



Meeting Minutes

Date: 07-18-2024 **Time:** 3:15 PM

Meeting Called to Order By: Van Roberts

Location: Wayside Center @ 44219 10th St W, Lancaster, CA 93534

Organizations in Attendance

Voices of Our Youth, LASD Lancaster Station, City of Lancaster, Parents Anonymous, Veterans Information Center, Krazy K Productions, LASD/DMH Veterans Mental Evaluation Team, Little People Childcare, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, Children's Law Center, Mental Health America Los Angeles, California Highway Patrol, Tunnel Vision Foundation, AV Seed & Grow,

Minutes

Minutes were posted to the VOYCC webpage on the Voices of Our Youth website.

Reports

There are no reports at this time.

Old Business

There was no old business at this time.

New Business

Van Roberts (VOY) began by emphasizing the purpose of the Council. It was made clear that the gathering was not about competition; rather, it aimed to unite everyone present who held strong connections within the community. The primary goal was to combine resources to address the pressing issues facing the community. It was acknowledged that the community was currently experiencing a major crisis and urgent assistance was required. The focus was on providing law enforcement with the necessary tools to support community members they encounter during patrols. Equipping them with these tools could help reduce the use of force and minimize the need for arrests. VOY highlighted the positive impact of the resources within the room, citing

three recent instances where law enforcement was able to assist individuals in need thanks to these resources, rather than resorting to arrest. The overarching message conveyed was one of care and concern for the youth and the community as a whole.

As we gathered in the room, everyone took a moment to introduce themselves. They shared their name, the organization they represent, and provided a brief overview of their role and contributions.

Teri Harrison, Voices of Our Youth's COO, requested that Council members please email flyers for upcoming events and services offered to voycc@voicesofouryouth.org. Thank you!

In our community, there is a strong sense of familiarity among individuals. Here, everyone is on an equal footing, regardless of their background or status. When we remove labels and positions, what remains is a sense of belonging to a family. We share common challenges in our neighborhoods, which we can address by engaging in open dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. Every voice is valued and important in this space. We only request that any conflicts or personal issues be left outside, as we strive to create a supportive and inclusive environment for all.

Deputy Laurence Green from LASD's Lancaster Station highlighted the critical resource needs of law enforcement. He noted that a significant portion of their calls involve individuals who are homeless, struggling with mental health issues, or facing substance abuse challenges. The station also receives a high volume of calls related to transient individuals. Deputy Green pointed out that there is a lack of communication among various entities in the area, and many calls come in outside of regular business hours, making it difficult to coordinate assistance.

He stressed the importance of providing the Sheriff's Department with resources that can offer immediate solutions, rather than delayed responses that can take several days or hours. Due to limited staffing, officers often find themselves unable to follow up on calls once they have left the scene. Deputy Green emphasized the need for efficiency and prompt assistance to address these complex issues effectively.

He reiterated that the primary goal for the Sheriff's Department is to provide help and support to individuals in need, with the aim of avoiding unnecessary arrests.

Van emphasized the importance of timely assistance to law enforcement. He acknowledged that if they reach out for support and it is not provided promptly, they will seek help elsewhere, resulting in missed opportunities.

Calvin Sauls shared that he will provide a set of numbers to the council members who will respond to incoming calls. He emphasized the fluctuating nature of resources, highlighting the need for sustainable support. Sauls urged city officials to consider allocating a building for community use, proposing it as a 24-hour drop-in center that could be staffed by individuals present at different intervals. Heather Varden from LAHSA and the City of Lancaster Deputy Mayor recommended submitting a formal proposal to the city commissioners for further consideration.

Administrative Captain Joseph Fender of LASD's Lancaster Station, was invited to speak to the audience by Van. Captain Fender shared openly, describing himself as a sincere individual who always speaks from the heart. He delved into the current state of the station, highlighting the challenges they face. With a budget allocation for 180 deputies, they are currently understaffed by 66. The station is also short of 3 lieutenants, 4 sergeants, and 8 detectives as per the allocated positions. Captain Fender stressed the importance of community involvement in recruiting new deputies, mentioning that many of the current deputies in Lancaster and Palmdale are local residents themselves.

Captain Fender highlighted the issue of homelessness, revealing that half of the homeless population in the United States resides in California. Within California, 25% of the homeless individuals are in Los Angeles County, with the Antelope Valley having a higher homeless population than anywhere else in the state, except for LA City. Additionally, Captain Fender shared that 47% of use of force complaints involve interactions with the homeless, mentally ill and those under the influence. He clarified that these complaints often stem from situations where officers attempt to escort individuals off private property, and they resist by refusing to leave. He also mentioned that a significant portion of their efforts, around 30%, is dedicated to supporting individuals who are experiencing homelessness, struggling with mental illness, and in need of substance abuse programs.

Lancaster Station in Los Angeles County is renowned for its high level of activity. With 80,000 service calls, 60,000 observations, and 160,000 contacts annually, it stands out as one of the busiest stations in the region.

Captain Fender emphasized the importance of acknowledging that law enforcement may struggle to ask for help, as they are typically the ones people turn to in times of need. He candidly admitted that they require assistance with resources, particularly after regular business hours, when immediate response is crucial. Considering law enforcement's round-the-clock dedication, support is needed throughout all hours of the day and night.

Tanisha Dickerson from the Tunnel Vision Foundation asked where ideas should be sent. Van responded that ideas should be directed to Teri Harrison, the COO of Voices of Our Youth, so that they can be included on the agenda for our next available meeting.

Calvin Sauls requested the city donate a building, emphasizing its potential to unite people. The structure is envisioned as a hub for fostering connections and community engagement.

Van emphasized the importance of collaboration and civic responsibility, stating that by working together and fulfilling our duties as citizens, we can reduce the number of unnecessary calls. He encouraged everyone to set aside their badges and titles. Van also reminded individuals to consider that involving law enforcement in a situation shifts control away from them to the deputies once they arrive on the scene.

Van often hears people tell him that when it comes to providing for their family, they will go to great lengths to ensure their needs are met. They believe in doing whatever it takes to take care of their loved ones, no matter the sacrifices or consequences involved.

Van also mentioned that Voices of Our Youth will reach out to our partners whenever assistance is needed. He also highlighted that Parents Anonymous and the Sheriff's Department contacted Voices of Our Youth over the weekend seeking help, and thanks to our connections, we were able to provide the assistance needed.

Van emphasized that his ability to make a difference is fueled by the relationships he builds. When working with young people, his top priority is ensuring their safety. He is committed to taking whatever steps necessary to achieve this goal.

Many issues within our community stem from the inability of individuals to support their families or meet basic needs.

Van recently led an initiative called Operation Hydrate, a joint effort involving Voices of Our Youth (VOY), MHALA, and various volunteers. This project was successful thanks to the City of Lancaster's generous donation of approximately 343 cases of water and ice. Over the course of two days, water was distributed to homeless individuals, seniors, and those in need to help them cope with the effects of the heatwave. The city also donated cases of water to law enforcement to carry in their cars to hand out to individuals in need.

Van emphasized that every individual present is a leader. He highlighted that each person has a following and encouraged everyone to set a positive example for others to follow.

He emphasized the importance of recognizing that crime can impact everyone, either through direct or indirect means, and urged us not to believe that we are immune to its effects.

One council member recommended developing a resource spreadsheet, but Teri stated she is creating individual one-sheets for each organization and program, detailing eligibility criteria and intake procedures. Christine Malta from the City of Lancaster proposed a collaboration with Teri to consolidate the list, as the city had already begun this process, emphasizing the avoidance of duplicating efforts. Heather Varden from LAHSA also mentioned that they were working on a similar initiative.

Van collaborates with multiple agencies to leverage collective strength and opportunities. For instance, he highlighted the story of Mrs. Dee from Little People Childcare, who welcomes children in challenging situations to her daycare, with the support of CCRC services. This approach demonstrates the power of utilizing available resources to prevent the need for larger interventions.

Van invited Pam Jones and Jennifer Melendez from MHALA to present to the council about the organization's offerings. Pam, in her role as the Program Manager for Outreach, highlighted her direct engagement with clients in the field, emphasizing the gratification of giving back to the community. Jennifer, as the Program Manager for the Homeless Services Center, outlined their daily support for over 100 individuals, with a focus on problem-solving and a spectrum of services from temporary to permanent housing. Additionally, the center provides essential resources like food, clothing, laundry facilities,

showers, and phone charging. Operating hours are Monday through Friday from 9 am to 2 pm.

A council member asked if MHALA had a water buffalo to assist the homeless in filling their water containers. They mentioned they are in the process of acquiring one. Heather noted that LAHSA currently has water buffaloes. Deputy Ken Cianciosi from LASD's Veterans Mental Evaluation Team also inquired about designated locations for homeless individuals to fill their water containers. It was mentioned that efforts will be made to determine the schedule. Jennifer highlighted that the Homeless Services Center provides amenities such as laundry services, misters on the patio, air conditioning, water, and food. She emphasized that it serves as a safe haven for individuals to escape the heat and receive assistance.

Lynde Williams recently asked if the MHALA's Homeless Services Center could extend their operating hours, as the hours of 3-5 pm are the hottest part of the day. The center currently closes at 2 pm. Another individual also inquired about the possibility of the center operating 24 hours. Jennifer and Pam explained that due to contractual limitations, extending the hours is not feasible. Additionally, there was a query regarding the availability of a weekend team. Presently, MHALA does not have a designated weekend team, but they do address emergencies during weekends.

Alvin Robinson from Parents Anonymous inquired about a drop-in center. He was informed that there are drop-in centers located across the city, but they typically operate only during business hours.

Van emphasized the importance of destigmatizing interactions with law enforcement. He underscored the significance of community-based problem-solving, starting within our own homes. It's crucial to bear in mind that involving law enforcement means relinquishing control over the outcome.

He then addressed the Council. Can we work together? Can we stick together? The response from everyone was a resounding YES!

Through Voices of Our Youth's Streets to Suites program, a 92-year-old woman found sleeping outside Lancaster Station was given the support she needed. Deputy Laurence Green utilized one of the program's vouchers to secure her a place at a motel. After contacting her, we ensured she was settled in with food and later moved her to another motel for an extended stay. As time passed, it became apparent that she was experiencing more than just

homelessness. Signs of dementia emerged, leading her to make frequent 911 calls for food or assistance, and causing disruptions by knocking on other residents' doors. Recognizing the need for further intervention, we enlisted the help of community activist Marcos Alvarez, who connected us with Adult Protective Services. With their guidance, we were able to place her on a psych hold, enabling the authorities to take charge of her case and provide the necessary support. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of Pam, Deputies Cianciosi and Green, and our team, we successfully ensured she received the help she needed for a better future.

He highlighted this as a demonstration of the power of collaboration. He emphasized that sometimes we may feel helpless in assisting others, leading us to give up. This is when it becomes crucial to mobilize resources, as we did in this case, ultimately providing essential assistance to the elderly woman in need.

Van has helped numerous young people reconsider suicide and prevented fathers from turning to crime. He emphasizes the power of a smile or a simple conversation in brightening someone's day.

Deputy Cianciosi highlighted the risks of interacting with homeless individuals and emphasized the significance of informing other organizations about any adverse encounters. This practice enhances overall safety. He recommended reaching out to him or the MET teams for assistance in managing such situations.

Van invited Cindy Silva, President of the Veterans Information Center, to share about her organization. Cindy informed the Council that VIC's meetings take place every Monday from 8-10 am at Desert Vineyard Church. They provide breakfast, coffee, Starbucks pastries, and groceries from Trader Joe's. Additionally, Cindy mentioned that VIC offers assistance to veterans with bills and transportation to appointments.

Deputy Cianciosi also mentioned that they work with the VA and help support tiny home living initiatives.

Sergeant Shane Chapman from LASD shared with the Council about a Community Healing candlelight and prayer vigil scheduled for 6 pm at the Lancaster Public Library. The event is supported by the Sheriff's Department, City of Lancaster, Supervisor Kathryn Barger's Office, and the H.E.L.P.E.R. Foundation. It aims to bring together the faith community and law

enforcement for a meaningful evening of healing and unity. The vigil is a step towards addressing the violence in our community and honoring the lives that have been lost.

The Sheriff's Department is currently offering the Explorer Program, an intensive 15-week initiative designed for 14 to 20-year-olds. This program, which meets once a week, is modeled after the Sheriff's academy and focuses on physical fitness, including running, sit-ups, and push-ups. In addition to the physical aspect, the Explorer Program provides leadership development, guidance, structure, and helps participants build confidence and interpersonal skills.

Upon completion of the program, graduates have the opportunity to join the post and wear uniforms at community events, or they can choose to transition directly into the academy. The only cost associated with the Explorer Program is the uniform, priced at approximately \$100. Applications for the program are open until August 14, 2024.

The meeting was concluded by Van, attendees mingled and exchanged information, as the event ended around 5:30 pm. A small group continued to socialize outside for a while longer.

Other Information

None to report at this time.

Committee Reports

No reports at this time.

Announcements

No announcements at this time.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned around 4:45 pm.

Next Meeting

Thursday, August 15, 2024, @ Wayside Center @ 44219 10th St W, Lancaster, CA 93534, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.