thursday. "I'm proud to say we achieved and exceeded an important goal, but there is much more work to be done on homelessness in our county."

In June, the Board of Supervisors unanimously [approved a recommendation](#) by one of the nation's leading experts on homelessness to implement a strategy to permanently house all 401 of its identified homeless veterans from last January's point-in-time homeless count on or by Dec. 31, 2015. By Thanksgiving, all had been housed, along with roughly 100 other homeless veterans who were identified after the homeless count, according to a news release.

The next step will be to house the approximately 100 homeless veterans identified since July.

"The transitory nature of homelessness means the numbers of homeless people in the county changes day to day," said Supervisor Josie Gonzales, who is the chairwoman of the county's Interagency Council on Homelessness. "But the model used to tackle the homeless veterans issue worked and will be applied to assist other sections of the county's homeless population."

County CEO Greg Devereaux recruited homeless czar Philip Mangano to serve as an advisor to the county. Mangano is the CEO of the American Roundtable to Abolish Homelessness and is the former executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness under former President George W. Bush.

Mangano said Thursday the strategy the county put in place has caught the attention of U.S. Veteran Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald in Washington D.C. He said it was the confluence of political will in Washington and San Bernardino County to end veteran homelessness that is attributed to the county's success.

The county's strategy, Mangano said, entailed forming the San Bernardino County Advisory Group on Ending Veterans Homelessness, composed of various county agencies, for the purpose of brainstorming ways of clearing obstacles and slashing through bureaucratic red tape that hinders the housing of homeless veterans. The group met with housing providers to get a clear picture of what those obstacles were, then set out to eliminate them, Mangano said.

“Every impediment that was identified by the providers, the advisory group was to able to solve the problem and get rid of the impediments,” Mangano said.

Various county agencies and nonprofits that joined in the effort include the San Bernardino County Department of Veterans Affairs, the California Apartment Association, the Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino, Lighthouse Social Services Centers in Colton, National CORE, Arrowhead United Way, Loma Linda University Health, Inland Valley Hope Partners and the Faith Advisory Council in San Bernardino.

Frank Guevara, director of the San Bernardino County Department of Veterans Affairs, said that, as a veteran himself, he found it appalling that anyone who served the country in the armed forces is homeless. But he found it inspiring to see what the county and its partners have been able to do for its homeless veterans.

“The journey of our veterans has not been an easy one, and they still have many challenges before them, but they are not alone,” said Guevara, a retired Army colonel. “As they face the next chapters of their lives, they will continue to receive support and guidance from the county-led advisory group of community and private partners who worked tirelessly to ensure our heroes have housing.”

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