



# UNITED TO END HOMELESSNESS

Housing Champions Advocacy Network  
Advocacy 101 Training FAQs  
February 2020

## Background

In late 2019, three Advocacy 101 trainings were held in partnership with the Orange County Alliance for Just Change. The trainings took place in Mission Viejo, Fullerton and Garden Grove. Attendees wrote questions down on Post-It notes and we promised that each question would be answered, either in the course of the training, or in an FAQ following the sessions. Following are the questions and answers from those trainings. They are divided by four categories: Homelessness, Affordable and Supportive Housing, Local Government Role, and Advocacy Strategy/Messaging.

## Questions About Homelessness

Overall, if you have questions regarding the causes of homelessness in Orange County, who becomes homeless and where they're from and how people who are homeless access services, we encourage you to [attend our Homelessness 101 class](#). This class is updated with the newest data about who is homeless and why housing is the key to addressing homelessness in Orange County. Look for a class in your area:

- What is chronic homelessness?
  - Chronic homelessness refers to the very specific subset of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of homelessness. Chronically homeless people must have a disabling condition and must've been homeless for a year or longer. A "disabling condition" requires a certificate of disability from a doctor. People experiencing chronic homelessness can have very complicated physical or mental disabilities that prevent them from working a full-time job. This is a very vulnerable population, and over half of Orange County's unsheltered population is chronically homeless.
- What is Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)?
  - PSH is a program specifically for chronically homeless people, getting them into housing quickly and providing services to help them stabilize and succeed. These services can be case management, medical services, mental health services, job training and others. There is no requirement for this person to move out of their housing; they may live in their home however long they need services. When a chronically homeless person is housed through PSH, their name is on the lease and they pay a third of their income for rent. It's important to remember that PSH is for the chronically homeless population which is a very vulnerable population with disabling conditions that might prevent them from being able to work at a job that will pay a wage that can afford even a 1-bedroom apartment in Orange County.



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- Why do people become homeless in Orange County?
  - The [UCI Cost Study](#) found that the top three reasons people become homeless are difficulty finding a job that pays a sustainable wage (40%), finding housing that is affordable (36%), and family issues (death in a family, divorce, etc.) (28%).
- How does one have a conversation with those who truly believe homeless individuals choose to be homeless?
  - Remain calm and focus on facts from the Homelessness 101 class (or even invite them to one!). You can also ask them what they mean when by “choice.” Is it a personal experience they’ve had? Ask questions to get them to think deeper about what their perspective. Many people think of their own personal experiences. You can also discuss the many barriers people experience when trying to access services in Orange County; programs and shelters might be full, some might not meet eligibility requirements of certain programs, others might not know where to go to be directed to services and housing. Even when people figure out where to go for help in navigating Orange County’s housing system, most still experience barriers such as long wait times (250 days is the average waiting time for someone in O.C.’s Coordinated Entry System), and might face barriers with property owners who won’t accept housing vouchers. It can be difficult to hear these opinions, but try to dig into what that person means when they say it and help unpack their beliefs in a calm and collected manner, responding to their thoughts with data and personal experience.
- Is there a consolidated place where people who are experiencing homelessness can be directed?
  - [211 OC](#) is a website and a number on the phone where those in need can be directed to various resources throughout Orange County. If a family is experiencing homelessness, they can be directed to the Families Solutions Collaborative: <https://211oc.org/get-help/211oc-can-help/families-experiencing-homelessness.html>.
- How do we help Orange County learn more about homelessness?
  - Invite your friends, relatives and neighbors to a [Homelessness 101 class](#) in their area or sign-up to host a Homelessness 101 class for your group or organization!
- Is the flow of immigration in southern California impacting your efforts to reduce homelessness?
  - No. In fact, 90% of people experiencing homelessness are US-born. 73% in Orange County had their last permanent address in Orange County, and 68% have lived here 10 or more years. Most of the people who become homeless in a community have lived in that community and have ties to it; 51% have family in Orange County, 51% attended



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(or do attend) school in Orange County, and 72% have worked (or currently work) in Orange County. ([2019 Orange County Point in Time Count](#))

- What are the best practices for addressing homelessness?
  - The [Housing First model](#) is a model became official U.S. policy under the George W. Bush administration and has continued under both the Obama and Trump administrations. Housing First sees homelessness as primarily a housing issue and seeks to stabilize people in housing as quickly as possible with supportive services that will help them maintain and be successful in that housing. Around the country (and in Orange County), Housing First approaches have been shown to reduce the amount of time people spend on the street and save taxpayers' money, as well.

### Questions About Affordable/Supportive Housing

- 2700 supportive housing units: What does supportive mean?
  - Supportive housing combines affordable, non-time-limited housing with voluntary supportive services provided, usually on-site, but also in scattered site locations, when necessary. It is a proven solution to chronic homelessness. Services are designed to build independent living and tenancy skills and can include mental health, employment, community-based health care and life skills.
- What is the demand for houses vs. supply, now vs. future?
  - California needs to produce approximately 1.8 million new units of housing by 2025 to meet statewide demand and has averaged only around 80,000 units annually since 2005. California ranks 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation in number of housing units per capita with only 358 homes per 1000 people. There is currently a 1.5-million-unit shortage of rental housing statewide. Orange County has a current shortage of approximately 65,000 homes of all types.
- Where is the affordable housing in south Orange County?
  - The places where large numbers of affordable homes are available are usually found in parts of California where jobs, public transportation and other public amenities are not plentiful. In Orange County, there is not a single city where the median rent is affordable to low- and very-low-income people. In South Orange County, there is very little affordable housing and it isn't concentrated in any single city.
- How many PSH units should each city strive to create? How about affordable units? Do we need the same number of each?
  - Countywide, there is an initial need for approximately 2700 permanent supportive housing units. When expanded out to include affordable housing, that number grows exponentially.



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- Do some cities require more units than others?
  - The size of each city varies, and some cities have more available vacant land or land that can be repurposed into housing, so necessarily, all cities have different capacities for producing more housing. Additionally, some cities have inclusionary zoning ordinances that require new developments to have affordable housing, and thus have often developed more than other cities. Some cities have enacted exclusionary zoning ordinances which favor single-family homes, which makes it more difficult to meet their housing goals. Each city is given a goal under the Regional Housing Needs Assessment developed by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG).
- What is the inventory of current unoccupied housing?
  - In California, 12.72 million of 13.85 million existing homes are occupied. 54% of occupied homes are owner-occupied and 46% are renter occupied.
- Can undocumented immigrants qualify for Section 8, PSH and affordable housing?
  - Undocumented immigrants are not eligible to receive Section 8 housing assistance. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which oversees Section 8 programs, does allow for some housing assistance to “mixed families” consisting of at least one undocumented immigrant, however the amount of assistance is adjusted to account for the non-citizens in the household.
- Why are Section 8 waiting lists so long?
  - This is mostly an issue of supply and demand. There simply aren’t enough affordable and supportive housing units for all who need them. There are also not nearly enough federally subsidized housing vouchers for all whose income qualifies them to receive this benefit. Housing Choice Voucher holders often have difficulty finding a landlord who will accept the voucher. A new California law prohibits landlords from discriminating based on source of income.
- Do you think lawsuits will be needed to get mandatory PSH for those in need?
  - Perhaps. However, what is needed more are groups of citizens who live, work, worship, shop and go to school in their cities to consistently, proactively advocate with their elected leaders to entitle PSH projects. Only when this advocacy is exhausted and ineffective should lawsuits be considered.
- What can I say to counter the argument that homeless housing will bring down property values because homeless people bring crime and drug use? How can affordable housing be built that won’t be infested by gangs and crimes?
  - A 2016 study by Trulia Research of the top 20 least affordable housing markets found that low-income housing built over a 10-year span had no negative impact on property values, with one slight exception in Boston. In Denver, there was actually a positive impact on property values. Regarding crime, a study published in the journal, Urban Studies, looked at crime and housing data in 215 cities between 1997 and 2008 and found virtually no relationship between the Housing Choice Voucher Program and



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higher crime in cities or suburbs. Jamboree Housing Corporation and UC Irvine are currently partnering on a study to examine this specifically for Orange County. It's imperative to insist that reputable, quality developers and operators are chosen by cities to build affordable and permanent supportive housing to ensure proper management. However, advocates have found that this argument often doesn't sway opponents, as the real issue is less about property values and more about safety concerns.

- Why don't they move to cheaper places to live?
  - Most cheaper places don't have enough jobs or public transportation to provide a living for low-income people and families. Also, moving is expensive and many can't afford it. Some have family and supportive networks in a particular geographic location and moving away would create hardships or strain families. In some cases, this includes custody arrangements with children which prohibit moving. Homelessness for most is a temporary condition and uprooting to move far away doesn't make sense. Most places are experiencing some level of housing affordability crisis, so the next destination might not be much better. Lastly, more affluent areas rely on low-wage workers for a healthy economy. People who need affordable housing contribute to the economy and community and shouldn't have to earn the right to live near where they work.
- What are the roadblocks that exist to provide adequate housing for all? If it's fiscally and morally the right thing, what is the roadblock?
  - There are many reasons, from available land, to per unit costs, to regulations which drive up costs and delay development of new housing, to lack of adequate funding for the National Housing Trust Fund, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, Section 8 vouchers. But ultimately, the major impediment is lack of political will fueled by community opposition. And that community opposition is based on fear and ignorance. Elected leaders need people who live in their cities to let them know they are supported when they support PSH and affordable homes.
- With all the new apartment developments locally, is there any realistic expectation that affordable housing will be a priority let alone a reality? How do we motivate developers to include this in their plans?
  - Outside of nonprofit housing developers, homebuilders exist to maximize profits. Market-rate housing is simply more profitable than PSH or affordable housing. It's not realistic to expect for profit developers to be motivated by anything but profits. The focus should be more on policies which incentivize nonprofit developers to build in cities and require market-rate developments to include affordable units. This can be done through policies such as inclusionary zoning and eliminating policies like exclusionary zoning which favor only single-family homes.



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- Is affordable home ownership part of the solution?
  - Yes. But this is a harder issue to solve and is less pressing than providing affordable rental housing. Ultimately, the state and county need more housing of all types. Homes will not be affordable for purchase until the supply and demand across all housing types is balanced.
- For seniors who lose their homes, what options are there?
  - Seniors are eligible for many of the same federal and state housing programs as others, but there are some housing programs geared specifically to seniors including HUD Section 202, the Congregate Housing Service Program, Section 811 for low-income seniors with disabilities and Medicaid Assisted Living.
- How do we prioritize who receives/qualifies for subsidized housing?
  - This prioritization happens through a process called the Coordinated Entry System (CES). All jurisdictions receiving federal housing funding must develop a CES. This system ensures that all people experiencing a housing crisis have equal and fair access and are quickly identified, assessed for, referred and connected to housing and assistance based on their strengths and needs.
- How is mental illness and addiction addressed in the PSH model?
  - Eligibility for PSH can't be conditioned on mental illness or chemical dependency status. Supportive services are provided to residents experiencing both issues. These services are usually coordinated through a Full Service Partner (FSP) contracted to coordinate supportive services at the PSH site. FSPs are experienced in case management for people with mental illnesses and chemical dependency issues.
- How much does it cost to produce PSH and affordable housing? What is the per unit cost?
  - Depending on the type of development (new construction or rehabilitation of an existing structure), the cost can range from \$250-400K+.

### **Questions About City and Local Government Role/Conduct**

- How do I get on the city council calendar?
  - There isn't a way to get yourself on the city council agenda ahead of the meeting. If you want to speak at a city council (or planning commission) meeting, you must first submit a speaker card to the City Clerk when you arrive at the meeting. Speakers are called in the order speaker request forms are received and corresponding to the agenda item indicated on the card. There is a time limit of three minutes per speaker unless otherwise announced.
- I want to learn how to approach and affect the decisions of my city. What works?
  - Attend your city council and planning commission meetings as much as you can. Educate yourself on the specific aspects of your city's Housing Element and ordinances. Build relationships with city staff, city council members and planning commission



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members so they see you as a trusted resource and influencer. Partner with as many others from your city as you can who are doing the same thing.

- How can we have input into the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) process?
  - All meetings of the RHNA Subcommittee, CEHD Committee, and Regional Council are public meetings and verbal and written comments can be submitted. Announcements of additional public workshops, meetings, and milestones are announced through the RHNA email list. To submit a written comment or question, or to be added to the RHNA mailing list, send an email to [housing@scag.ca.gov](mailto:housing@scag.ca.gov). Additional resources on RHNA, including a RHNA 101 tutorial, can be found at [www.scag.ca.gov/rhna](http://www.scag.ca.gov/rhna).
- How do we overcome the NIMBY syndrome in our community?
  - The best way to overcome NIMBYism in our community is through outreach, education and ultimately organizing enough people advocating for supportive and affordable homes in your city that NIMBYism becomes moot.
- I hear there is a county level board that has state funding to distribute. Is this for housing?
  - The Orange County Board of Supervisors controls a \$6.8 billion budget and a percentage does go to housing. You can read about the budget and the allocations [here](#). There is also a federally mandated Continuum of Care (CoC) Board which oversees distribution of most HUD dollars dedicated to homeless housing programs in Orange County. Recently, the CoC has been charged with overseeing new state dollars such as the California Emerging Solutions to Housing (CESH), the Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) and the Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention Program (HHAP). CoC meetings are open to the public and you can find more information here: <http://www.occommunityservices.org/hcd/homeless/coc>.
- What are other advocacy venues besides city councils?
  - City planning commissions are a great place to advocate. Check your city's website for the dates and times of your planning commission meetings. You can also attend Ad-Hoc meeting that may be formed in your city, including community input sessions on your city's Housing Element update approximately every five years.
- What is the Board of Supervisor's position on rent control?
  - The Board of Supervisors only has jurisdiction over unincorporated parts of Orange County. Each city makes the decision on rent control, unless it is decided at the state level.
- What meetings and laws must cities offer and abide by in regard to the creation of housing and affordable housing?
  - There are too many to list here. We've highlighted a couple of the most important. Every city must complete and update a Housing Element generally every five years. These Housing Elements are the "strategic plan" for housing for your city and must be submitted to the California Department of Housing and Community Development for approval. The Housing Element should reflect concrete strategies for meeting the



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housing needs of all income levels and should align with your city's allocation under the RHNA. A recently passed law in California makes it illegal for landlords to discriminate based on source of income, which could lead to more Housing Choice Voucher recipients being able to secure housing. Another state law forbids cities from denying affordable housing projects if the project meets all land use and zoning requirements. As of January 2020, Accessory Dwelling Units and Junior Accessory Dwelling units of no more than 500 square feet can be built bypassing a city's exclusionary zoning prohibition in new and existing single-family developments.

- How can we have more affordable housing in South Orange County?
  - We can have more affordable housing in South Orange County by organizing residents, advocating for it and demanding that our elected officials uphold their responsibility to provide for the housing needs of all residents.
- Why is it not in the best interest of local leaders to get on board?
  - Opposition to supportive and affordable homes can be intense and vitriolic. Elected officials are often threatened with recall and political retaliation if they vote in favor of projects. This is why citizens who live in their cities are needed to offer them support when they make courageous decisions.
- Are there any city/county officials that have buy in to the Housing First model or is everyone still all about shelters and band aids?
  - All city governments, if they desire federal dollars, must buy in to the Housing First model, as it is the mandated direction of HUD. Increasingly, state dollars are also being tied to adherence to Housing First. The tide turned some time ago, but we must be vigilant in continuing to push housing as the ultimate solution to homelessness.

### **Questions About Advocacy Strategy/Messaging**

- What are the biggest obstacles to people becoming housing champions?
  - Probably time and knowledge. We hope that we can recruit enough volunteers in each city to spread the work out among multiple people while providing all the data and resources volunteers need to be effective advocates.
- Is there a communication network to bring together all voices?
  - Yes! Housing Champions under United to End Homelessness is organizing to be that voice. There are other resources such as The Kennedy Commission, People for Housing OC and California YIMBY working to organize and advocate.
- Is it worthwhile to fight the good fight on Nextdoor.com?
  - Probably not. That forum doesn't lend itself to civil, honest debate and discussion. Most NIMBYs (Not In My BackYard) and BANANAs (Build Absolutely Nothing Anytime Near Anyone) are set in their perspectives and opinions. We want to focus on the silent majority and reach out to those compassionate people who just need to know they can make a difference.



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- How can we best mobilize the faith community for solutions?
  - Connect with United to End Homelessness's Faith Leaders Council. This group is galvanizing faith communities all over the county. Talk to your clergy leadership about getting involved!
- How do we effectively combat misinformation in media?
  - United to End Homelessness has been producing reports, such as the Homeless Cost Study, and sustaining public awareness campaigns, including outreach to media, serving as spokespeople for news stories and conducting Homelessness 101 and Housing Advocacy trainings. You can also educate yourself and contact media outlets to correct misinformation.
- How do we respond to NIMBY arguments? How should we address NIMBYs in public meetings?
  - It's best not to argue in public meetings. Calmly presenting facts and focusing on behind-the-scenes relationship-building and engagement will be more effective. The Housing Champions effort is focused on proactive engagement with city councilmembers, planning commissioners, city staff and the silent majority of people who support more affordable homes in their communities. If we're arguing with NIMBYs in a public meeting, we haven't done our work well.
- How do I know when to show up?
  - Public meeting agendas are posted in advance on city websites for both city councils and planning commissions. We hope that our Housing Champions will show up and use their time during public comments at nearly every meeting to speak positively about the needs and benefits of more PSH and affordable homes. You should definitely mobilize your people to show up in large numbers when there is a vote to be taken or discussion around a PSH or affordable housing development.
- Who is the organizing center?
  - United to End Homelessness supported by Orange County United Way and its partners will support the Housing Champions Advocacy Network with paid Field Organizers, web portals, data, training and other resources.
- How do we teach people to build relationships with all involved in the homeless crisis?
  - Form a Housing Champions Advocacy group in your city and attend Homelessness 101 and Housing Advocacy 101 trainings. Sign up for newsletters from great organizations advocating for PSH and affordable housing. Join or create social media groups dedicated to the cause.
- What can I say to counter the argument that because I don't own property nor have children, that I don't understand the problem?
  - Renters are the hardest hit by the lack of affordable housing. Chances are, if you're a renter, you are experiencing firsthand annual increases and rental markets close to where you work that are far beyond your price-range. So, tell your story. You don't have to have children to have compassion and want the best for other people's children.



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- Who should we advocate to?
  - New PSH and affordable homes require the approval of city councils and planning commissions. These should be your primary targets. We can't get to approvals for housing developments without those deciding votes. Helping this along is the second target of our advocacy: the silent majority. People just like you, or who might need a little more education and convincing, who want to do the right things but have yet to find a forum and support.
- How do we combine groups to create the greatest impact?
  - Dialogue is the best way. In some cases, it may make sense for different groups to fulfill different roles. Short of combining groups, there should be a high level of coordination among the groups advocating for more PSH and affordable homes. This is what United to End Homelessness is doing.
- The issues seem too overwhelming. How do we even begin to address it in a way that has an impact?
  - Don't feel like you have to solve it all at once. Start with what you do control. Gather your group. Attend trainings. Read relevant information. Start attending and observing city council and planning commission meetings. Then, move on to more active engagement from there, such as commenting during the public comments portion of a meeting or arranging to have a city councilmember come for a Q&A with your group.
- How do we maximize our leverage with these politicians' representatives?
  - Numbers and consistent engagement. Build your group to a sufficient number to get their attention. Don't be a flash in the pan. Demonstrate that you will keep showing up, keep speaking out and will support local leaders when they make the courageous decisions.
- How can cities most effectively work with developers to produce more affordable housing?
  - Cities can help by identifying land for both new construction and rehabilitation. They can also make the development process as efficient and streamlined as possible. City staff can be proactive in identifying reputable developers and bringing them to their cities. City leaders can pass ordinances which require inclusion of affordable housing in all developments, as well as relax parking and density rules which can unnecessarily reduce the number of units possible. City leaders can eliminate exclusionary zoning ordinances which discriminate against apartments.
- How do we go about coordinating at the bigger picture level?
  - There are several organizations organizing at the federal and state level. We're sending an email with links to many of these groups so you can connect with them if you desire to focus on federal or state legislation.



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- Is there a movement toward a county plan with a professional at the top coordinating all efforts/grassroots?
  - It would be impossible to coordinate all grassroots efforts. But the Housing Champions Advocacy Network is intended to build out a scalable platform for a city-by-city citizen-led advocacy effort in every city in Orange County. This effort is happening in cooperation and coordination with other groups advocating for PSH and affordable homes.
- Are schools teaching K-12 about homelessness in our city?
  - We're not aware of any curriculum in public schools specifically about homelessness.
- What policies should we be educated on?
  - First and foremost, you should educate yourself on your city's Housing Element and Consolidated Plan, including the process by which it is updated. This is your city's strategic plan for housing. Simple Google searches should point you to your city's plan, as well as resources to help you understand how to read it. We'll be including information on this in the web portal soon.
- What are the best message points/fun facts/asks to present at planning commission and city council meetings? What important talking points should we use to create a single message?
  - Messaging should be customized to fit the situation. The UCI/United Way Homeless Cost Study is an excellent source of data. As we build out the Housing Champions Advocacy Network, our Field Organizers will curate more resources for our volunteer advocates so that everyone has easy access to the right information.