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SNAPS In Focus: Guest Blog by Mayor Ralph Becker, Salt Lake City

In Salt Lake City we believe homeless is an adjective, not a noun. It describes a current situation someone is experiencing but does not describe the whole person. Individuals experiencing homelessness are members of our community. We must help them in their times of need, just as we would for any other member of our community.

The goal of our homeless services community is to get people into housing and off the streets as quickly as possible. If people have a home, they can begin to rebuild their lives. To lessen the time a person experiences homelessness we coordinate our services and funding as much as possible. We have several outreach teams to connect individuals with services. Our service providers communicate and get people help from other agencies if they cannot help them. Weekly meetings are held among our housing providers to find the right match between an individual and a home. Our funders work together to make sure the needed services get the money they need to serve the community.

At the same time we're getting people into housing, we also work to combat negative activities often associated with homelessness. Panhandling and criminal activity are issues in our community but we consider these separate issues from helping people get off the streets. Under the City's Homeless Outreach Street Team (HOST) program, we encourage our service providers and discourage panhandling. Red HOST parking meters are found throughout Downtown to offer people a way to help those experiencing homelessness without giving money to a panhandler. A person using one of the red meters knows 100% of his donation goes directly to a homeless service provider. Salt Lake City also has a dedicated police officer to work with individuals experiencing homelessness and service providers. This police officer is in the community everyday building relationships. He is able to separate those that truly need services from those there to prey on others.

By reducing the number of people on the streets, we will make our community healthier. The only true way to end homelessness is to get people into housing.

Ralph Becker
Mayor, Salt Lake City