

Lee's Summit Police Department
Travis Forbes, Chief

RESPONSES TO HOMELESS/TRANSIENT POPLUATIONS

Purpose

- Create awareness and understanding of homelessness
- Frame the current environment
- Review current resources
- Future paths
 - No final, simple conclusion provided
 - Research
 - Community-based coalition
 - Avoid police-only focus

Defining Homelessness

- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) two categories:
 - sheltered and unsheltered.
- Sheltered - lives in an emergency shelter or transitional housing
 - domestic violence shelters; residential programs for homeless or runaway youth; or a hotel, motel or apartment paid for with a voucher provided by a governmental or private agency because the person is homeless.
- Unsheltered - lives in “a place not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings, or on the street.”
(44%)
 - (Arizona State University)

Defining Homelessness

- Status
 - A) temporary (due to an eviction, prolonged unemployment, job layoff, or domestic violence) or
 - B) chronic. The federal definition of chronically homeless - “unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years” (18%)
 - (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2008).

Defining Homelessness

- Special Note
 - Some individuals, often panhandlers or loiterers, are often classified by some citizens as “homeless” due to a disheveled appearance, odd behavior, or activities such as panhandling
 - These factors do not define an individual as homeless
 - San Bernardino study: 60% of panhandlers were not homeless

Causes

- Substance misuse
- Mental health (20%, according to Housing & Urban Development)
- Prior abuse
- Economy
- Lack of affordable housing
- Simple choice

Associated Community Concerns

- chronic public intoxication
- panhandling
- loitering
- trespassing
- shoplifting
- drug dealing
- mental illness
- victimization
- unsanitary living conditions
- negative impacts to businesses and residents
- illegitimate use of public spaces

Society's Views

- “Some believe chronic homelessness is a lifestyle choice and, as such, should be protected by law. Others claim it is a consequence of socio-economic factors, such as high unemployment and the lack of affordable housing, or that the chronically homeless are victims of abusive childhoods, addiction, or mental illness.”
 - (Community Oriented Policing Services, 2009)

Society's Views

- “Some police observers report that being homeless subjects people to more strict enforcement for activities that are dealt with more leniently if the person can show proof of address.”
 - (Community Oriented Policing Services (USDOJ), 2009).

Common Misconceptions

- “Solving” the homeless problem
- The police are ambivalent toward homelessness
- The police can stop homelessness
- A homeless person can be identified by appearance
- A homeless person can be identified by behavior
- Homelessness is illegal
- We can pass criminal laws to eliminate homelessness
- We can pass funding to eliminate homelessness
- Free handouts to a homeless person will solve their problems

“Typical” Police Response

- “Concealing the problem”
 - Call for service
 - Arrest and transport
 - 4 – 6 hours in jail
 - Subject returns to same location
 - Behavior continues
 - Missed court dates
 - Cycle – repeat
 - (San Bernardino County Sheriffs Department, 2016)

LSPD “Toolbox”

- In addition to standard response, LSPD has worked to expand services, to include:
 - Crisis Intervention Team
 - Safe Passage Drug Addiction Treatment
 - Mental Health Co-Responder

Requirement for Assistance Acceptance

- Involuntary approaches to addressing homeless individuals are limited to:
 - 1) arrest for criminal law violations
 - 2) 96 hour civil involuntary detention

Requirement for Assistance Acceptance

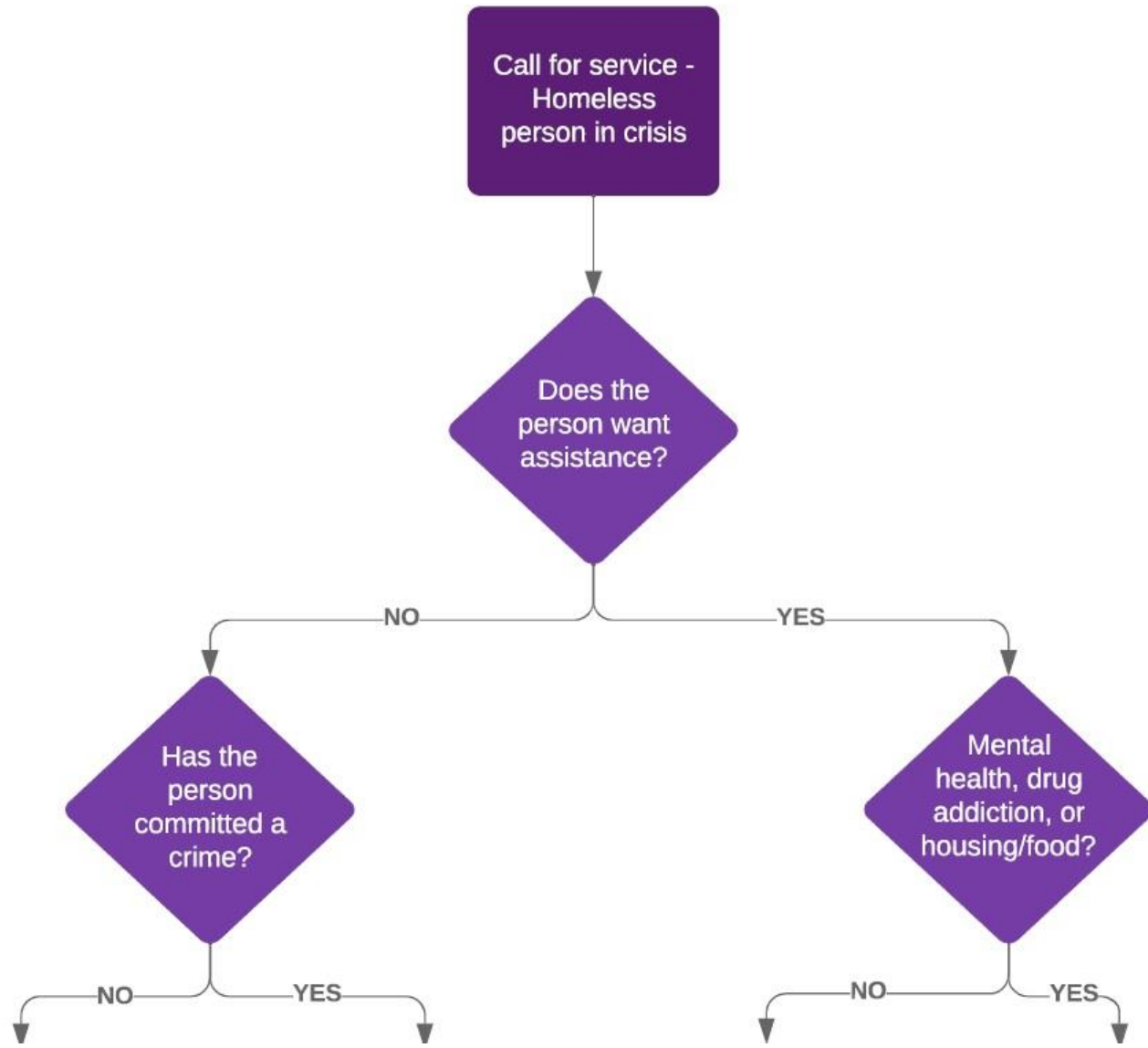
- Arrest for criminal law violations
 - Typically for misdemeanor offenses
 - Low bond terms, ROR bonds, or signature bonds
 - Cyclical introductions to the criminal justice system
 - “Criminalizing” homelessness

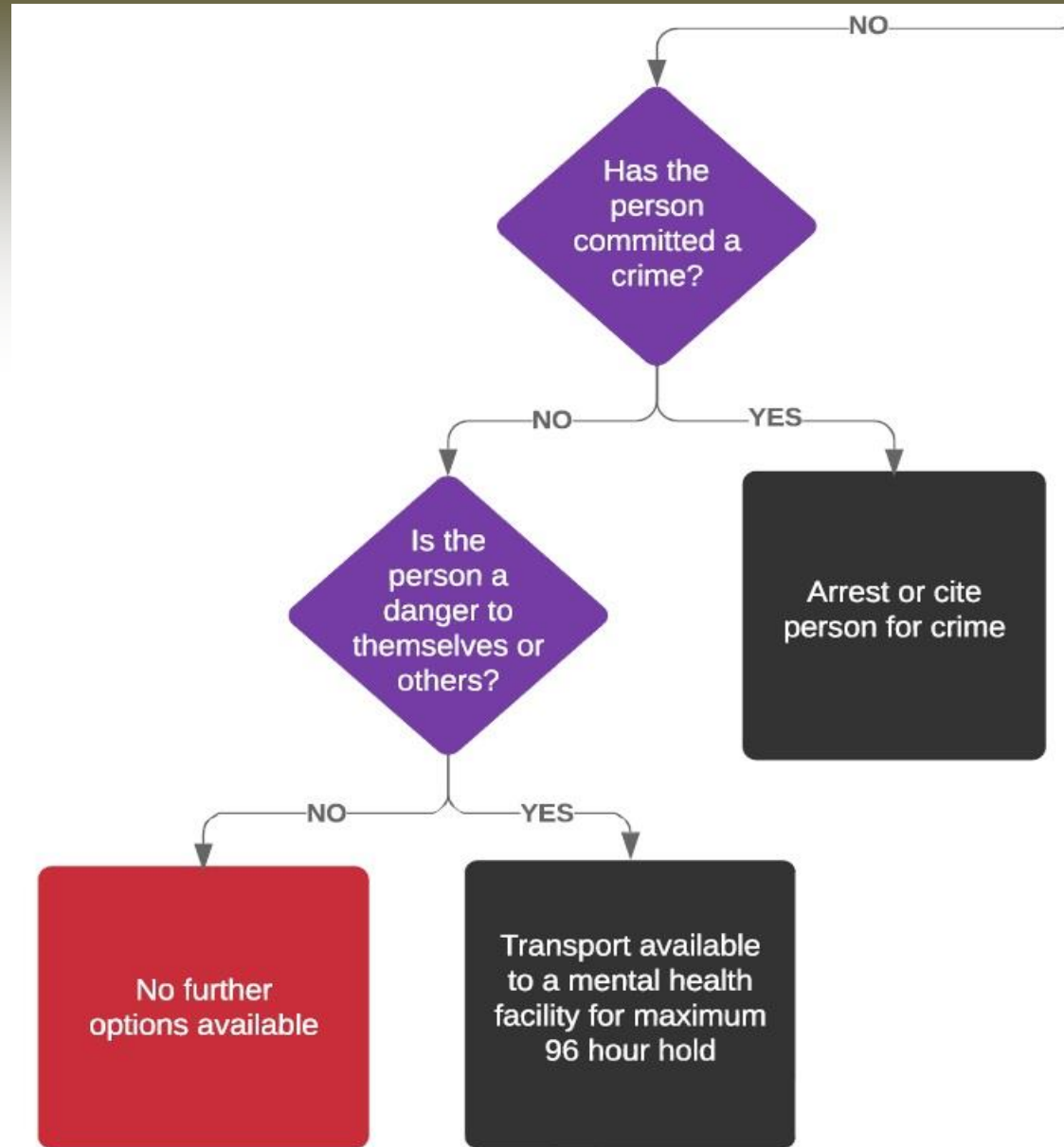
Requirement for Assistance Acceptance

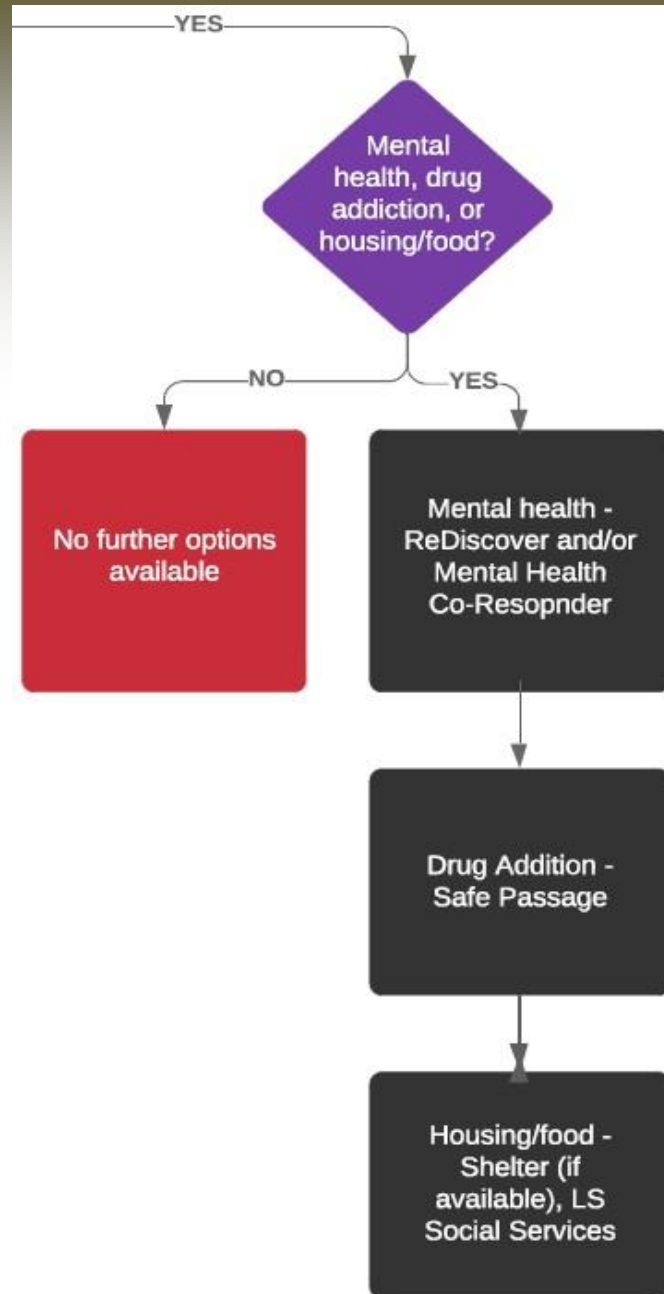
- 96 hour civil involuntary detention
 - Missouri Statutes, Chapter 632 RSMo
 - Affidavit required
 - Evaluation by medical staff determines release
 - Petition to court required for longer detention

Requirement for Assistance Acceptance

- The most effective approaches **require** the acceptance of assistance from the individual
- Absent this acceptance, absent a criminal law violation, absent stringent circumstances for a civil involuntary detention = most challenging situation







High Level of Effectiveness

- Enlisting community support to solve problems
- Educating the community
- Educating all service providers, police
- Developing a long-range plan
- Police/community collaboration with service providers
- Strong mental health/substance abuse resources
- Cautious regulations/ordinances
 - Public camping, exposure
- CPTED in public spaces
- Private sector security methods
- Coordination of services (eliminating unstructured “good Samaritan” offerings)
- Police specific - “Toolbox” of solutions (Houston PD)

Limited Effectiveness

- “Sidewalk behavior” ordinances
- Panhandling enforcement
- “Sweeps”
- Safe zones
- Increasing/implementing local shelters

Coalition Approach

- A coalition of local stakeholders to evaluate individual cases to determine appropriate responses
 - Emergency basis
 - Periodic meetings
- Plan of action developed based upon individual circumstances

Coalition Purpose

- Determine available responses for homelessness
- Determine gaps in homelessness response
- Determine availability of resources to fill gaps
 - Note: resources will not be all from the City of Lee's Summit
 - City staff can provide some of the research needed

Potential Stakeholders

- Social service agencies
- Religious and charitable organizations
- Homeless advocates
- Resident representatives
- Business representatives
- Community members
- Codes
- Media (for education)
- Elected officials
- City officials
- Outside government officials
- Police leadership
- Prosecutor's office/law
- Courts

Executive Order on Safe Policing for Safe Communities – (June, 2020)

- “The Attorney General shall...increase the capacity of social workers working directly with law enforcement agencies; and to provide guidance regarding the development and implementation of co-responder programs, which involve social workers or other mental health professionals working alongside law enforcement officers so that they arrive and address situations together.”

Cynthia Renaud, IACP Director, October 23, 2020

- “Homeless is “a global problem, to which no one seems to have found a complete resolution...”
- ...and while our current efforts with specialized teams should not be lessened, we need to generate a dialogue around the root causes of homelessness; not just the proximate ones we currently have the ability and tools to impact.”

Cynthia Renaud, IACP Director, October 23, 2020

- “And in that dialogue, we need to bring partners to the table. Those partners need to be people in groups rooted in both mental health and drug and alcohol addiction work as well as business community members and elected officials who can move forward the dialogue on the topic of homelessness while furthering the voice that law enforcement has had on this topic for so many years now.”

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Sources

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