

# **The San Antonio Way**

## **Haven for Hope Focuses on Transforming Lives**

**By Craig Powell**  
**Inside City Hall**

I first learned about Haven for Hope, a unique homeless facility in San Antonio, Texas, from a close friend, Jill McDonnell. Jill is a professional photographer in Sacramento who doubles as the official photographer of the Land Park Volunteer Corps. Jill rides “shotgun” with me on our monthly park work days in William Land Park. We distribute copious amounts of cold water to hardworking park volunteers and thank them for their indispensable help.

Jill’s overriding passion, however, is capturing extraordinary images of Sacramento’s homeless people. Her photography is reminiscent of the remarkable work of Dorothea Lange, the photographer famous for chronicling the desperation on the faces of struggling migrants during the Great Depression. Jill’s photos of homeless people have been displayed in the photo gallery in the lobby at Sacramento City Hall and other local galleries. We occasionally display her work at the Corps’ Base Camp, a reminder to park volunteers of the struggles the homeless in our midst face. Her pictures of our park volunteers are often featured in this publication.

Jill is no softheaded bleeding heart. She has a steely-eyed realist’s view of the complexity of human nature, both its positive and negative elements. She’s also closely attuned to the players, policies and politics involved with homeless issues in Sacramento. Because she has an abiding human compassion and innate common sense (an all-too-rare combination, I’ve found), I sought out her perspective when I began studying the city’s stumbling responses to the homelessness problem. She had one unwavering piece of advice: Go to San Antonio.

What she meant was that I should visit Haven for Hope. Last month, I spent a week in the south Texas city while attending a think tank conference. I made sure to schedule an extended tour of the facility with Laura Calderon, Haven for Hope’s insightful and frank director of external relations.

## **Overview of Haven for Hope**

Haven for Hope, built in 2010, is the largest facility of its kind, caring for almost 1,600 people nightly in a sprawling campus spread out over 34 acres. It's also the nation's most highly acclaimed homeless facility. Officials from more than 300 U.S. cities have passed through its doors to see exactly how the Haven model works and to assess whether its approach would be a good fit for their communities. Haven differs from other facilities in its innovative two-step approach to caring for the homeless, as well as its comprehensive approach to helping homeless individuals transform their lives. Haven for Hope is clearly not in the business of just warehousing people.

### **Haven's Transformational Campus**

Haven for Hope is clear about its mission: to transform lives, not merely ameliorate the immediate problem of homelessness. Unlike most homeless programs, Haven is laser-focused on aggressively and comprehensively addressing the root causes of homelessness, which are as varied as the colors of the rainbow: drug addiction, alcoholism, mental illness, bad luck, medical crises, sudden joblessness, domestic abuse, domestic disintegration, the unique challenges facing disconnected LBGT youth, and the rebellious among us who choose a life of living off the grid.

The heavy lifting of helping people work through the root causes of their homelessness takes place in its Transformational Campus, a series of renovated industrial warehouses housing 65 affiliated service agencies and nonprofits that implement the highly individualized care plans crafted by case managers for each new participant. An additional 85 referral partners provide services to Haven's residents at their own sites. There are also typically 1,000 volunteers working on the campus each month in various capacities.

### **The First Step: The Courtyard**

The typical entry point for most homeless people to Haven is through its outdoor Courtyard. It is a very large, open-air covered patio that typically has a count of 841 people during the day and 637 at night. It's equipped with heavy-duty fans and misters to keep down ambient temperatures. Indoor facilities are made available to Courtyard occupants during periods of inclement weather. Only basic services are provided to those in the Courtyard: regular meals, laundry access, sleeping pads, health care triage and mental health care services, as well as lockers for personal belongings.

Sobriety is not a requirement for entry into the Courtyard. It is a largely safe resting and sleeping place for those not yet ready to meet the requirements for entry into the Transformational Campus. Petty theft is a problem, but the Courtyard is heavily patrolled by both Haven security personnel and off-duty San Antonio police officers.

If someone is willing to commit to sobriety and agrees to comply with the Transformational Campus' rules for participation, they are typically admitted to the Transformational Campus. Once admitted, they are closely monitored in their early days to ensure that they remain sober. Haven staffers acknowledge that slips are often a part of recovery and don't result in summary dismissal from the program. Staffers are clearly committed to each resident's success.

More than 5,948 people have moved from the Courtyard to higher levels of residential care, including sobriety programs, mental health programs and other forms of supportive and/or permanent housing, since Haven's opening in 2010. The contrast between the spartan Courtyard and the more supportive Transformational Campus provides a strong incentive for homeless people to transfer to the Campus.

### **Success in Ending Homelessness: Employment of Residents**

The Transformational Campus currently houses 433 single men, 174 single women and 254 family members (including 152 children with an average age of 6), each housed in separate dormitories. It also houses 56 veterans.

Since opening, 3,682 people have exited the Transformational Campus and moved to permanent housing. The average length of stay for the past 12 months was 162 days for single people and 134 days for families. After one year, 90 percent of people who exited with a housing placement did not return to homelessness, an extraordinary track record. More than 2,262 individuals have attained employment since Haven's opening, typically through the efforts of Haven's staff and affiliates.

### **Impact on Residents and the San Antonio Community**

How effective has Haven for Hope been in reducing homelessness in San Antonio? After Haven's first year of operation, the annual January point-in-time count of homeless people in downtown San Antonio declined from 738 to 254, a drop of nearly two-thirds. In the most recent count in January of this year, the homeless count had dropped to 148.

Because Haven provides comprehensive health care to its residents (and nonresidents), including mental health programs, detox services and in-house recovery programs, it has become the care facility of choice for San Antonio police dealing with public inebriates. More than 50,000 people have received such potentially life-saving detox services at Haven's Restoration Center since its inception, relieving city and county jails, emergency rooms and courtrooms of an estimated \$97 million in taxpayer costs, according to Haven estimates.

Haven's In-House Recovery Program provides housing and support for those with drug and alcohol addictions. A total of 1,438 individuals have successfully completed the program, and many of its graduates were job-ready upon completion. Since opening in October 2010, IHRP has had a success rate of 56 percent, which exceeds the average completion rate for such programs of 44 percent. Through its in-house mental health wellness programs, one for men and another for women, Haven has served 1,391 individuals, with a combined success rate of 44 percent.

Haven has developed joint projects with the San Antonio Police Department, including Haven's Jail Release Program and the Center for Health Care Services' Jail Diversion Program, which has resulted in sharp drops in the number of jail bookings. Jail bookings dropped 3,300 in Haven's first year, with recent drops of 800 and 1,700 in the past two years.

Haven's Restoration Center also allows police officers to quickly divert injured prisoners to the center's on-site minor-emergency clinic instead of to hospital ERs, minimizing the time officers spend in emergency rooms. The city estimates that the value of getting those officers quickly back on the street is approximately \$2 million annually.

Most of the health clinics operating at Haven are open to the public free of charge; the public makes more than 40,000 visits to Haven for medical, dental and vision care services annually.

## **An Engaged Private Sector Funded Most of Development Costs**

Haven for Hope was built at a cost of \$100.5 million in 2010. Here's a stunning fact: More than 60 percent of its construction cost was funded by private-sector sources. Its construction served to create 190 permanent new jobs at Haven and another 150 new jobs created by its affiliate nonprofits, as well as 465 construction jobs.

Haven for Hope is still heavily supported by the private sector: 50 percent of its \$18.6 million annual operating budget is funding by private-sector donors, 27 percent by the state, 16 percent by city government, 4 percent by county government and 3 percent by the federal government. Of the private-sector sources of operations funding, the United Way contributes 8 percent, private contributions account for 21 percent and 21 percent is provided by two private foundations, one of which is largely funded by the extraordinary visionary who created Haven for Hope, William E. Greehey, a retired CEO of San Antonio-based Valero Energy.

## **Business Community Leadership**

In 2005, Greehey, recently retired as Valero's CEO, was having difficulty figuring out how to make a difference. According to an interview by the Los Angeles Times, Greehey said he was inspired by a local television report on homelessness. "What I saw was that all we were doing is recycling the homeless people that would go to jail, come out of jail, get sick, go to the emergency room, get treated, get back to the street. We weren't doing anything to address the root cause of why these people were homeless," he said.

He spent the next five years developing his ambitious vision for Haven for Hope, a first-of-its-kind facility in terms of its scope of services, size and degree of collaboration required by nonprofit and agency partners. He succeeded in bringing San Antonio's mayor and city manager on board as strong early supporters. He also corralled major support from San Antonio's business community and leaders, as well as those experienced in providing services to homeless populations. He used his deep experience in industrial development and executive leadership skills to move his vision from dream to reality.

## **A Model Sacramento Should Seriously Consider**

In my August column, I recounted the failure of homelessness policies in almost every major city on the West Coast while public spending by West Coast cities to "solve" their homeless problem has been skyrocketing. In my September column, I chronicled the seemingly endless fights and disagreements in

Sacramento over how to best deal with homeless issues, with Mayor Steinberg scrambling to spend money as quickly as possible on largely untested scattershot approaches to the problem.

San Antonio's model, Haven for Hope, is succeeding in transforming lives, dramatically reducing street homelessness, improving health outcomes for both the homeless and the public, moving people from homelessness into permanent housing, increasing employment and dramatically reducing costs to taxpayers. I'm convinced that developing a Haven for Hope-type facility in Sacramento requires strong private-sector leadership, free of the political angles that color—and too often contaminate—the search for sound solutions to difficult public problems. In addition, private-sector capital is probably essential to bringing such a vision to life in Sacramento.

The Sacramento business community has no shortage of visionary, talented business leaders. Here is a perfect opportunity for one of them to make a real difference.

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