

A Plan to Reduce Homelessness And Crime in Salt Lake City

A Proposal by the Pioneer Park Coalition
October 2022



A Homeless Encampment Next to Smith's Ballpark

The plan was prepared by the Executive Board of the Pioneer Park Coalition, with the input from coalition members, professionals within the homeless services industry, and local stakeholders.

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Preface

Salt Lake City is at a crossroads. Measures to curb crime and homelessness are ineffective. This not only tarnishes Salt Lake City's long-standing reputation for cleanliness and attractiveness but is driving businesses out of the city and making our neighborhoods unsafe.

A growing number of mentally ill and drug-addicted homeless people are living on our streets. The population is responsible for much of the crime and civil disorder we see in our community. They are committing assaults, shoplifting, breaking storefront windows, breaking into cars, and stealing bikes. They leave their needles on the ground and defecate in our parks and back alleyways. They light fires on private property to keep warm. They are turning some of our parks and riverways into zones unsafe for walking, biking, or the simple enjoyment of nature. These destructive and dangerous acts in our community are disturbing to residents, business owners and visitors. There is a troubling sense that our neighborhoods are no longer safe. Unless this trend is reversed, the Pioneer Park Coalition believes Salt Lake City may become like San Francisco and Seattle, where businesses and residents are moving to other, safer communities.

Executive Summary

Salt Lake City's approach to crime and homelessness is failing because it does not address the underlying causes of those facing persistent homelessness. Understandably, our city leaders and our provider community have made it a priority to help find housing for those experiencing homelessness. We recognize that their focus on providing housing has been largely successful for those individuals facing a short-term housing crisis. However, there are some who experience homelessness who are not ready for housing. They may suffer from mental illness, drug or alcohol addiction, or demonstrate anti-social behavior. They may also face difficulty obtaining employment. If they are left alone in an apartment without addressing their personal challenges, these individuals are unlikely to overcome the behavioral problems that led to their homelessness and will not likely thrive. It is this second group, the persistently homeless who suffer from mental illness and addiction, and who commit crime, who are the focus of this report.

The problems with our city's current approach to homelessness are evident to anyone who visits an emergency shelter or a permanent supportive housing project. Drug use is common among residents at these facilities, as well as untreated mental illness. In addition, police reports show these facilities attract crime to the neighborhood. Neighboring businesses find used needles left on their property and people are defecating in alleyways. Providing housing, without a service rich environment, accomplishes little more than simply transferring people and their problems from the homeless encampments into an apartment complex. While their need for shelter is met, they continue to confront neighbors and other individuals whose drug use may trigger their own addiction.

The Pioneer Park Coalition suggests Salt Lake City adopt a comprehensive approach to solving crime and homelessness on our streets. Specifically, we propose the following three-pronged strategy: (1) provide the homeless with a structured, service rich environment that help people change their lives for the better, (2) enforce the law, even the homeless need to know there are consequences for bad behavior, and (3) hold both the service providers and their clients accountable for results. The following describes the key features of this plan:

1. **Provide Support Services that Enable the Homeless to Change Their Lives.**
 - a. **Offer more opportunities for housing with supportive services and treatment.** These programs must offer structure, rules, and a host of wrap-around services aimed at addressing the self-destructive behavior and mental illness that leads to homelessness. Examples of this type of program include Haven for Hope in San Antonio Texas, and The First Step House, The Other Side Academy, Lifestart Village, and Switchpoint, all in Utah.
 - b. **Provide more immediate treatment options for those suffering from a substance use disorder or mental illness.** We need to expand the availability of receiving centers and treatment programs for those requiring a critical level of care for their drug dependency and mental illness.
 - c. **Support programs that aim to change people from the “inside out.”** To help people make a lasting change, the Pioneer Park Coalition favors programs that help people connect with others who understand their needs, have a shared life experience, and can help motivate them to transform the way they think about themselves and their potential to do good.
 - d. **Create sanctioned camps as an alternative to the homeless resource centers.** Some homeless people living in camps are reluctant to stay in a homeless resource center. These camps can provide them with a safe place to stay, and receive supportive services and guidance to help them transition into housing.
2. **Enforce the Law.**
 - a. **Enforce no camping laws.** Teams of police officers and social workers should visit the homeless encampments and help the unsheltered find an appropriate place to stay while they get the help they need to start down the road towards stable housing. San Antonio Texas and South Salt Lake City are two communities that have successfully reduced homeless encampments through aggressive enforcement and outreach.
 - b. **Enforce laws against using illegal drugs.** We must start treating drug use as a crime especially in facilities that serve the homeless. Drug use is not a victimless crime. We must impose consequences on those found using or distributing drugs in our homeless resource centers, within permanent supportive housing, and on the streets where homeless individuals gather. Use drug sniffing dogs and random drug tests at facilities that shelter the homeless.
 - c. **Expand on current efforts to focus on “high utilizer” offenders.** Law enforcement, prosecutors, the judiciary, and behavioral health agencies must give greater attention to repeat offenders. They must no longer allow those with multiple offenses to return to the streets without consequence or some type of intervention.
 - d. **Adopt a “broken windows” approach to policing.** We must recognize that allowing minor acts of violence, vandalism (such as breaking windows), intoxication, and defecating in public leads to greater civil disorder on our city streets. The “Broken Windows” approach requires police to enforce the laws prohibiting these minor infractions as a means of discouraging anti-social behavior and civil disorder that often lead to more serious crime.
 - e. **Discourage crime by promoting a clean community environment.** Crime can be discouraged by maintaining clean streets and sidewalks, removing graffiti, maintaining public spaces, and reducing the number of neglected spaces, including abandoned buildings.

3. Improve Accountability.

- a. **Salt Lake City and the homeless service providers must take responsibility for the high rates of crime and drug use within their facilities and in the surrounding neighborhoods.** Salt Lake City must stop allowing resource centers and permanent supportive housing from becoming hot spots for crime. Also, service providers must fulfill the commitments they made to address the impact their residents have on the surrounding neighborhoods.
- b. **Track rates of recidivism for treatment programs and service providers.** We must identify the number of clients who receive housing subsidies and then return to homelessness once the subsidies are used up. We must identify the number who receive treatment for drug and alcohol addiction and remain drug free or who return to their addiction. These are called recidivism rates which can be used to measure the success of programs that serve the homeless.
- c. **Hold prosecutors and judges accountable for executing justice.** The district attorney's office and justice courts must not ignore criminal behavior simply because the perpetrator is homeless. We do not want to "victimize" people for being homeless. At the same time, those found guilty of criminal behavior will have little incentive to change if they never experience consequences for their behavior. The court administrator should identify and report the number of "high utilizers" who are repeatedly involved in our criminal justice system.
- d. **Apply the concept of restorative justice.** Criminal offenders and those participating in drug treatment programs should be surrounded by a culture that reinforces the need for people to be responsible for their own behavior.
- e. **Develop a unified client management system.** Increased accountability will require developing the ability to track client service plans and services provided across multiple service systems, including homeless service providers, mental health agencies, the criminal justice system and law enforcement.
- f. **Collect and analyze street-level data.** There is a great need to document encounters with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness by outreach workers, law enforcement, security and ambassador officers, and program providers. Collecting street-level data on a single, dynamic platform will improve outreach efforts, unify and coordinate the people and agencies working to assist those who need help, and demonstrate the outcomes of outreach and referral efforts. This can be accomplished through hand-held data collection, record keeping, and on demand reporting.

Overview

Much of the crime in Salt Lake City's Downtown and Ballpark Districts can be attributed to the growing number of homeless within those areas. Not all people experiencing homelessness are experiencing mental illness and substance abuse disorders. However, local business owners have observed homeless individuals committing acts of vandalism, abusing drugs, defecating in public spaces, and shoplifting near their places of business. Furthermore, police data also show crime is increasing in those neighborhoods where homeless resource centers are located. Homeless resource centers not only bring hundreds of homeless individuals to an area, but they also lead to homeless encampments in the surrounding neighborhoods. They also attract drug dealers and others seeking to take advantage of the homeless population. As a result, the safety and security of some Salt Lake City neighborhoods have been harmed by the presence of homeless resource centers and other facilities that serve the homeless.

Members of the Pioneer Park Coalition believe bold action is needed to prevent Salt Lake City from suffering the same problems as other cities such as San Francisco and Seattle. In those cities crime and homelessness have become so widespread that residents and businesses have begun to leave. It is our hope that Salt Lake City can avoid the same fate by taking decisive action against the growing problem of crime and homelessness in our community. This document proposes a strategy based on the principles of compassion, law and order, and personal accountability.

Our plan to reduce homelessness contains the following sections:

- I. [The Impact of Homelessness on Our Community,](#)
- II. [Three Steps We Must Take to Reduce Crime and Homelessness in Salt Lake City,](#)
- III. [Steps the Pioneer Park Coalition Will Take,](#)
- IV. [Questions and Answers.](#)

Appendices

- A. [Reports of Growing Crime Associated with Homelessness,](#)
- B. [Salt Lake City is at Risk of Facing the Same Problems as San Francisco,](#)
- C. [While there is Little Evidence that More People are Becoming Homeless, Those Who Are Homeless Tend to Remain Homeless for Longer Periods of Time,](#)
- D. [Consider the "Inside Out" Approach to Helping the Homeless.](#)

I. The Impacts of Homelessness on Our Community

The Growth in Crime in Some Areas of Salt Lake City Can be Linked to the Growing Homeless Population

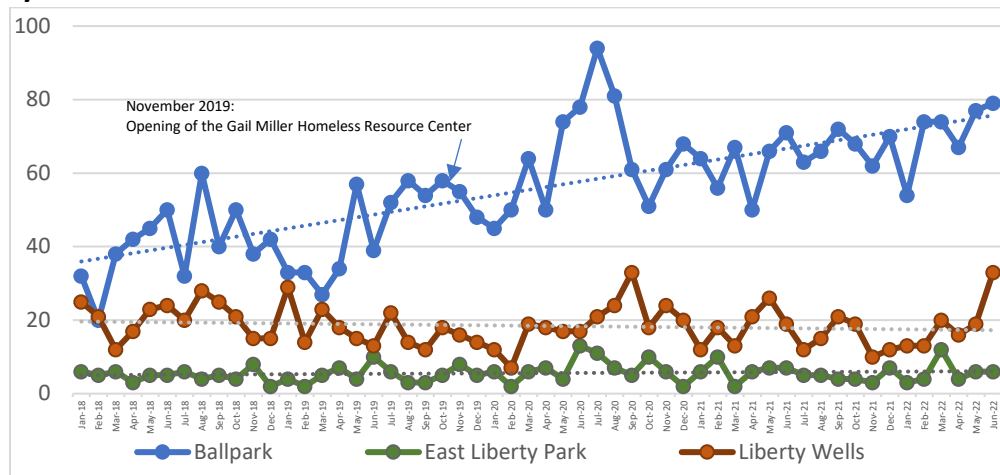
Members of the Pioneer Park Coalition are concerned by the growing crime and civil disorder they see in Salt Lake City's business districts and residential neighborhoods. Homeless individuals have damaged our property, our customers and employees have been harassed, and we have found drug paraphernalia and human waste on our property. The rise in homelessness in our city is no doubt one of the reasons Salt Lake City was recently listed among ["the top 100 most dangerous cities in the USA."](#) Furthermore, the city's own police data suggests a strong correlation between crime rates and the presence of homeless individuals in a neighborhood. Coalition members believe that if we do not develop a more effective response to homelessness, Salt Lake City will continue to experience an increase in crime, filth, and uncivil behavior. That in turn will discourage people from doing business in our downtown area. Residents may also conclude it is unsafe to continue raising their families in neighborhoods where the homeless are located, such as the downtown area, Ballpark District, and along North Temple. Like other cities with high rates of homelessness, such as San Francisco and Seattle, Salt Lake City could eventually see an exodus of businesses and residents to other communities.

Click [here](#) for a description of the crime and uncivil behavior reported by coalition members.

Not All Homeless are Committing Crime but They All Face Obstacles to a Safe, Healthy, Productive Life. We recognize that there are several categories of homeless and that not all are mentally ill, drug addicted and committing crime. In fact, 60 percent of those who receive services from Utah's homeless services system have a brief experience with homelessness and are not seen again. This population, which we describe as the "briefly homeless," usually experience a short-term housing crisis. They may lose their apartment because of a lost job, or a health problem. After receiving temporary financial assistance, most of those who enter the homeless services system succeed in resolving their problems and obtain new housing. We believe the best way to help the briefly homeless is to (1) provide sufficient short-term housing assistance to meet the need, and (2) increase the availability of low-cost housing. We believe our homeless services system has been relatively successful in addressing the needs of this population. In contrast, our community still lacks an effective strategy for addressing the needs of the persistently homeless who suffer from drug addiction, mental illness, and who are responsible for much of the crime in our community.

Police Data Suggests that Individuals Experiencing Homelessness Account for Much of the Crime and Disorder in Certain Salt Lake City Neighbors. Police crime data show that crime has increased in areas where new facilities for the homeless have been located. For example, in September 2019, the Gail Miller Homeless Resource Center opened in Salt Lake City's Ballpark District. As shown in the figure below, crime has increased dramatically in the ballpark area since that time. At the same time, crime in the nearby Liberty Wells and East Liberty districts, which have no homeless facilities, has declined or stayed the same.

Figure 1. Person Crimes are Higher in the Ballpark District than in the Adjacent East Liberty and Liberty Wells Districts

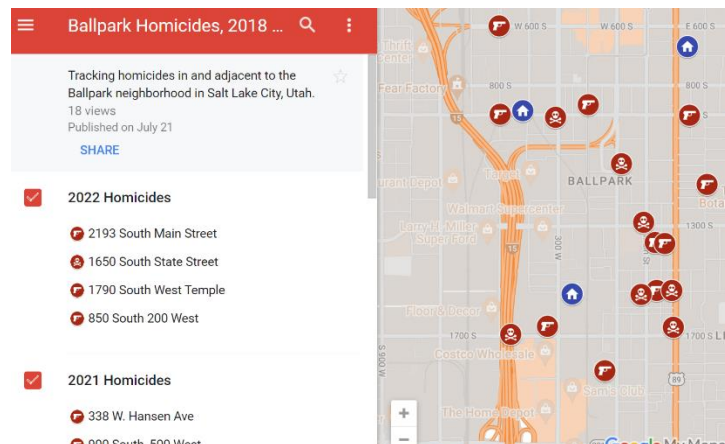


Person crimes include aggravated assault, homicide, rape, robbery, family offenses, other assaults, sex offenses.

Source: Salt Lake City Crime Statistics, available on-line at <https://dotnet.slcgov.com/police/crimestatistics#/chartpresentation>

Figure 1 shows the Salt Lake’s Ballpark District has been impacted particularly hard by person crimes. There has been a similar increase in property crimes in the area. We believe this is partly due to the presence of the Gail Miller Homeless Resource Center. The crime is committed not only by those living at the resource center, but also by others who camp in the neighborhoods surrounding the resource centers, and those who are drawn to the area because they prey on the homeless. Figure 2 shows the locations of each homicide reported in recent years within the Ballpark District.

Figure 2. Ballpark Homicides, 2018 to 2022



For comparison purposes, the Salt Lake City online crime data shows there were 18 murders in the Ballpark District since August 2017 and four murders during the same time-period in the adjacent Liberty Wells district to the east.

Source: SLCPD data plotted [here](#).

Police data also suggest that locations where the homeless congregate are hotspots for crime. Figure 3 contains data noting the addresses where police calls were most often made in the Liberty and Central police districts in Salt Lake City. The data show that the two homeless resource centers (HRCs) and two permanent supportive housing projects are responsible for the highest number of police calls.

Figure 3. Salt Lake City Police, Division Top Call Locations.

Source: [2021 CompStat](#), SLCPD, , page 7.

LOCATION	ADDRESS	2021 CALLS	CHNG COMPARED TO 2020
Liberty			
Palmer Court	999 S MAIN ST/1000 S STATE ST	1053	-55 ↓
Walmart	350 W HOPE AVE	1037	-69 ↓
Gail Miller Resource Center	242 W PARAMOUNT AVE	819	178 ↑
Jefferson School Apartments	1011/1099 S WEST TEMPLE ST	637	258 ↑
Liberty Park	601 E 1300 S/600 E 900 S/539 E 1300 S	559	34 ↑
Park Vue Apartments	1450 S WEST TEMPLE ST	515	100 ↑
Home Depot	328 W 2100 S	264	-98 ↓
The Towers on Main	1810/1820 S MAIN ST	259	-28 ↓
Target	1130 S 300 W	218	50 ↑
Walgreens	909 E 2100 S	216	142 ↑
Central			
Geraldine E. King Women's Center	131 E 700 S	1677	407 ↑
Downtown West Apartments	714 _800 N 900 W	864	162 ↑
Motel 6	176 W 600 S	489	110 ↑
River Rock Apartments	731 S 300 E/330 E 700 S/732 S 400 E	470	115 ↑
Smith's Marketplace	455 S 500 E	352	-18 ↓
Jackson Apartment	274 W 200 S	338	-7 ↓
City Creek	21/50/51 S MAIN ST	287	-65 ↓
Magnolia	165 S 300 E	262	255 ↑
VDA Youth Shelter	888 S 400 W	255	-75 ↓
Maverik	414 W 500 S	247	63 ↑

The call location data in Figure 3, combined with the data in Figure 1, shows a high correlation between the presence of facilities serving the homeless in a neighborhood and the amount of crime. A report ([click here](#)) by South Salt Lake City shows similar increases in calls for service and reported crime after the Men’s Resource Center opened in November 2018. One difference between Salt Lake City and its neighbor to the south is that South Salt Lake City deploys a special police unit that monitors conditions in and around

the men’s resource center. The unit also makes an ongoing effort to prevent homeless encampments from forming in the city.

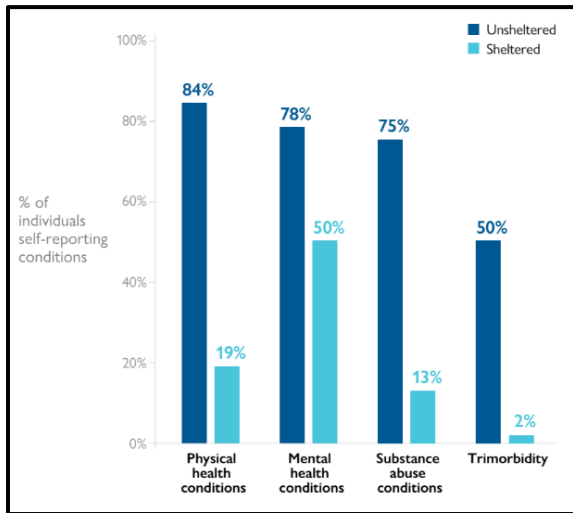
Reports from Seattle and Vancouver British Columbia Also Show Higher Rates of Crime Where Homeless Individuals Reside. The link between homelessness and crime is not unique to Salt Lake City. Similar observations have been made in cities such as Seattle and Vancouver. A Seattle City Council member [observed](#), “It is blatantly evident that a significant amount of the city’s crime and disorder is attributable to conditions in homeless encampments.” Similarly, a study of homelessness in Vancouver British Columbia observed “The presence of a shelter appears to cause property crime to increase by 56% within 100m of that shelter, with thefts from vehicles, other thefts, and vandalism driving the increase.”

Salt Lake City is Facing a Growing Number of Long-Term Homeless Who Suffer from Mental Illness and Substance Abuse

The Unsheltered Population is More Likely than the Sheltered to Suffer from Mental Illness, Drug Addiction and Health Problems. In contrast to the briefly homeless, it is more difficult to know how to help the long-term, or "chronically" homeless. This population is much more likely to suffer from mental illness, drug addiction, and some commit crimes. The University of California's PolicyLab conducted a ground-breaking survey of 64,000 individuals from across the country experiencing unsheltered homelessness that demonstrated that 78 percent experienced a mental health condition, 75 percent had a substance use disorder, and 84 suffer another health-related condition. 50 percent suffer from all three. The sheltered homeless are much less likely to suffer from these conditions.

Figure 4. Physical Health, Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Trimorbidity by Shelter Status.

Source: [Health Conditions Among Unsheltered Adults in the U.S.](#), Janey Rountree, Nathan Hess, and Austin Lyke, October 2019



The data described in Figure 4 suggest that the unsheltered homeless require a more comprehensive, service-rich set of interventions. They must be connected with people who can help them overcome their behavioral issues and move towards a more healthy and independent life.

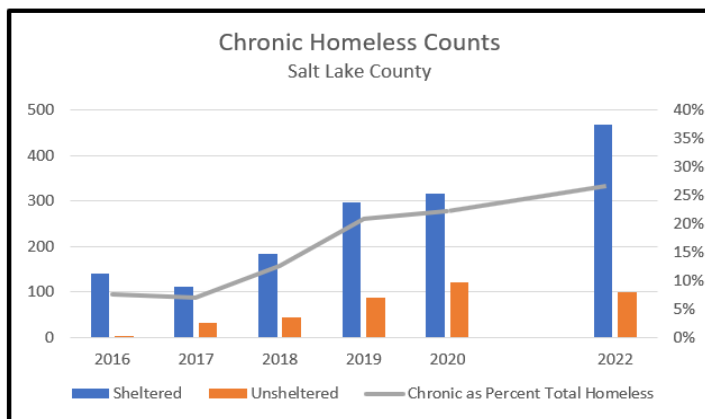
Nearly Half of Unsheltered Homeless Come from Other States.

A study by the University of Utah reports that 47 percent of homeless individuals camping on the Jordan River Parkway, are originally from other states. See page 4 of the study which is available [here](#). It suggests that a large part of Salt Lake City’s problem with unsheltered individuals is imported.

Data Show the Number of Long-Term Homelessness and Unsheltered Homelessness is Rising. While the number of first-time homeless has declined in recent years, the data from the annual Point-In-Time Counts suggest that the number of long-term homeless is on the rise. It is this population that faces the most serious obstacles to independent living and is therefore the most difficult to serve. Furthermore, a growing number of long-term homeless are now unsheltered. The long-term homeless includes the chronically homeless. Figures 5 and 6 show the number of chronically homeless in Salt Lake County has grown in recent years.

Figure 5. Chronic Homelessness is Increasing and Represents a Larger Portion of All Homeless.

Source: Data obtained from the [2022 Annual Data Report on Homelessness](#), the Office of Homeless Services, Utah Department of Workforce Services

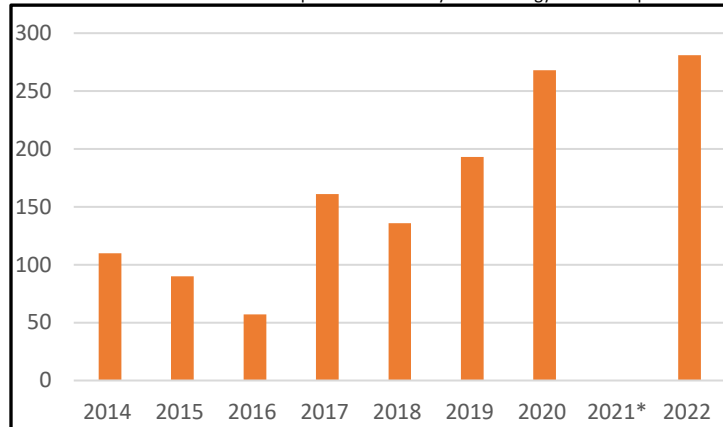


The chronic homeless, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, are those suffering from a disability, and who have been homeless for more than a year or have had multiple periods of homelessness over the preceding three years. Figure 5 shows that the number of chronic homeless is increasing and now comprise a larger portion of all homeless in Salt Lake County than in years past. The data

suggests that Salt Lake County is having difficulty ending homelessness among those who face serious obstacles to self-sufficiency. Figure 6 shows that the number of unsheltered homeless in Salt Lake County has also increased in recent years.

Figure 6. Unsheltered Homeless in Salt Lake County

Source: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, [Annual Point in Time Counts](#).
 *The 2021 data are excluded due to a problematic survey methodology used in response to COVID



In addition to the data in Figures 5 & 6, we provide additional information found [HERE](#), showing the population of long-term homeless is increasing in Salt Lake County. This information suggests Salt Lake County is losing ground in the fight to end homelessness. Our homeless population is comprised of an increasing number of individuals suffering from mental illness and addiction to controlled substances than in years past.

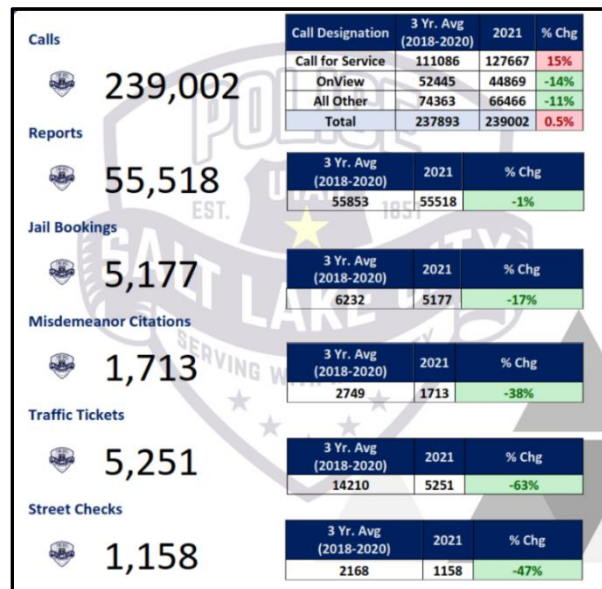
Data Suggests Police are Offering a Muted Response to Crime by Homeless Individuals

Are Police Less Aggressive in Responding to Crime and Misconduct? Recent police reports suggest that the Salt Lake City Police Department is not as active in pursuing criminal misconduct by homeless individuals as it has been in the past. Although police received 15 percent more calls for service in 2021 than in prior years, those calls are resulting in fewer arrests, citations, and traffic tickets. See Figure 7. This data leads us to question why the department is not more active in its enforcement of the law.

Figure 7. Police are Receiving more Calls for Service but are Taking Less Action Towards Those Violating the Law.

We are concerned that the data suggests Salt Lake Police have become less likely to impose citations or make arrests when responding to a call. Is the department taken a softer stand towards criminal activity? Have they been asked to avoid citing people who are homeless? We are calling on the police department to answer these questions.

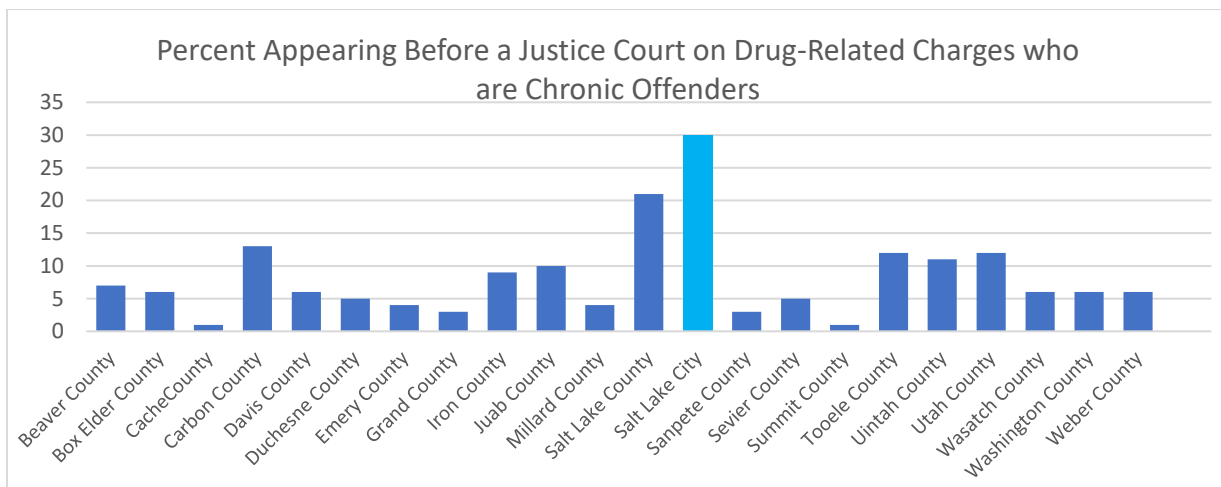
Source: [2021 CompStat Summary Report](#), page 3, Salt Lake City Police Department.



Salt Lake City Justice Court has the Highest Rates of Repeat Drug Offenders in the State

Recidivism data provided in a state report shows Salt Lake County has the highest rate of repeat offenders for drug related charges in the state. The data for 2019, shown in Figure 8, shows that one of every five offenders who appear in the Salt Lake County justice courts was deemed a chronic offender. That is, they had been charged with 4 or more drug offenses within the same year. The data show that Salt Lake County’s rate of chronic drug use is much higher than any other county in Utah. Furthermore, the data show the Salt Lake City Justice Court had 30 percent of its offenders classified as being chronic drug offenders.

Figure 8. Salt Lake County has the Highest Rate of Chronic Drug Offenders in the State. The data show the percentage of drug related cases adjudicated by the justice courts in the year 2019 which were classified as chronic drug offenders. That is, they had 4 or more drug offenses within the same year.



Source: See [A Performance Audit of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative by the Legislative Auditor General](#). Appendix C. Page 92.

The data suggest that Salt Lake County justice courts in general, and Salt Lake City Justice Court specifically, are processing a large percentage of drug offenders which the researchers classified as chronic. In all, 700 individuals appeared on drug charges four or more times before the Salt Lake City Justice Court in 2019. Clearly, only a portion of those appearing in justice courts are homeless. However, the data suggest that the justice court judges and county prosecutors in Salt Lake County have not found an effective response to the growing problem of illegal drug use. Until they develop a more effective response to chronic drug, we question how those suffering from drug addiction, while living on the streets and in shelters, can ever overcome their homelessness.

Summary.

To conclude, Salt Lake City has seen a growing number of long-term homeless who face serious obstacles to independent living. This population appears to be responsible for much of the crime in the neighborhoods where they live. It is critically important that the city develop a more effective strategy for reducing crime, while addressing their mental illness, substance abuse, and other obstacles to healthy living. The following section describes three steps we propose to address these problems.

II. Three Steps We Must Take to Reduce Crime and Homelessness in Salt Lake City

The Pioneer Park Coalition is calling on community leaders and homeless services providers to develop a new response to homelessness based on the principles of providing compassionate service, law and order, and personal accountability. These principles have been applied by successful programs serving the homeless in Utah and other states.

1. Provide Supportive Services that Enable the Homeless to Change Their Lives.

The Pioneer Park Coalition has found that the most successful programs serving the homeless are those which not only provide housing but also help them change their lives by offering treatment and counseling along with strong peer support. Unlike some Housing First programs, which focus mainly on changing a person's living environment, these treatment-oriented programs strive to help people make a change from within. Some have described this as the "inside out" approach to helping people transform their lives from within. Click [here](#) for more information. Alcoholics Anonymous is an example of such a program. They use peer support and a conceptual framework that helps people change their way of thinking about themselves, their addiction, and their effect on other people. Similarly, there are homeless services programs that use peer support, employment assistance, counseling, and medical treatments, when appropriate, to help people change their way of thinking about themselves, their community, and their self-destructive behaviors. One example is the Haven for Hope in San Antonio Texas. Everything about the facility is about helping people change their lives. This emphasis on changing people is even reflected in the name they have given their facility, which is the "Transformation Center." Other programs that focus on changing lives include Switchpoint in St. George Utah, the Lifestart Village in Taylorsville Utah, and the Other Side Academy in Salt Lake City.

For those suffering from mental illness, First Step House and Valley Behavioral Health both provide residential facilities with mental health treatment. Currently the demand for these types of residential facilities far outstrips the supply. As a community we must do two things: (1) provide adequate funding for the treatment of mental illness, which for many can be supplied, in part, through Medicaid, and (2) increase the supply of trained mental health professionals.

2. Enforce the Law: Help People Understand the Consequences of Their Behavior.

As we offer enhanced services, our homeless friends also need to learn that there are consequences for inappropriate behavior or refusal to accept offers of housing and services. Specifically, we recommend that Salt Lake City enforce the laws prohibiting illegal camping on public and private property. The creation of sanctioned camps can provide an alternative to camping on the street. Furthermore, police must step up their efforts to enforce the laws against illegal drug use, the destruction of property, and disorderly conduct such as defecating in public. To be clear, we do not want more homeless people placed in jail. A better option is to create special receiving centers for those suffering from mental illness and addiction to controlled substances. Most of all, we want the criminal justice system to motivate the homeless to get the help they need to change their lives for the better. If they show a willingness to obtain treatment for their illnesses, they should be allowed to avoid criminal penalties.

3. Require Accountability. Everyone Must be Accountable for Results.

Everyone that plays a role in the homeless services system should be held accountable for the outcomes of their activities. That includes our homeless clients, their service providers, and the criminal justice system. We must use data to identify which service providers have been the most successful in helping clients overcome the obstacles they face to self-sufficiency. Furthermore, we must develop a client management system that enables service providers to monitor a client's service history and to ensure clients are not reenrolled in programs in which they have failed. Lastly, outreach efforts need to demonstrate effectiveness by chronicling engagements, referrals, and their outcomes.

With regard to the homeless individuals themselves, some have expressed concern that if we require them to follow the law and abide by certain house rules, they will refuse to move off the street and enter housing. This is a tough policy decision that public officials and board members will need to make. To what extent do we tolerate self-destructive behavior while individuals are living in publicly funded facilities? To what extent do we allow an individual's poor choices to affect the other residents living in such facilities? We believe in being patient with those who have suffered the trauma of living on the streets, but must also expect people to follow the law, and work towards improving their lives.

The following are specific actions proposed by the Pioneer Park Coalition:

1. Provide Services that Change Lives.

- A. Provide a state-sanctioned camp with a wide range of services for those unwilling or unable to stay in an emergency shelter.**
 - The camps provide a safe, controlled environment where the homeless can find a safe place to stay and be connected to the services they need to move towards independent living.
 - Examples include camps in [Austin, Texas](#); [San Antonio Texas](#); [Denver, Colorado](#); and [Missoula, Montana](#).
 - Click [here](#) for additional information about sanctioned camps.
- B. Create receiving centers for both mentally ill and substance abusers which enable law enforcement and social workers to offer individuals an alternative to jail.**
 - Example: Davis County offers a receiving center for drug offenders as an alternative to an arrest. Key to the success of this program is to transition offenders into an environment that helps them remain drug-free.
 - Example: Huntsman Mental Health Institute has created a new clinic in South Salt Lake to serve the mentally ill. Though a good first step, we question whether its 30-bed receiving center, and 24-bed acute care unit will meet the demand for services.
- C. Provide opportunities for housing that help people overcome the self-destructive behavior preventing them from living healthy productive lives.**
 - When Housing First programs tolerate drug use and other illegal behavior, residents often discourage one another from overcoming the obstacles they face to healthy independent living.

- Additional housing opportunities should be provided which have clear expectations of behavior, prohibit drug use, and offer an environment that supports healthy independent living.
- D. Develop teams of highly trained outreach and case managers who are effective at helping those suffering from mental illness or drug addiction, or other self-destructive behaviors.**
 - We must help people navigate the complexities of our homeless services system by providing a single person or point of contact where they can understand their needs and be their advocate with the system.
 - For those facing serious obstacles to self-sufficiency, case managers should prepare a case management plan for each client.
 - Those participating in a housing or treatment program should be required to meet regularly with their case manager to discuss their progress in completing the case management plan.
 - The professionalism of case managers must be strengthened by increasing their training, qualifications, and pay.
- E. Provide case managers with an assessment tool that replaces the VISDAT.**
 - The new tool should identify whether a person has substance use disorder, mental illness, and other obstacles to healthy, independent living.
- F. Provide a wide range of treatment options for those with a substance use disorder or mental illness.**
 - Treatment should be offered as an alternative to confinement.

2. Enforce the Law

- A. Enforce laws against camping on city streets and in other public spaces.**
 - Teams of police and social workers should regularly engage those who are unsheltered and notify them that camping on the streets and parks is prohibited.
 - Those found camping illegally should be offered a choice of going to (1) a state-sanctioned camp, (2) a resource center, (3) a residential treatment program or receiving center, or (4) the home of a friend or family.
 - Enforcement of the no camping laws must be intensive and sustained.
- B. Respond to those found using illegal drugs.**
 - PPC believes homeless individuals are poorly served when the criminal justice system and homeless services providers do not hold them accountable for using illegal drugs.
 - Offenders should be allowed to avoid jail time if they seek treatment at a receiving center, complete the treatment and refrain from further use. We must also recognize that some may relapse, but should continue to receive support as long as they are on a positive trajectory.
 - The criminal justice system should not treat lightly those with repeated drug offenses, who refuse to address their addiction, and who do not follow through with the alternative they were given to jail.
- C. Deploy drug-sniffing dogs in the homeless resource centers and in permanent supportive housing.**
 - Officers should deploy friendly drug-sniffing dogs that are not threatening to the residents.

- D. Require random drug tests for those who stay in resource centers and permanent supportive housing.**
- E. Increase the presence of law enforcement in homeless resource centers, neighborhoods, and business districts most affected by homeless.**
 - Provide a strong police presence in the resource centers and neighborhoods where the homeless have created encampments.
 - Offer bike and walking law enforcement teams who can do true community policing.
- F. Respond to All Criminal Acts.** Prosecute those found committing assault, vandalism, public defecation, and other activities which contribute to civil disorder. This is sometimes referred to as the “broken windows” approach requires police to enforce the laws prohibiting these minor infractions as a means of discouraging anti-social behavior and civil disorder that often lead to more serious crime.
- G. Prosecutors and service providers should expand their current efforts to focus on “high utilizer” offenders.**
 - Those with lengthy criminal records, even those with minor offenses, should not be given the opportunity to continually re-offend without consequence or be given another alternative to jail if they demonstrate an unwillingness to change.
 - An effective response to high utilizer offenders will require a shared response from police, prosecutors, public defenders, and service providers.

3. Improve Personal Accountability

- A. Hold mental health and substance abuse treatment programs accountable for results.**
 - Recidivism rates and outcomes for those completing a mental health or substance abuse treatment program should be made public. This is required by S. B. 179 approved during the 2022 legislative session.
 - Before approving a treatment plan as an alternative to jail, prosecutors and judges should consider a program’s recidivism rates, and an offender’s suitability for the program.
 - Use data to identify effective programs and prioritize funding for those programs found to be most successful.
- B. Services Providers Should Report Successful and Unsuccessful Exits from Facilities Serving the Homeless.** They should evaluate their success in terms of how well they help people achieve sustainable self-sufficiency. One way to measure success in this regard would be to identify, by program, the number of homeless individuals who successfully exit to an independent, self-sufficient living situation. Conversely, they might identify the number who return to homelessness or who become involved in the criminal justice system.
- C. Judges and prosecutors must be held accountable for results.**
 - The courts should identify and publicly report the percentage of those individuals prosecuted who are repeat offenders, even for minor crimes.
 - For “high utilizer” offenders, the courts should report the number and percent which, after receiving court-ordered assistance, have avoided further involvement with the criminal justice system.
 - If a judge orders someone to obtain treatment for a drug habit, there should be some type of verification of compliance with that order.
- D. Hold clients accountable for the successful completion of the treatment programs.**

- We recognize that after years of engaging in self-destructive behavior, clients face a high risk of relapse. However, when relapse does occur, clients must still experience consequences as well as encouragement to do better.
- Case managers and staff must not ignore a client’s continued self-destructive behavior and unwillingness to alter their behavior.
- E. Create additional supportive housing for individuals willing to work towards addressing the personal obstacles they face to healthy, independent living.**
 - Each facility should clearly identify a set of expectations for their residents including no drug use or other illegal activity.
 - Respect for the property must be maintained.
 - Residents should be subjected to periodic drug testing.
- F. The Boards of Each Service Provider Organization should take responsibility for illegal drug use within their facilities and for any crime that spills into the surrounding neighborhoods.**
 - Shelter the Homeless, owner of the homeless resource centers, has committed to the terms described in its conditional use permit with Salt Lake City. In those agreements, Shelter the Homeless, and by extension, its facility operators, have committed to providing security in the resource centers and in the surrounding neighborhoods. the Shelter the Homeless Board of Directors needs to respond to complaints from local businesses that their facilities are not complying with the security plans to which they agreed.
 - For their own benefit, Shelter the Homeless and its facility operators should require their staff to carefully document their efforts to mitigate the impacts their clients have on the surrounding community.
- G. City Should Consider Public Safety Issues Prior to Approving New Facilities for the Homeless.** Safety concerns should be address during the process of considering new sites for homeless shelters, housing for the homeless, or for similarly indigent populations. The city should carefully consider the adequacy of the applicant’s public safety plan, and impose penalties if the provider fails to carry out the plan.
- H. Develop a Unified Client Management System.** Increased accountability will require developing an improved client management system that enables service providers to track client service plans, and services provided over time and across multiple service systems including the homeless service providers, mental health agencies, and the criminal justice system.

III. Steps the Pioneer Park Coalition Will Take.

1. **We proposed that this plan and its recommendations be considered by the following:**
 - a. Salt Lake City Community Councils,
 - b. Salt Lake City Council,
 - c. Salt Lake County Coalition to End Homelessness,
 - d. Utah Homelessness Council,
 - e. United States Interagency Council on Homelessness

2. **Promote the Creation of a Sanctioned Camp and Elimination of Illegal Camping.**
 - PPC will encourage the state homeless council, Salt Lake City and County governments to establish one or more sanctioned campsites with supportive services.
 - Once sanctioned camps are available, PPC will encourage the legislature to deny homeless mitigation funds to any city that does not enforce its no camping laws.
3. **Promote a “Housing Plus” Demonstration Project.** The PPC will:
 - Identify service providers willing to develop and implement a Housing Plus program that offers (as described in Section II, item 1 above) a strong sense of belonging, peer-based support, and high engagement with staff.
 - Support having the project staffed by highly skilled, and well-paid case managers and staff.
 - Solicit financial support from state and local government entities as well as from local philanthropic organizations.
 - Support an independent evaluation of the project’s success based on the number who successfully complete the program, find housing, and remain housed with no involvement in the criminal justice system for two years.
4. **Sponsor a Research Study to Identify the Flow of Clients through the System and Provide Basic information about gaps in the service system.**
 - System accountability is currently difficult because decision makers have insufficient information regarding the flow of clients through Utah's homeless services system, their service needs, the different programs in which they have participated, and the length of stay in those programs. We propose a research study to provide that information. A description of the proposed study can be seen here.
 - For the members of each major subgroup population, the researchers will identify the length of stay in homeless facilities, the services received, and the client’s involvement in the criminal justice system.
 - Researchers will attempt to measure the flow of clients through the homeless services system by identifying the number of people who repeatedly move out of the shelter, onto the streets and back, the services they received, and whether they were involved in the criminal justice system.
5. **Encourage Facility Owners and Operators to be Accountable for the Drug Use and Illegal Activity in and Adjacent to their Facilities.** The PPC will:
 - Encourage the Board of Directors for Shelter the Homeless and The Road Home to report their efforts to reduce the reported drug use and illegal activity within the homeless resource centers and permanent supportive housing they operate.
 - Encourage the Boards to require each facility operator to comply with the requirements in their conditional use permit that they provide for the safety and security of the resource centers as well as the surrounding neighborhoods.
 - Encourage each service provider to identify the degree to which tier programs are successful in helping people move towards greater self-sufficiency, and avoid continued involvement in the criminal justice system.

IV. Questions and Answers

1. What obligation do service providers have towards maintaining a safe and secure environment in the neighborhoods where facilities are located?

Before building the homeless resource centers, Shelter the Homeless committed that they would take steps to minimize the impact of the resource centers on the safety and security of the neighborhoods in which they are located. For example, the following statement was made by Harris Simmons, Board President, Shelter the Homeless:

The Board of Directors of Shelter the Homeless is committed to working with stakeholders toward measurably improving the lives of those in need while minimizing any negative impact on neighborhoods.

In addition, both Salt Lake City and South Salt Lake City issued conditional use permits to Shelter the Homeless which included a facility security plan. The permits required the operators of the resource centers to take the following steps to maintain the safety in the neighborhoods near the facility:

No criminal behavior will be tolerated on or around the property;

Security stationed at the HRCs could respond to loitering off-site within specific boundaries:

- 700 S HRC – along 700 South, between State Street and 200 East.
- High Avenue HRC – along Paramount Avenue, High Avenue, and 300 West between High and Paramount Avenues.

The HRC will work closely with the local businesses and the Police Department to address any loitering issues that may arise outside of the defined boundaries above. The HRC operator will work with the neighborhood to address any loitering issues not addressed by the above policies.

Security can respond to off-site suspicious activity/complaints within specific boundaries:

- 700 S HRC – along 700 South, between State Street and 200 East.
- High Avenue HRC – along Paramount Avenue, High Avenue, and 300 West between High and Paramount Avenues.

If at any point a neighbor, local business, or visitor feels unsafe or sees suspicious activity they can either call or email the 24/7 response center and trained staff will respond and take the appropriate steps necessary to resolve the issue or concern.

Local businesses report that the HRCs have not been responsive to their complaints of crime and vandalism in the surrounding neighborhoods. They say the on-site security guards do not respond to reported criminal activity occurring on the street near the HRC. Local business owners also report that the HRCs have not taken responsibility for the vandalism that has occurred on their property. Some businesses have suffered thousands of dollars in damages from homeless individuals who appear to be residing at the HRCs. However, when they submitted their claims to the Resource Center Operators, they have been told they must provide evidence that the damage was caused by a resident of the homeless resource center. For these reasons, the business owners believe the HRCs have not fulfilled their commitment to maintaining the safety and security of the neighborhoods where they are located.

2. Question: What is a Sanctioned Camp?

For a variety of reasons, some homeless individuals are reluctant to stay in an emergency shelter. Some do not want to live in a congregate setting, some do not want to follow the rules imposed by resource centers, some fear their possessions will be stolen, and some say they don't want to be around the drug users at the resource centers. Some simply prefer to live independently. However, street encampments are not good for the homeless or the community. Residents of encampments can be victimized, residents defecate in the open and create an environmental hazard, and they don't provide people with the services they need. The camps also create an environmental hazard.

In response, some communities have created sanctioned camps as an alternative to a homeless resource center. These camps, which are overseen by a non-profit service provider, provide many of the same services offered at a homeless resource center. Some sanctioned camps provide toilets, showers and a place to safely store possessions. The camp operators also provide counseling and support services for people who need to transition into housing. The primary measure of success of a sanctioned camp is the same as that for the resource centers. Hopefully, those staying at a sanctioned camp can progress to the point that they will choose to stay in a resource center or permanent housing. A sanctioned camp would also help reduce the negative effects of homeless encampments on a community.

Click [here](#) to view a local podcast describing the issues surrounding homeless camps.

An example of a sanctioned camp is the courtyard operated by the Haven for Hope in San Antonio, Texas. The Haven for Hope reports that they are successful in getting some of the residents of the courtyard to move into the "transformational center" which is the term they use to describe their resource center.



Click [here](#) for a description of the services offered at the courtyard.

Other examples of sanctioned campsites:

- [Camp Esperanza, Austin, Texas;](#)
- [Haven for Hope, San Antonio Texas;](#)
- [Colorado Village Collaborative, Denver, Colorado;](#)
- [Safe Outdoor Spaces, Denver Colorado;](#)
- [Operation Shelter, Missoula, Montana.](#)

Here is article by the National League of Cities on illegal homeless encampments and the option of creating sanctioned camps:

[An Overview of Homeless Encampments for City Leaders](#)

3. Can Communities Enforce No Camping Laws if People have No Place to Go?

The legal issues surrounding the abatement of homeless encampments are controversial and the case law is not well established. A ninth district court ruling in the case of *Martin vs. Boise* ruled that the city could not enforce its no camping ordinance as long as there was no “alternative sleeping space” that is “practically available.” While the ruling does not technically apply to Utah, which is in the tenth district, it is considered by many to be the “controlling legal doctrine” that guides community responses to homeless encampments. Some communities have interpreted the ruling to mean that the enforcement of no camping laws is only possible when there are unused shelter beds available. In other words, you can’t make homelessness a crime, you must provide them with shelter. However, other jurisdictions have responded by creating sanctioned campsites as a way to meet the court’s requirement that they provide an “alternative sleeping space.” Two examples are [Olympia Washington](#) and [Novato California](#).

The PPC believes a sanctioned camp is a compassionate way to address the need to enforce the no camping laws while meeting the legal requirement to provide the homeless with an “alternative sleeping space.” As mentioned, many unsheltered people choose to live outdoors because they do not want to live in a homeless shelter. Our position is that we should allow them to live outdoors. However, city officials should decide the location where people may live outdoors. We believe this position is consistent with *Martin v. Boise*.

For more information on the debate surrounding the *Martin v. Boise* case, see the following:

[Martin v. City of Boise – Harvard Law Review](#)

[Navigating Martin v Boise](#)

Appendix A

Reports of Growing Crime Associated with Homelessness

1. Bob Danielson, owner Alpha Munitions, reports numerous encounters with homeless individuals at his business which is located next to the Gail Miller Resource Center. Bob collected drug paraphernalia that had been left on the street and parking lot near his business. He said his building has been vandalized by the homeless who are staying at the homeless resource center. Bob said the residents also threaten physical harm. Incidents reported by Bob Danielson include:
 - A group of homeless individuals was fighting on the street in front of the shelter. Bob called Premier Security and ask them to intervene or call the police. They did neither.
 - On December 26th, at 11:00 AM in front of the shelter there was a man who was shaking a woman. Tom described it as an assault, and he went and intervened, and then the man threatened Tom.
 - A resident of the resource center once entered the secured parking area on Bob's property, broke windows and threw a rock onto the equipment causing \$6,000 in damages.
 - The guests of the shelter have threatened Bob and Tom with knives, which he has taken from them. He has also pickup up syringes discarded onto his property.
 - On one occasion, he was attacked by a resident of the resource center who was wielding a pole which Bob took from him.

2. Several businesses report having windows broken by local homeless individuals living in their neighborhood.
3. One member of the PPC reports meeting three homeless individuals camping on the church property where he serves as bishop. When asked why they didn't go to the homeless resource center, one said he was trying to get off drugs and while at the resource center he encounters people who are using or selling drugs.



4. A PPC board member met a resident at the Gail Miller Resource Center who said he had been offered drugs by another resident inside the facility.
5. [Ballpark Residents Inundated by Crime Feel Unsafe, Unheard by Salt Lake City Leaders, Tribune Article, Dated May 10, 2022.](#)
Also see [A Dailey Buzz interview of Paighen Harkins, Author of the above Tribune article.](#)
6. [Sex offender with history of arrests accused of causing \\$11K in damage to SLC business](#)
7. Several local business owners reported observing homeless individuals injecting drugs in front of their places of business. Some report finding human waste on their property.



For additional examples visit this link: <https://ppcreports.blogspot.com/>.

Appendix B

Is Salt Lake City at Risk of Becoming San Francisco and Seattle?

San Francisco

The following reports show Walgreens closed 15 stores in San Francisco due to “organized retail crime” and a lack of enforcement of shoplifting laws.

<https://californiaglobe.com/local/san-francisco/exclusive-iconic-target-store-in-mission-district-to-close-amid-a-shoplifting-tidal-wave/>

<https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Another-San-Francisco-Walgreens-closing-16848319.php>

The following articles from the Atlantic magazine highlight the impact of homelessness and crime have had on San Francisco.

[The Revolt Against Homelessness](#) – Describes the view of Michale Shellenberger, author of *San Fransicko*.

[How San Francisco Became a Failed City](#) – The author, a long-time resident of San Francisco, describes the changes she has seen as homelessness and crime have taken over the streets.

A recent [article in the SF Chronicle](#) reports a wide majority of residents think conditions have greatly deteriorated and are going to get worse. The number one problem residents identified is homelessness:

John Whitehurst, a political consultant, said he has “never seen voters more upset and angry in San Francisco than they have been over the last two years and continue to be, and that anger gets expressed in many ways. Two ways, recently, include the district attorney recall and the Board of Education recall.”

Roughly one-third of the respondents said they were likely to leave within the next three years. A large majority, 65%, said that life in the city is worse than when they first moved here. Less than one-quarter of respondents said they expected life in San Francisco to improve in two years. More than one-third said it would worsen.

San Franciscans were largely in agreement about the city’s biggest problems: Homelessness took first place, followed by public safety and housing affordability. When asked if, three years from now, those problems would be significantly less severe, nearly 70% of people said either “slightly likely” or “not likely at all.”

Seattle

Click [HERE](#) for a news documentary about homelessness in Seattle.

Appendix C

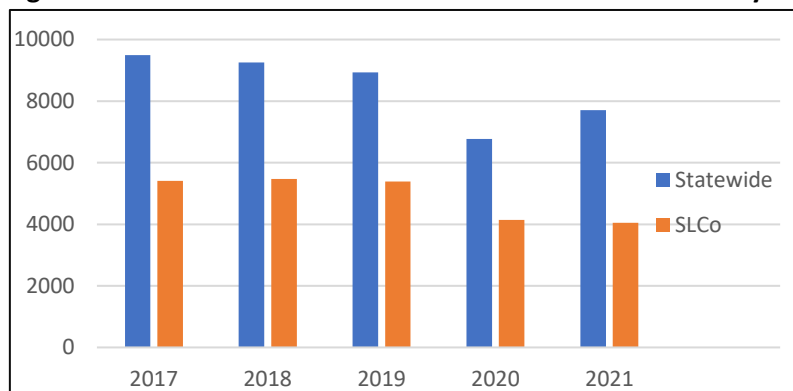
First-Time Homelessness has Dropped in Recent Years, The Number of Long-Term Homeless is Increasing

Recent news reports have raised concerns about the recent uptick in first-time homeless. The data, however, show that the number of first-time homeless has declined in recent years. In Salt Lake County, the number of first-time homeless continued its decline in 2021. At the same time, the overall number of homeless has increased. What this suggests is that our homeless population is growing because those who are homeless are remaining homeless for longer periods. The data suggest our homeless service system has not been successful in addressing the needs of those with serious obstacles to self-sufficiency. As a result, the chronically homeless are making up an increasingly larger portion of our overall homeless population. It suggests we need to do a better job of addressing the mental illness, substance abuse, and other behavioral problems of our long-term homeless population.

First-Time Homeless Has Been Declining in Recent Years.

Figure A. shows the number of first-time homeless increased statewide in 2021. However, the overall trend is down in recent years. First time homeless has continued to decline in Salt Lake County.

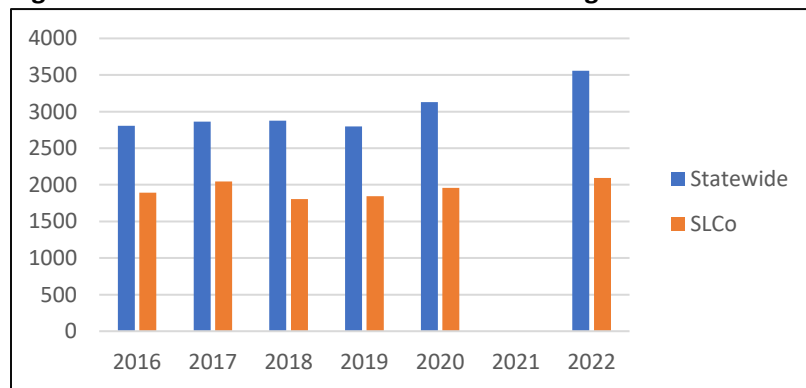
Figure A. First Time Homeless has Declined in Salt Lake County.



Source: [Annual Data Report on Homelessness, reports from 2017 through 2022.](#)

While Figure A shows first-time homeless is down, Figure B shows the total number of homeless continues to rise.

Figure B. The Total Homeless Count is Increasing

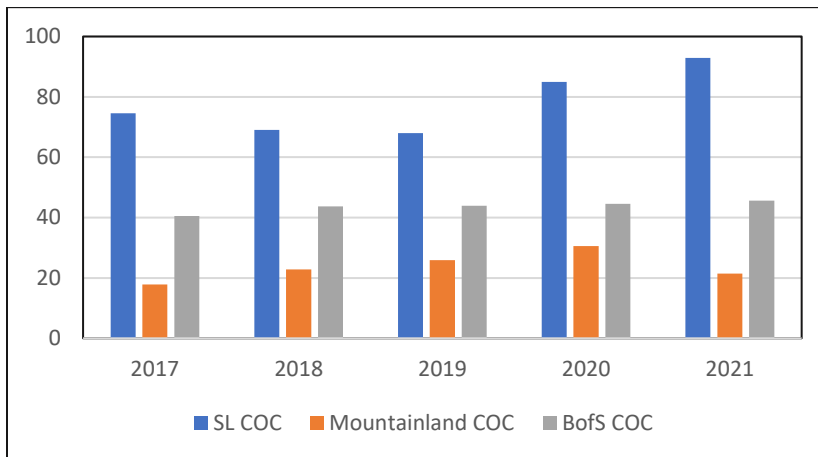


Source: [Annual Data Report on Homelessness, reports from 2017 through 2022.](#)

Question: How can the total PIT count increase while the number in emergency shelter decrease and the number of first-time homeless decrease?

Some who stay in the emergency shelter are staying for longer periods. Increasingly, the long-term homeless may be taking up space that would not be otherwise available to first-time homeless. It is also possible that the number of first-time homeless is not decreasing after all, they may be unable to find an available bed in the emergency shelter and are therefore not counted. This thesis is supported by Figure C which shows an increase in the average time homeless especially in Salt Lake County.

Figure C. Length of Time Homeless



Source: [Annual Data Report on Homelessness, reports from 2017 through 2022.](#)

Figure D shows a table provided by The Road Home describing how a large number of long-term residents can take up a disproportionate number of beds in a Homeless Resource Center.

Figure D. Breakdown of Shelter Population by Length of Stay

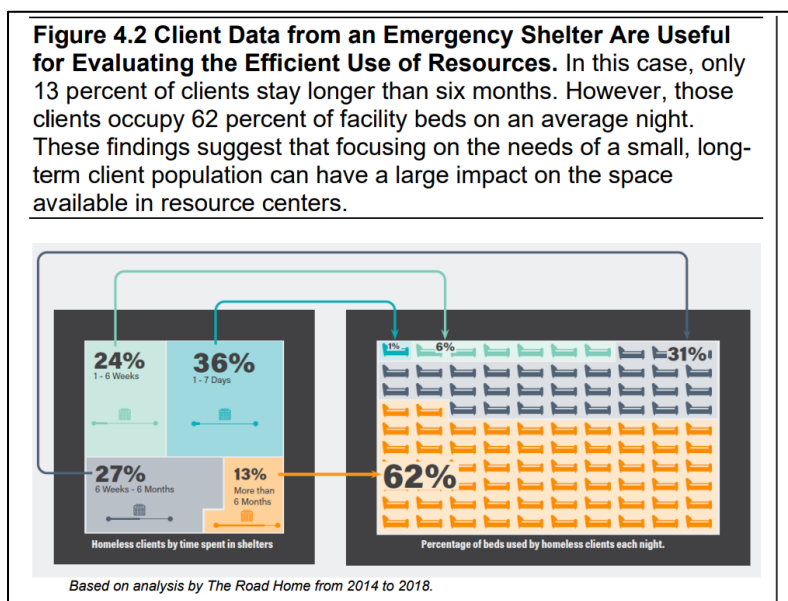
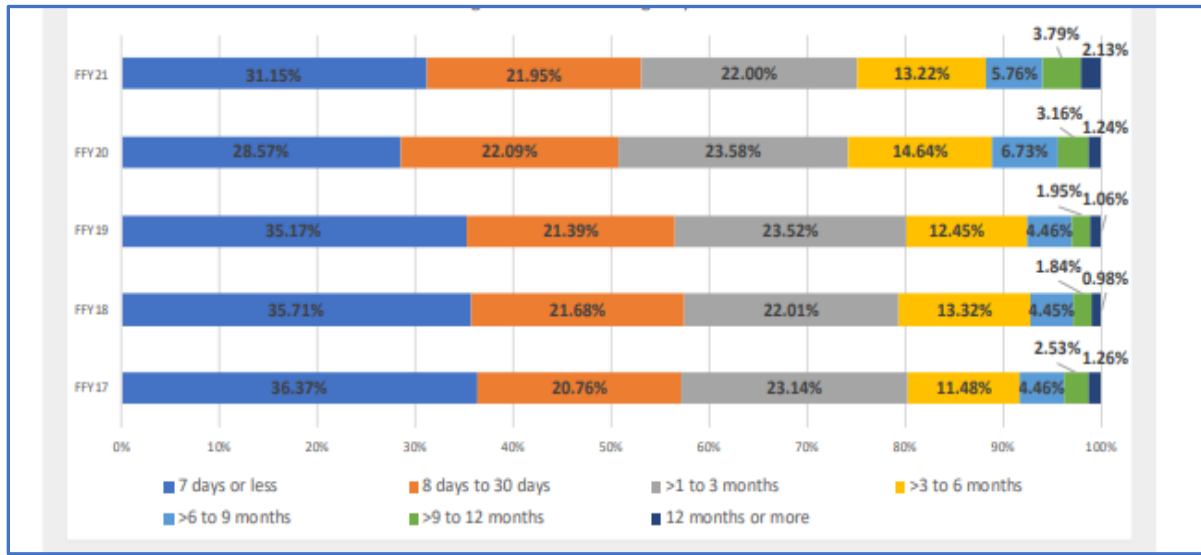


Figure D shows the problem of having a large number of long-term stayers in the HRCs. The above data is from the old downtown shelter, but data in the most recent Homelessness Annual Report suggests the problem continues and may be getting worse. The problem presented by those who stay in the resource center for a year is that they are taking bed space for the equivalent of 53 people who only need to stay in the shelter for a week. The data in Figure E shows the percentage of those who stay in the resource centers for long periods is growing.

Figure E. Length of Time in Emergency Shelter



Source: page 16 of the 2022 annual report.

Figure E suggests the short-term residents shown in the blue section to the left (those who are in emergency shelter for 7 days or less) are declining, while the number of long-term residents (the light blue, green and dark blue to the right) are increasing.

Question: So why is our homeless population increasing the time in shelter and increasingly living on the streets?

It may be due to the increasing number of homeless who face serious obstacles to independent living and who are either unwilling or unable to address them. These obstacles may include mental illness, substance abuse, and other behavioral and health-related issues.

Question: What is to be done to reduce long term homelessness?

The solution is to provide housing as well as a range of services that are effective at helping people overcome their mental illness, drug addiction and other behavioral and health-related obstacles to independent living. For many, the services are available, but individuals are either not incentivized or are not held accountable for taking advantage of those services.

Appendix D

Consider the “Inside Out” Approach to Helping the Homeless

The Pioneer Park Coalition believes the homeless can best be served by helping them change their hearts and minds. We refer to this as the inside-out approach to helping people overcome their challenges. In contrast, the Housing First programs we have observed in Salt Lake County, place too much emphasis on changing a person’s circumstances -- what we would refer to as an outside in approach. By offering food and shelter, they hope to change a person’s circumstances but not necessarily the behavior that led to their homelessness. The programs supported by the Pioneer Park Coalition strive to change both the homeless person’s heart and mind as well as their need for housing. That is, we support programs that provide housing as well as a wide range of services and support aimed at changing their way of thinking about themselves and their ability to contribute to society.

Inside Out Approach

The “inside out” approach was recently mentioned by David A Bednar in a recent presentation to the National Press Club when he said:

Often, the world works from the outside in. Changing a person’s circumstances and environment may be considered the best method of changing that person. This approach certainly is important, as I will illustrate in just a few minutes. But God typically works from the inside out through a spiritual rebirth. If a person allows God to change his or her heart, then that person is empowered in remarkable ways to change his or her circumstances and environment. Now, both temporal change from the outside in and spiritual change from the inside out are needed and useful in different situations. But we have learned that a person with a new heart — a person changed from the inside out — serves and blesses family, friends, neighbors, congregations and communities in powerful ways. They learn to see each other for who they are and therefore treat each other accordingly.

Source: David A Bednar speed to the National Press Club, May 28, 2022.

Programs that Help People Change from the Inside Out

The Pioneer Park Coalition has observed many programs that strive to help the homeless by taking the “inside out” approach described by David Bednar. Examples include The Other Side Academy, The Red Barn, Lifestart Village, and Alcoholics Anonymous. They focus on helping people by not only providing housing but also by changing the way they think about themselves and their potential to do good. We have noticed that a key feature of each of these programs is that they are staffed with people who successfully connect with clients. Building a close, personal relationship with clients, staff, and skilled case managers can motivate people to make the changes they need to make in their lives. They also help strengthen client resolve when they have doubts as to whether they can stay committed to their goals.

Housing First Programs Do Not Facilitate Change

We fear that many housing programs for the homeless in Salt Lake County do little to help people overcome their self-destructive behaviors. For example, the residents of many facilities apply the Housing First model. Examples include the Magnolia and Palmer Court. They operate on the assumption that once a homeless person is provided with housing, they can decide for themselves

whether they are ready to seek treatment for their mental illness and drug addiction. We are finding that too often, residents do not have the motivation to overcome the powerful force of drug addiction and years of antisocial behavior. Moreover, the common use of drugs in these facilities creates an environment in which residents reinforce one another's dependency on illegal drugs

Key to Success: Connecting People with Others Who Can Motivate them to Change

Too often we force people into programs and services designed to help them overcome their mental illness and drug addiction, but then we return them to a community that reinforces bad behavior. They are soon back to their old behavior. What actually leads people to make a change of heart and stay on course is making a connection with a person or group of people who continues to provide love and support.

Moe Egan, of The Other Side Academy, has seen many people go through this process. He said:

The elephant in the room is always gonna be, is the person you're trying to help ready? If the person is ready, who will be the point person that, first, builds a relationship of trust with that person. This process does not happen overnight. Next, when this process happens and is fruitful, where is a safe place (detox, etc) that I can take this person and have them received with the same level of support, understanding and a culture of accountability. After a person agrees to detox, upon release, it's crucial that they have the next step in place...safe, clean housing that is away from the drama and chaos of the destructive environment they come from. Far too many times, I've seen folks get detoxed...and released back into the same toxic environment with the same people, places and things. Not having the next step in place right away will cause opportunities for relapse, discouragement and disappointment. If a person is homeless trying to get their life together...and you're asking them to go online and fill out a 15-page application for housing or whatever, show up at a certain place and time, it's ridiculous.

At every step of the way, there needs to be someone walking with this person that has a similar lived experience. I think we are under-using the homeless advocate that are on the street and with the homeless on a daily basis. They know many of the homeless and what they're suffering from. These advocates can be used to walk a person out of homelessness and begin the next step.

Programs that link people to a supportive network of individuals with shared experiences are the most successful at helping people make an inside out change of heart. Examples of these programs are The Other Side Academy, Lifestart Village, and Switchpoint. These programs are successful because they address the following needs: (1) expectations for appropriate behavior, (2) deep, connected relationships with staff and case managers, and (3) a stable living environment. Other programs are not as successful, in our view, because they only address only one or two of these needs.

Examples of People Who Have Made the Change

The following are two examples of students from the Other Side Academy who were homeless and who changed their lives. Click on the images to view the source.



Sierra Belka

I'm Sierra Belka and here's my story.

I had a normal upbringing, and like many kids, I got into the party scene in high school. It started with drinking and quickly progressed to using pills. Before I knew it I was using heroin. I got my first DUI before my 16th birthday, around the same time I became a full-blown heroin addict. I started stealing to support my addiction, and by the time I was 18, I wasn't welcome anywhere. I would lie to, steal from, and manipulate the people who cared about me most. I lived on the streets or stayed with friends, carrying everything I owned in a backpack on my back.

When I was 22, I had been arrested 9 times and spent 3.5 years in jail. That was when I found out about The Other Side Academy. What stuck out about it was that it was something I could do on my own. I had burned every bridge out there, I had no insurance, and nobody was going to help me. The Other Side Academy was free and all it took was my commitment.

Throughout my 3 year stay, I gained courage and learned to set boundaries. I don't run away from my problems anymore. I confront the people around me and let them help me. I'm honest now and I've grown compassion for others. I learned that it's not all about me! I want other people to do well and feel as good as I feel now. Most importantly, I got something I never thought I'd get back: my family. These days I'm at the top of the list to babysit my little brother, which would have been unthinkable before.




Brian Redd and his Friend Desmond Demonstrate the Importance of Making a Personal Connection.

The relationship between Brian Redd and his friend Desmond is another example of how people can be motivated to change by making a personal connection with someone willing to help. When Brian and Desmond first met, Desmond was living on Rio Grand Avenue, where he was dealing and using illegal drugs, and was not in a good place mentally or physically. At first, Desmond was very confrontational with the police because his girlfriend had been recently arrested for assault. After several friendly encounters with Desmond over several weeks, Brian and Desmond formed a relationship of trust, and they have now been friends for years. Brian helped Desmond find temporary shelter, and enrolled in Odyssey House where he could receive treatment for his drug habit. Later, Brian connected Desmond with the Department of Workforce Services who helped Desmond find a job. Most importantly, Brian made a lasting connection with Desmond and continues to encourage him as he began his life off drugs and off the street. While he has had several relapses over the years, Desmond is currently drug-free and is working as a flagger on a road construction crew. Brian says Desmond is now leading a much more stable life than he was a few years ago.



Brian Redd is the former Chief of the State Bureau of Investigation, Utah Department of Public Safety.