
The Street Outreach Team Takes a Personalized Approach to Assist Unhoused Individuals

By Steven Herrera / June 11, 2021

Tag: Community

Casual observers may notice the appearance of a proliferation of homeless encampments in Hollywood and believe that little is being done to address the situation. Perhaps surprising to some, there is actually a lot of work taking place behind the scenes to remedy the situation. The Hollywood Partnership's (The HP) street outreach team is trained to connect with unhoused individuals living on the streets and refer them to services and assistance. The outreach team has the specialized knowledge, experience, and compassion to help the homeless and bring about positive changes in the community.

Over the past year, and in response to rapidly evolving shifts in local ordinances, the HP's approach toward addressing the homelessness crisis has shifted from a focus on security to a more empathetic and helpful posture through outreach. Although the Hollywood Partnership's Safety/Security Ambassador Program has been in existence for two decades, the street outreach team was added in January 2020, in response to overwhelming community concern about the expansion of the homelessness crisis and the loss of the public realm.

Courtney Kanagi leads The HP's street outreach team. "Our mission is to engage our unhoused individuals, meet them where they are at, and help them reach their full potential," she said. "We give them resources and options to help guide them to their intended goals."

The street outreach team consists of seasoned professionals who treat people with dignity and kindness. Team member **Yolanda Mickens** was brought onboard in May 2021 to diversify the skill set of the team. She can relate to homeless people as a former peer who has experienced being unhoused and having to navigate the social services system. Each member of the team is trained to have the initial conversation to understand the immediate needs for an unhoused individual.



Yolanda Mickens and Courtney Kanagi approach an encampment on Homewood to offer services to the occupant. (Photo by Devin Strecker)

The street outreach team gathers information in many different ways. For example, observations are made while patrolling the neighborhood, stakeholders report trespassing incidents involving the homeless, and reports can be made by anyone under the HP umbrella. Cases are prioritized based on need and the resources that are available at a given time.

One of the challenges of managing the unhoused population is finding the right tool for each individual. Many of them suffer from long-term mental health issues and drug/alcohol addiction. Furthermore, unhoused individuals often have trust issues, and are not ready to leave the street immediately. As Kanagi points out, "...rapport building takes time."

Kanagi previously spent seven years at People Assisting the Homeless (PATH), a non-profit organization in Los Angeles that builds affordable housing and provides supportive services. She worked from a street outreach position all the way up to the director level, overseeing an emergency shelter. Her next stop was St. Joseph Center, another Los Angeles-based non-profit, where she oversaw an array of programs. She started in her current role with The HP in January 2021.



Encampments have proliferated in Hollywood during the pandemic. The HP's street outreach team attempts to offer assistance to unhoused individuals on the street, and confirm when an encampment has become abandoned and can be cleared. (Photo by Devin Strecker)

There have been significant accomplishments throughout Kanagi's career. Take, for example, the case of a homeless man named Benny*, who was well-known in Hollywood. He suffered from mental health issues and his condition worsened. It reached a point where he was endangering himself and others. Ms. Kanagi—in tandem with the outreach team and AGS security—organized an effort to relocate Benny from the street and into a facility where he could be helped. A hospital bed was reserved, and a gurney was obtained. The effort was a collaboration with the Department of Mental Health, which rallied its LAPD assistance unit. At the intersection of Hollywood Boulevard and Schrader Boulevard, Benny was taken into custody by the LAPD for his own safety, and transported into a facility better equipped to provide Benny the help he needed.

Going forward, an education process is needed to inform other stakeholders about the street outreach team. There is a misconception that people experiencing homelessness can be removed from the street, put into temporary housing, and support themselves. But the situation is more complicated as each unhoused individual requires attention on a case-by-case basis.



Courtney Kanagi and Yolanda Mickens speak with one of their regular clients in the Hollywood Entertainment District. (Photo by Devin Strecker)

"It is truly a team effort, and we are so grateful for the support of the Hollywood community in being solution-oriented," Kanagi said. "Our recent collaborations with The HP's "Special Projects Team" has been a very successful effort in gaining compliance from unhoused individuals to remove discarded belongings, trash and hazardous waste from the sidewalks and their encampments. The compassion and care shown by both teams has resulted in 157 collaborative clean-ups since the inception of this partnership in January 2021."

It is going to take a collective change of heart to provide the resources needed for sustainable solutions to the homelessness crisis. Meanwhile, the street outreach team is taking the compassionate approach to connect unhoused individuals with support services. These seemingly small actions are going a long way toward improving the quality of life in Hollywood.

**Name has been changed*