

Re: Submission for IDA Downtown Achievement Award – Leadership and Management
Organization: Downtown Tucson Partnership (DTP)
Project: DTP Connects

Background:

Chronic street homelessness is a complex societal issue that many cities are faced with world-wide. Tucson, Arizona and its Downtown are no different. Living on the streets is very dangerous and threatens the health and well-being of people, businesses and the entire community.

According to the 2017 Business Security Survey conducted by the Downtown Tucson Merchant and Retail Council, homelessness was ranked the number one safety concern among Downtown business and property owners. Chronic street homelessness was also identified as the biggest barrier to Downtown Tucson's success in both DTP's online Board survey and at the 2017 DTP Board Retreat.

Homelessness comes at a cost. In 2016, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded approximately 8.6 million dollars to Pima County for homeless programs and housing. Additionally, millions of dollars are spent locally each year on courts, law enforcement, jail beds, hospitals, and emergency responders.

Quality of life becomes a real factor for not only those experiencing homelessness, but also for the Downtown visitor, resident, student and employee. Public health and sanitation issues result from an increase of defecation and urination in public spaces. Safety is also threatened with an increase of illegal behavior and violence occurring among this population. The result is a public perception that Downtown is unsafe, unwelcoming and unsanitary.

This social issue is occurring at a time of unprecedented growth for Downtown Tucson. 34 development projects are currently underway and/or proposed, 38 new businesses opened last year averaging one new business every ten days. The number of residential developments is on the rise as well, with approximately 15,500 people living within a one-mile radius of Downtown.

Project Summary:

DTP Connects is a homeless outreach program utilizing the *Housing First* approach providing housing as a priority. Individuals experiencing homelessness are being placed in housing and receiving support services. Onsite interviews and assessments are provided by a dedicated community engagement specialist at homeless encampments and on Downtown streets via a *DTP Connects* mobile service unit.

Goals and Objectives:

The primary goal of *DTP Connects* is to get individuals off the streets and into housing.

Objectives:

- Connect individuals in need with housing and support service agencies.
- Seek out those in need and provide information via mobile service unit.
- Provide onsite assessments and evaluations utilizing the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT).
- Remove barriers and streamline approval process for housing and support services.

Approach:

Initially, the plan was to recruit several social workers to provide outreach and make direct contact with homeless individuals living at Jacome Plaza, Downtown's central park and gathering space. The plaza was used as a homeless encampment for many years, occupied by over 80 homeless individuals.

After a mass call to over 30 social services agencies, we received one response. Old Pueblo Community Services (OPCS) stepped up to the challenge and provided Downtown Tucson Partnership with a community engagement specialist. We were thrilled that OPCS wanted to partner with us given their reputation as a leading social service agency known for producing results. In collaboration with OPCS, we adjusted our initial plan. Instead of having numerous outreach specialists combing the encampment daily, we setup one table in the plaza with a large red sign that read, "Need a Home?" The table was staffed five days a week from 9 am – 12 pm by the community engagement specialist. Onsite interviews and assessments were conducted to pair homeless individuals with services and housing. A DTP security ambassador was assigned to the plaza 24 hours/7 days a week to further encourage participation and build trust among individuals in need. On most days, the line of applicants was steady and unending. An average of two people per day were signed up for housing and/or support services in the first two months of the program. During unstaffed hours, the table and sign remained in place with a note pad. People in need were able to sign up for an interview no matter what time of day.

We developed a Fact Sheet explaining the details of the program including our approach and results. A user-friendly resource guide detailing housing and support services accompanied the Fact Sheet. This Fact Sheet was distributed to Downtown stakeholders and local media.

Phase II of the program took our outreach efforts to the streets and outlying parks. DTP Security and the Community Engagement Specialist make rounds throughout the Downtown in a *DTP Connects* branded golf cart, complete with a purple emergency light on top and a *DTP Connects* banner on the rear. *DTP Connects* mobile service unit makes diligent rounds every Tuesday and Thursday throughout Downtown Tucson, searching for those experiencing homelessness, delivering information about services, housing and job opportunities.

Results:

The success of the program is tremendous. *DTP Connects* has placed approximately 80 individuals into housing in three months, decreasing chronic street homelessness by 96%. On December 1, 2017 there were approximately 84 homeless individuals living in the parks and streets of Downtown. As of March 1, 2018, there were only three! Sanitation calls for human waste have decreased by 92%. Security calls for violence and drug use have decreased by 96%. Implementing *DTP Connects* has saved our organization money due to the reduction of maintenance and security calls, requiring less staff and resources. Police, fire and emergency services have noticed a similar drop off in calls.

This program is responsible for completely transforming a homeless encampment fraught with sanitation and safety issues, into a vibrant public plaza enjoyed by all. Jacome Plaza now averages approximately 175-250 new park users per (non-event) day, around 75% are women and 53% are children. The effects of this program extend throughout the entire Downtown community.

Sustainability and Replication:

Local agencies are impressed with our success and are using the *DTP Connects* program as a model for a larger city-wide outreach effort. We are meeting with service providers and neighborhood groups to share our tactics, methodology and to provide advice on how best to manage this very complex social issue. Together with our partners we are solving the problem of chronic street homelessness in Downtown Tucson, Arizona.