

Sharing the Solutions Webinar 3

Understanding Our Past and Reforming Our Future: Law Enforcement and Homelessness

Transcript

Panel members

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Bonnie Sultan: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining the Center for Court Innovation's third webinar in our series, titled *Sharing the Solutions* to homelessness police court partnerships. This is a series of four webinars. So again, we welcome you back. We'd like to take this moment to thank the United States Department of Justice, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services for their support of this project. We greatly appreciate all the time and dedication you've put into this work. Today we'll be joined by law enforcement and housing policy experts and learn about the relationship between police and people experiencing homelessness.

Sultan: We're incredibly fortunate today to have such a dynamical panel and of course our facilitator. Our team would like to thank our facilitator, Dr. Nikki Smith-Kea for all of her work, not just on this panel this afternoon, but also as an advisory board member for this project. As a participant today, you'll have the chance to ask questions directly to the team during the discussion section of the presentation. If you would like to ask the question and for the panel, be sure to type it in the Q&A box on the bottom of the chat function.

Sultan: In the chat function, you'll see that you can either send a direction right to me or to the panel. Again, you can send it either way and we'll be reading our questions aloud to our speakers and audience. To share a little bit about more housekeeping before we begin, everyone should be automatically muted when they enter the webinar. And we ask that you please remain muted throughout the webinar, so that recording quality is as clear as possible.

Sultan: If you're experiencing any technical issues during our webinar, please submit your questions in the chat box, which you'll find by hovering over the bottom of your screen and clicking on the label

'Chat.' If you're having any other difficulties with the audio or seeing the slides, please let us know that in the chat box. So you can have the best experience this afternoon. If you don't immediately see the chat box, just click the word 'More' in the chat function.

Sultan: After the webinar, we're going to be distributing our slide and the recordings so that you may replay or share with your colleagues. Those are all of our housekeeping notes. We look forward to seeing all of your questions in the Q&A. And with that, I will task on to turn over to our facilitator, Dr. Nikki Smith-Kea to begin a discussion.

Nicola Smith-Kea: Thank you, Bonnie. So let me start by just introducing myself and then I'll ask Sarah and Daniel to introduce themselves. So hi, everyone. Bonnie mentioned my name, Nicola Smith-Kea. Everyone calls me Nikki, so please feel free to do so. I'm currently a criminal justice manager on the policing team at Arnold Ventures, which is our philanthropy dedicated to tackling some of the most pressing problems in the U.S. Our mission is to invest in evidence-based solutions that maximize opportunities and minimize injustice.

Smith-Kea: And we're committed to driving public conversation, crafting policy and inspiring action through research, education, and advocacy. A lot of the work that I've done and Bonnie mentioned it is at the intersection of policing, mental health, substance use disorder, and homelessness. So this is a topic that's near and dear to my heart. And so I'm looking forward to this dialogue with Sarah and Daniel. Sarah?

Sarah Gillespie: Hello everyone. My name is Sarah [Gillespie]. I'm at the Urban Institute. We are a nonprofit research organization. We're based in Washington, D.C., but we have work all across the country. And I'm a research director in our metropolitan housing and communities policy center. And so our policy center focuses on a lot of different things, but my work is really about housing and homelessness and how to end homelessness. And more and more, my work is at the intersection of homelessness with other systems. So criminal justice, child welfare, health and healthcare, really. So that is where my research focuses.

Smith-Kea: Thank you, Sarah. Daniel?

Daniel McDonald: Hey everyone. Dan McDonald. I'm a police officer from the Tampa Police Department and also an independent consultant. My job title officially is homeless liaison, which I always thought sounded like something Henry Kissinger would do in Geneva. But basically what my problem is solving problems, oftentimes lack of housing. We're very successful here in Tampa. And also along with my colleague from the sheriff's office, Stephanie, her and I go around the country, presenting venues, such as CIT International. I have also presented IACP, chief of police conference. And basically we were eight years ago looking for a better way to not arrest away homelessness, which didn't work very well. So we needed new ideas. Thanks Nikki. Back to you.

Smith-Kea: Absolutely. So this is what we decided to call a fireside chat. We're not doing PowerPoints. I think we're all over PowerPoints. So let me start by thanking you all for joining us. This is something I've been doing for webinars that I've been joining. I want to take a few seconds to acknowledge and

recognize this time of trauma and difficulty that we're all experiencing in a world consumed by, affected by, and impacted by the spread of COVID-19.

Smith-Kea: Most of us are trying to, unlearning to, adjust to this new normal. So thank you again for taking the time to be with us and to share in this discussion. If you are here with us today, you have an interest in better understanding law enforcement and homelessness. On any given night, nearly 550,000 people, 550,000 people, parents, kids, veterans are homeless. We know that communities across the United States continue to grapple with the interconnected challenges posed by mental health crisis, substance use disorder, and homelessness. And the alignment of resources to respond to people experiencing a behavioral health crisis, particularly those who are frequent utilizers for the justice health, and human services systems.

Smith-Kea: So as we proceed, bear with me because there are no simple questions, so let's get right to it. Sarah, I'll start with you. Let me ask you to begin by just helping us to understand the state of the field as it relates to unsheltered homelessness. What has it looked like over the last 10 years? What are the major drivers for where we find ourselves today and who is most impacted?

Gillespie: Sure. Thanks Nikki. So this is a big question. And I know folks in the audience today are going to have varying levels of familiarity with the field of ending homelessness and where our efforts have been over the last 10 years. So I'm going to try to give everyone the same level of, kind of, let's set the field, let's set the stage of how things are looking right now. And so when you look at trends and homelessness, there are different types of homelessness that we talk about. Most people who are enduring homelessness are sheltered. So they're in some sort of temporary shelter in their community.

Gillespie: But about a third of all people who are experiencing homelessness or unsheltered. Meaning they are outside in the elements, they're in a car, they're somewhere that's not meant for sleeping and human habitation. And compared with people who are in shelters, people who are living outside just face different risk factors: So they are more likely to experience physical trauma, less likely to be engaged in services, are more likely to have longer durations of homelessness. And what we know about unsheltered homelessness is that it's actually increasing.

Gillespie: So if you look at the last 10 years from 2009 to 2015, the number of people enduring unsheltered homeless was declining, but starting in 2015, that number started going up again. So from 2015 to 2019, it grew 22 percent. And this is highly correlated with geography. So unsheltered homelessness varies widely and scale across the country, but it's definitely more pervasive in urban areas and on the west coast. And there are reasons for that. There are drivers for that. Higher rates of overall homelessness and specifically unsheltered homelessness correlate with a lack of affordable housing.

Gillespie: And that lack of affordable housing comes from also lack of available housing assistance to afford housing. So housing assistance is woefully underfunded, only one in five people who are eligible for federal rental assistance receive it. People can be on waiting list for years. And even when it's available, there can be lots of barriers that make it hard for people to access that assistance. So that's really just telling you, we are seeing an increase in unsheltered homelessness. It is correlated in

geographic areas where housing affordability is an issue. And even when there is assistance available, it can be really hard to access it.

Gillespie: The other things we know is that most people enduring unsheltered homelessness are individuals. There are families who experience unsheltered homelessness, but the trends are really driven by an increase in individuals who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness. We also know that Black and Indigenous people are particularly overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness and in particular, among people enduring unsheltered homelessness. And that is due to a lot of the disparities we see in other systems as well.

Gillespie: And then we're talking today during a global pandemic and in response to the pandemic, we've seen the capacity of emergency shelters and other temporary housing reduce even further. Where communities are trying to adhere to guidelines and in a lot of places they're trying to space folks out and it just tightens the capacity of a lot of places to house people.

Gillespie: And then the last thing I'll just say is that at this time when unsheltered homelessness is increasing, we see even more clearly the link between homelessness in the criminal legal system or the criminal justice system and how deeply intertwined those two systems are. And you can see it both ways. So sometimes people become homeless immediately released from jail or from prison. Even if they have somewhere to go, they face ongoing challenges to carrying on the employment or housing. And it goes the other way, if someone is living on the street, enduring unsheltered homelessness, they're almost 10 times more likely to be arrested and have a jail stay.

Gillespie: So that cycle, we call the homelessness-jail cycle. And some of my research it's just really coming into view, especially during this pandemic time. So I think I'll leave it there. I know that was a lot of background and, and we'll get into some more of the details later on.

Smith-Kea: And that's really important. And I think two points that you brought home is, unsheltered homelessness is increasing, and there is a deep interrelationship between homelessness and the criminal legal system, which you all call it. Daniel, with a rising number of unsheltered homelessness, there has been and continue to be this public outcry, a term that I've heard being used is a tyranny of the house. In the United States of America, we have accepted and acted on this us-versus-them narrative.

Smith-Kea: And in response to that narrative, we've criminalized homelessness. I'll take the liberty of being the moderator to ask a pretty broad question and a question that's on the mind of many know, as we're steeped in arguments and hear a new public out to defund police. So let me ask you these questions. What is the current role for police in responding to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness? And what should be the role of police in responding to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness?

McDonald: So you want to defund the police. Okay. Okay. How long do we have here? Okay. No, no seriously yeah. It's a very good question. I think defunding the police, I don't really like that term because I think it implies that it's a zero-sum game. You can either have funding for the police, or you

can have funding for social services such as, mental health services, behavioral health services, addiction resources. And I think that people looking as a zero-sum game, you can have one or the other, but not both.

McDonald: And I disagree with that. You need all of the systems. Here in Florida, we have the dubious distinction of being 50th out of 50th in per capita mental health spending. So that puts us as the police, as the de facto to response to homelessness, mental health, addictions, unsheltered homelessness. And the police never asked for that role. Now don't get me wrong. I love my job, and I think is working very well here in the sheriff's Office, Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, which we're very closely with.

McDonald: So I kind of found that the police fall into three different camps for how to respond to homelessness. And I developed a name for a, very unscientific, I call it the Daniel McDonald's pyramid of social inertia. At the bottom, you have most communities where they just try to maintain the status quo. In other words, do nothing. Not very effective, but it's someone else's problem. It's a county's problem. It's a city's problem. It's not our problem. It's social services' problem. So we just ignore it and hope it will go away, which it won't. In fact, as Sarah said, it's getting is getting worse. We all know that.

McDonald: The second one is you can, which many more communities try and do is to maintain homelessness. And that is usually through the criminalization of homelessness. And I put people into two different categories. You have the homeless who might commit what is often defined as minor nuisance crimes for basically trying to survive out there on the streets. That could be camping, sleeping in public, urinating, a defecation, et cetera, in public. And then the police and the homeless being traditional adversaries will kind of the us versus them. Well, if you do something that's, we've dubbed illegal, we'll catch you, we'll take you to jail. Or some communities have done, we'll take a jail. It's no longer jail, we renamed it a homeless shelter and we'll put you in there, warehouse you there in the public or outside of the public view.

McDonald: It's not very effective. It's just a cheaper form of incarceration. And if people engaging in life-sustaining activity and that's all that guilty of, that's one thing we need to address the underlying problem, rather than the symptom. For example, one gentleman in our community named Billy. He's the most prolific offender in our community. He's been to the Hillsborough County Jail almost 200 times in his homeless career. And he's never committed a felony. In other words, something that you can receive prison time for. It's trespassing, drinking in public. He spent an aggregate of about 10 years in jail, 30, 60, 90 days at a time.

McDonald: So the jail becomes a very expensive homeless shelter, becomes a very expensive mental health facility as well. So in our community, because we have effective diversion programs, we have good homeless programs. Then we actually have too much jail space. Yes, you heard it right. We have too much jails. Whereas the county I live in, they pass a bond to build more jails. Perhaps they need to look at different methods in other communities.

McDonald: So the third solution at the top of the pyramid, which is the least common, but becoming more popular is actually solving homelessness. Now, what I do and my colleague Stephanie does is very much on the ground level, retail homeless outreach, boots on the ground. Very labor intensive. And we

solve problems that can be anywhere from helping someone get an ID to I've even arranged a marriage, a wedding, get people into housing. If I as a police can solve that problem and get people off the streets, one, I'm solving that call for service of someone being unsheltered and I'm eliminating that call for service down the road, maybe the 10 more, like the Billys of the world that are generating calls. That call after call the very high utilizers of criminal justice system, medical system, et cetera.

McDonald: So if I can solve the problem as a police officer, and it doesn't matter a cop or social services, a homeless services, the end result is the same. Our homeless rate will go down. Going back to defunding the police—how about re-imagining the police? Perhaps we need to get more of this service orientation. How would you think if I told you as a police officer, I take more people out of jail than take people to jail. I haven't made an arrest in eight years. I haven't written a ticket that I don't have a printer. I'd have to call someone else.

McDonald: So when I go to jail to take someone out. So some of us have been reinventing the police for a long time by redefining our metrics of what you would consider a good police officer. If you look at my traditional performance metrics of a cop, arrests, citations, I'm absolutely horrible. You going to think I just eat donuts all day or, or drink coffee. But we had to have a service function that's solving homelessness. So if more communities gone on board with trying to look at homelessness, which homelessness is not the problem, it is a symptom of a problem, which can be lack of housing, et cetera, lack of resources, et cetera.

McDonald: So if we go into problem solving mode as a community, rather than just looking at the symptoms, then I think we'll be a lot better off. So a long wind, I hope, hope that was okay.

Smith-Kea: Absolutely. So what I'm hearing from you is it's time to take enforcement out of law enforcement.

McDonald: Yes.

Smith-Kea: What I'll say to the audience that's out there is, within your own community, what does the response look like? Are you familiar with what that response looks like? And is it the most appropriate response? Now, let me move on to another question. We know there's a need for more holistic response, and you mentioned diversion programs, and we know that there's a growing number of diversion programs out there. There is a need for more holistic response, a more systematic, coordinated, and comprehensive approach. And we know that jurisdictions around the country have varying models of response and promising practices. What do we know about alternative responses? And what do we know about alternative to arrest? Daniel, I'll start with you. And then Sarah, I'd love for you to join in as well. And tell us about some of the evidence that's out there.

McDonald: Yeah. Nikki, actually, I credit you with the idea that really was pretty profound of taking the enforcement out of law enforcement and get more towards the service orientation. Now you need a balance. We have an agency of about a thousand officers. So there's two of us that do homeless outreach and there's plenty work to go around so we need more. But if there was no officers making

arrests for, if you need housing and go and rob a bank to pay for rent, well, that's bank robbery. As a felony, you go to prison for that.

McDonald: So you need people doing enforcement, but if you were in a community where you've got the couple, the organ— like National Homelessness Law Center, or the Southern Legal Council—if you're getting sued by them, for example, then you've got a really bad, in my opinion, response to homelessness. You need to have a more holistic approach. So you need to balance the model that we use here and myself and my colleagues is, I'm basically, all I do is homeless outreach. We also do behavioral health, CIT, which is crisis intervention, et cetera. We do that. So I've got a saying, unless you confess to the great train robbery at Lahan heist, you can tell me, permit anything in confidence, and it stays between us and I'll help you solve that problem.

McDonald: We've got a very relationship with the public defender. Marie just texted me before this, she's going to want. So we have very good relationships with the courts. We have very good relationships with the jails and the behavioral health facilities, myself and my colleague Stephanie, we're in the board of directors for a behavioral health facility. So it's really a community effort. And I think the community really has to reflect, are you serious about ending homelessness or are you just going to try and hide the problem pretend it doesn't exist? And hopefully you don't get sued.

Smith-Kea: So we know collaboration is the key and we should foster collaboration across sectors. We have a full range of partners. What is also important is data. Data is important to understand, to inform policy and practice and to determine what is most appropriate response. Sarah, I know that you are in many times deep in the research and the evidence. So I'd love for you to tell us about what some of the evidence is telling us.

Gillespie: Sure. Yeah. So I'm on a team here at Urban that recently did a deep dive into the evidence around alternatives to arrest for people and during unsheltered homelessness. And we really found three categories of approaches or interventions. And the first is by far the strongest, most evidence-based approach to ending homelessness and reducing and offering these alternatives to arrests, and that's connections to housing. I think it's not going to blow anyone's mind. Daniel just talked about this, but that's where the research evidence is.

Gillespie: And so when we talk about connections to housing, and there is a specific approach to connections to housing, and it's called housing first, and I'm sure many on this webinar are familiar with that, but it means a connection to housing without any preconditions or requirements. And this is a shift in the field of homelessness assistance in the last 10 years. Prior to that housing assistance often came with a lot of strings attached—so whether it was sobriety or participation in services, there were barriers that made it really hard for folks to make that leap into housing.

Gillespie: And so housing first flips it on its head and says, "You can't work on all of these other challenges until you have a place to live, a roof over your head." So housing first can be used in different models. Most commonly, we talk about permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing as two of the big models that you see across the country. Permanent supportive housing, just like it sounds, it's permanent. That's usually for people with a disability, whether it's physical, behavioral, mental health

disability, they often need that permanent assistance to be able to leave the homelessness-jail cycle. And permanent supportive housing has a lot of rigorous evaluation evidence behind it. Many randomized control trials that show around 40 percent reduction in days in jail, for people who are in permanent supportive housing.

Gillespie: So high rates of housing stability and pretty significant rates of reduction in time in jail. Rapid rehousing is a more short-term subsidy. Communities use it to get assistance to as many new people experiencing homelessness as possible, but it's also got some pretty good research evidence behind it in terms of helping people leave homelessness and not return to homelessness. And then the other important thing to know about these approaches, a lot of them use what we call jail in-reach.

Gillespie: So what Daniel was talking about going to jail, meeting with folks, making that plan for release, making that housing plan before they're released to the street in the middle of the night with no plan. So jail in-reach is another important piece of that evidence. But like, we all know the ability to connect someone to housing is dependent on having resources in your community. And in most places, there's just not enough. And so we also looked at some other strategies like public space management—so, that's making it easier for people who have to live on the street to do so without interacting with the police frequently.

Gillespie: So for example, in Santa Barbara, California, it looks like a program that helped people sleep safely in their cars and provide a safe parking lot where that could happen instead of having them continually come in contact with police over parking violations. And then another category that we see being replicated quickly across the country: alternative crisis response models. So instead of having police be the only option to respond to someone in crisis on the street, being able to dispatch social workers or behavioral health clinicians, or to have them go along with a police officer.

Gillespie: And so this can look very different. In some places they do provide special training for police officers to do that work. Sometimes they do it together and sometimes 911 will divert those calls entirely to more of a social provider organization. The thing to know is that there's a lot for us to learn about these models. I think that they're replicating by the week right now, based on the news. And we just don't have a lot of research evidence. I know a lot of communities are collecting some good data and seeing some good outcomes and research needs to catch up so that we know more about the best way to implement these programs. They all look a little different from place to place and what kind of outcomes they're getting.

Smith-Kea: Great. Thank you. So we know evidence supports alternative to arrest rather than punitive policing approaches, and the crisis response models are developing and scaling across the country, despite the little data available. So we know that from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, they look a little differently. And again, I always post questions to the audience. Are you aware of the alternatives to arrest or the alternative responses within your own community? And what is the data saying about those responses in the community?

Smith-Kea: And for those who are on this webinar, who are policymakers, who are practitioners, I'll encourage you to really look into that and to partner with research or entities. Partner with a university,

partner with a professor to help to understand what the state of the field is in your community. And as I mentioned, the word community as well, I often say that people who are most impacted should be a part of the solution. So the question to both panelists are, is there a role for community? And what does that look like? And Daniel, I'll start with you, and then Sarah.

McDonald: You definitely need the community in particularly community buy-in. I've been doing this for eight years. I've actually had public records requests for my budget. Well, I can remember it around number zero. I have no budget other than my salary, equipment. So I'm sort of like Google for the homeless. That's what I call myself. So we're an access point. We have access to coordinate an entry. A few years ago, we went to our local CoC, Continuum of Care, which is the lead agency in each community. "Hi, I'm from the police. Can you give us access to your homeless management information system?" And we now have access, or we have legal agreements, basically we can't use for on justice purposes, but I can go into the same system that homeless, that the service providers have and we work together. Because ultimately because I'm out there engaging people on the streets and then I'll help them particularly get IDs, kind of the boots-on-the-ground type of work.

McDonald: And then, and then do a warm handoff to the service providers. So that's very critical because you need—basically I'm the intake into the homeless system. Many times we can divert people. That's very important. Diverting the amount of the homeless system and try and keep them out of the system totally. And that's much more effective and cheaper in the long run too. So it really does take a community. One of the challenges with the homeless services and the criminal justice system is siloization or bucketing. You have these buckets of services such as, well, I can only help veterans. I can only help victims of domestic violence. I can only help this subpopulation. I can only help the chronically homeless. I can only help those with substance abuse.

McDonald: And that's a big problem and we all need to work together in one system and be able to integrate people into the very service and navigate them. What I do is system navigation. For those who have suffered through one of my presentations, then, one of my slides is, I compare a flow chart of the chronic home, homelessness from HUD, with a flow chart of a nuclear reactor. And the nuclear reactor is by far simpler. So we live in a time when we can make a nuclear reactor appear simpler than exiting homelessness or even defining homelessness, a chronic homelessness.

McDonald: So that's really why we need people to work together, because we are working at well, I'm the police and we are going to arrest everyone in your outreach and you're going to try and get to them before we arrest them. And you are housing and where is everyone? Well, we're all in jail and we can't go to jail. So, we've got to work together. We don't work together, it's just a big waste of time and resources.

Smith-Kea: Thanks, Daniel. Sarah, I'd love to get your response on the role of the community. And for both of you also to share with me, who are some of those key players that should be collaborating? What should that look like?

Gillespie: Yeah. And when you say community, two things come to mind for me—one would be other stakeholders who have a role to play in ending homelessness, and then folks who are experiencing

homelessness themselves. And so when I think about it from the viewpoint of research and what we need to learn to improve, how we respond. And so for example, there's a lot we need to know from people who are experiencing homelessness themselves and how they experience efforts to create alternative responses. So how do their experiences in a community where there is an alternative crisis response program, how do their experiences with those people differ from the status quo or the way that the community responded before that alternative program? How do they perceive the effects on their wellbeing and their quality of life?

Gillespie: There's a lot that we can learn from administrative data, but there's a lot that we can't learn that we just need to talk to the people who are experiencing this. And so things like quality of life and wellbeing and humane treatment. A lot of that, we just have to talk. And then, how do their perceptions and their experiences vary? So people who are experiencing homelessness are not all the same and we think that their experiences and their reactions to different response models or approaches would be different. And so that's the other important reason to really talk to people.

Gillespie: So, there's that part of the community. And then there's the part of the community that are the other stakeholders who have a role to play. So the people who are interested in reducing ED visits and the people who are interested in reducing detox and sobering center visits, all of those are folks that need to have a role to play in terms of, how will we identify people? And how will we do warm handoff? Just one example, I think I mentioned earlier before that I worked on a project in Colorado, and we found that one of the key points where something wasn't working is when people are released from the jail and it happens to be in the middle of the night and in the middle of the winter and you can't get on a bus because the buses aren't running and you can't get into a shelter at that time of night. And so can we change how that release happens and when it happens and strengthen that handoff to homeless assistance providers. So the other stakeholders have a huge role to play as well.

Smith-Kea: Thank you so much, Sarah. Daniel, did you have anything else to add on that question?

McDonald: No, not really. I mean, Sarah hit the nail on the head. It's all about working together and having a community approach to problem solving rather than individual or individual agency approach.

Smith-Kea: Perfect. So community needs to be involved in determining the solution. And thank you, Sarah, so much for pointing out that community doesn't just mean the persons who are in positions of power, but also the individuals with lived experience. Are we talking to them to have an understanding of what they're experiencing and what the solutions should look like? So as we come to the end, because we want to have questions from the audience, I'll take the liberty as the facilitator again, to ask pretty broad questions.

Smith-Kea: How do we do things differently and change this current, and I'll use the word, destructive and dehumanizing trajectory? How do we change? And are there some solutions to this problem? And what do those look like? Sarah, I'll start with you and then Daniel.

Gillespie: Yeah. And I did already hit on some of that evidence around interventions, like permit supportive housing and rapid housing. And I can provide some links to folks who want to go deeper into

that evidence. But I also want to say, Nikki's question was, how do we do things differently? And we've been paying attention during the COVID-19 pandemic, and communities are doing things differently as they've been forced to because of the pandemic. Jail populations around the country have dropped drastically because of CDC recommendations and deadlines for spacing and concern for health.

Gillespie: In some places we've seen police contacts and arrests with people who are experiencing homelessness specifically drop drastically. There's been the CDC guidance around not dispersing encampments because it's interrupts their connections to service providers, it spreads their community out. And so I think we are seeing that things can go differently. And the question is, will we return to the status quo after COVID-19? And if not, will we take this opportunity to say we've seen what happens and can we take that to the next level and make that part of how we respond?

Gillespie: And the other thing that we're watching closely, we know that a lot of communities opened up new motel space for people who are experiencing homelessness. That motel space is going to come to an end, and will people return to the street? What will communities do? We also know a lot of the communities who have opted for tickets in lieu of arrests. A lot of those folks are going to have court dates coming up—will they have the support they need to appear for that? Will we see a lot of the failure to appear that this community struggles with that results in the warrant for arrest?

Gillespie: So I think we're coming up on a time period where we really need to think about where do we go from here and how do we connect people to the housing and services that will get us where we need to go and not return to the huge levels we've seen of overlap between people who experience homelessness and people who spend time in jail.

Smith-Kea: Thank you, Sarah. Daniel, how would you to that question? How do we do things differently? What needs to happen?

McDonald: Well, we have, the pandemic is giving us, the opportunity, I suppose, to rethink homelessness on broad level and rethink how we are addressing the problem. You have to have buy-in from the top down. And homelessness is not an issue that someone is going to run for office on. The only elected official I know that has won on that platform is from my hometown in Manchester, England. Great Manchester, [Andy Burnham]. That was one of his platforms. Other than that, usually affordable housing will get some traction, but that's really kind of a factor, but not really a homeless issue.

McDonald: So it is a good opportunity to rethink how we do things. I'm a systems guy. I like trying to break down rebuilt systems, it's a very complex system. Like Sarah says, no one never asked a homeless like, what do you need? How can we help you? And that's always a question I ask, "What do you need to get out of homelessness?" So we need the people with shared experiences and we need buy-in from elected officials. We have communities that say, oh, well, I'm in favor of more housing for the homeless, as long as it's not in my backyard. And [inaudible] as we all know, so people in theory support it, but they're not willing to spend with their pocket buck.

McDonald: The argument I approach is that the economic cost of homelessness is very high. I've got a whole presentation devoted to this. So you're actually saving money by ending homelessness. Like Sarah thought about housing first, it saves a ton of money. It's very good public policy and the rewards rate. So I'm hoping that we, as a society and nation take the opportunity to rethink how we are going to address homelessness. Rethinking, defunding the police, rethinking the police that is starting to correspond models. We're looking at that, the sheriff's office nearby has one as well.

McDonald: So I think change is going, but whether we'll go back to the status quo, once this is over, I don't know; that's going to be a tough one.

Smith-Kea: Thank you both. Any final thought from you both while we prepare to just go to some Q&A? Some questions and answers. Any final thoughts, Daniel?

McDonald: If you have an idea or you can make a difference, people can make a difference. Just go out there start the conversation and be a part of change of good change and positive change. Like my favorite quote, hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things.

Smith-Kea: Great. Sarah, any final thoughts before we go to Q&A?

Gillespie: No, just that I know everyone on this call is doing the work in their own community. And so my plug is to collect the data and share how things are going. Because I think so many of these great questions I'm seeing in the Q&A should be answered by the other participants on this call. Where I sit here in my office and look at the research and try to share that, but really excited to learn from what all of you on this call are doing as well.

Smith-Kea: Great. Thank you, Sarah. So a couple questions have come in and I'll just send them to individual panelists. And for some of the questions I'll ask both of you to respond to them. So Sarah, there's a question from Nate Schwiethale from Wichita, Kansas, that 22 percent increase in unsheltered homelessness is also what we're seeing across the nation as well. Are there any recent studies on why this is? I remember hearing about affordable housing, well before 2015. So I hesitate to think that's the issue. In Wichita, we have seen a 39 percent increase in meth cases since 2015, and we are seeing people camp even more though there is shelter beds available. So, is there an explanation as to what is going on for this increase in unsheltered homelessness?

Gillespie: Yeah, I would just caveat out my response, but I think every community is going to have probably a slightly different answer. Nationally we know, the data show us that it is very strongly correlated with affordable housing. So even though that's been the answer, it's definitely still the answer. Although I don't doubt that community to community, there are probably other driving forces as well.

Gillespie: I think the question around seeing more people camp is also probably, you would want to look to what's going on that would make it more easier or necessary for someone to sleep outside than to come into a shelter—so, what are the barriers to going into that shelter? Are they allowed to come in with their partners? Are they allowed to be there during the day? Are they required to participate in

some sort of service while they're staying there? I think that's commonly what we see when people would prefer to live outside than go into a shelter with those types of barriers, but it's going to vary so much from community to community.

Smith-Kea: Thank you, Sarah. There was a question from a panelist on whether or not they would be able to see your research, Sarah. And Daniel, whether or not you can also share your handout on the economics of ending homelessness. So I'll just make a broad statement to the audience that we will put together resources. So if you're interested in any resources, just put it in the chat function and we will make sure that that goes out to everyone.

Resource Links:

- Research & Results: Nine U.S. Localities Offer Human-Centered Approaches to Unsheltered Homelessness
- While National Debate Over Homelessness Grows, Cities are Finding Ways to Disrupt the Cycle of Crisis
- The Law Enforcement Response to Homelessness: Identifying High-Priority Needs to Improve Law Enforcement Strategies for Addressing Homelessness
- Elevating Alternatives to Arrest in Response to Unsheltered Homelessness

Smith-Kea: Daniel, a question that came in. What kind of data points do you track in your work, and how has your police department come to define success as it relates to the work around homelessness? That's the first part of the question. And I'll read that again. What kind of data points do you track in your work and how has your police department come to define success as it relates to the work around homelessness? And additionally, since you are not taking enforcement action, why do we still need a police officer doing the work we are doing?

McDonald: Yeah, very good questions. In terms of data is very difficult to measure. There's a couple of different ways of doing homeless outreach. The most common is called contact-driven outreach. I'll go out there, which is usually mandated by grants. It's attempted to be a performance measure. I'll go out and talk to as many homeless people as I can. I won't really have much of an impact. I won't really solve anything. But, "Hey, I talked to lots of people and I can't talk to you anymore because I've got to go and talk to someone else." And so on and so on.

McDonald: The other point of view is impactful outreach and which is basically, I'm dealing with less people, but I work the problem from start to finish. The longest I've taken to house any one person is four and a half years, which is, I just did not give up. One gentleman who I recently helped who was born in rural Georgia. He was 61 years old. Well, still is, I just talked to him yesterday. He's 61 years old. He's born in rural Georgia. He never had a birth certificate, so he couldn't get an ID. So he legally doesn't exist. So how would you do all that?

McDonald: Well, it took me three years and nine months to solve that, which is basically gathering his whole life in elementary school records, marriage records, child's birth certificates. Assembling his whole life in documents. So I spent almost four years doing that so he could get an ID and get into housing, et

cetera, versus, well, sorry, harsh, I can't spend more than five minutes because I got to go and spend five minutes with someone else.

McDonald: So it's basically solving the problem, and if enough people do that and it gets momentum, then if everyone has a net positive change in society for each day to go of the work, then it has a cumulative effect. How do you measure that? It's very difficult because the traditional contact-driven outreach is very ineffective and this can be challenging. Dealing with my bosses sometimes is dealing with a whole different definition of police work. And then I just look at our homeless rate, and our homeless rate in Hillsborough County, which Tampa is in, is going down.

McDonald: So we are one of two communities inside of 2017 by *Forbes* magazine, Houston being the other one, of major cities where homelessness is going down. Homelessness is going down, we have jails, they're staying empty. So, that's a good barometer. Now I can't take the credit for all of that, but for some of that anyway. The second part of the question is, in terms of not taking enforcement action, can someone else do my job? Yeah, absolutely. But at the end of the day, I outlasted every single social worker in homeless outreach in Hillsborough County. I've been around for eight years and doing homeless outreach, the homeless can call me, I'll get up to about 1800 phone calls in a busy month so they can call me and I'll still be there. There won't be someone else there a month or a year for from now.

McDonald: So yeah, we don't have a monopoly on it. In fact, the more, the better, but we are able to work the problem from start to finish, even if it takes years, and many agencies can't do that. So when the whole reason the police or why I got into this in the first place was no one else was doing anything about it. So it's often a very reaction to at least initially that was no one else was working on the problem. That has since changed. And we have a lot more resources. We've got about \$40 million going into housing for the next couple years.

McDonald: So there's definitely room for others and out there, but yeah, I don't have a monopoly on it, but as long as there's a need for me, I'll be here.

Smith-Kea: Great. Thank you. So, a really interesting question that came in, and something that we are very much interested in at Arnold's Ventures is, how would a 911 diversion, of a homelessness outreach happen? What kinds of questions are dispatchers asking, and how are we differentiating situations that require social workers only from situations that require social worker and the police for safety? So that's a question around both 911 diversion, and also a core responder type program. How does that happen in practicality? And I'll ask both of you to respond and then I'll jump in as well with a bit of a response to that as well. Daniel, I'll start with you and then Sarah.

McDonald: Okay, well, there's a couple of different issues here. One, you're calling 911, no one ever calls 911 because they're having a good day. It's because they're in crisis, and that's what we're here for. So you have crisis response mode and you have problem-solving mode. It's very difficult to do both. You can have people doing separate functions, such as correspond to models or folks calling to get immediate assistance. And that can be as simple as well calls for us. It was about 50 degrees last night here in Florida. So that's called calls for here. Whereas a cold weather shelter tonight to, "I'm in crisis,

I'm having a mental health breakdown." So you have crisis response mode and you have problem solving mode.

McDonald: I'm more of, I don't usually respond to calls for service. I do sometimes, but most of the time, all of my work is very appointment driven. I'm just working the problem from start to finish. So there's definitely room for both, but they're separate but equal. If that makes sense.

Smith-Kea: Thank you. Sarah, any responses to that 911 question?

Gillespie: I would say your question basically outlines the research we need to do. I think there's a lot of what we would say there're promising practices, communities who say they're having success, who can talk about what they're doing. But like I said, there's no research evidence on what would work best. Like which criteria for diverting calls is most appropriate and leads to the best outcomes. Those are the questions that we really need to answer. One of the programs that I'm sure many on this call know about, Cahoots out of Eugene, Oregon, is one of the longest-running alternative crisis response models. They do use 911 and divert calls from 911 to the Cahoots team. So that's one place to look, but again, we need more research evidence on this.

Smith-Kea: Thank you, Sarah. And I'll just add as well and again, feel free. And at the end you will see our email addresses to reach out to us. This is an area that Arnold Ventures is really interested in at the moment. And we literally just had meetings regarding this; many of you on the phone would know: 18,000 agencies. The number of 911 centers are also really large. There're over 6,000 911 centers doing their own thing. And so it's a black box of information that we want to understand.

Smith-Kea: Houston Police Department has a really robust program that they started about four years ago with funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, from the Justice and Mental Health Collaboration grant. And what they did, they actually embedded social workers in their 911 center. And so the call takers are getting the calls. They're sending them to dispatch. They have come up with the protocols for questions to ask. And they're diverting calls to the social workers within the 911 center. I believe in one year there were over 40,000 calls diverted to those individuals in the 911 center.

Smith-Kea: So there are systems that are being put in place. I know Boston was also thinking of trying that, LAPD was also thinking of trying that. So please do feel free to reach out to us. I would more than be willing to connect folks to the Houston folks if you would like to learn more about what that looks like. In the chat as well, we got just some follow up to that 911 question and thank you for this comment that, "I think we can certainly be co-responders to most of those calls, but I'm not sure how to identify calls that don't need a police at all. Especially in some areas with high concentration of homelessness, accompanied by violent crime."

Smith-Kea: So again, this is not something that's going to happen overnight. And there are certainly ways to work collaboratively to put together protocols that are necessary for a 911 diversion program. Another comment that came in the correspondent question was, how can 911 identify calls that don't need police, especially in some areas with high concentration of homelessness. So that's a—sorry, I repeat from what was said earlier. The misconception I think, and Daniel and Sarah to jump in, is that

not everyone experiencing homelessness is a violent criminal. And we need to move away from that definition of human beings who are in unfortunate situations because of the lack of resources for them to live like the rest of us.

Smith-Kea: So we need to move away from that thinking that once we define someone as being homeless or experiencing homelessness, that they're a violent criminal. In the great United States, it takes a day and two for me to become homeless. And we need to be and put ourselves in the shoes of those individuals. And start, I would say, be humanizing. Do not assume that everyone is a violent criminal. Sarah or Daniel, any other comments regarding that?

McDonald: No, I do not have any budget for anything, but fortunately compassion is free. Have some compassion for your fellow human being because we're in the people business here. So I think in many respects, we need to get the enforcement of law enforcement when you don't need that if you want to solve a problem rather than solve the symptom. And that's what I do.

Smith-Kea: Right. Another question that came in: All criminal justice processes eventually end up in the court unless diverted, yet rarely are courts and judges included in the community decision and response to homelessness. How do we change that? And I follow up to that question, How do we get prosecutors interested in this work? So I'll ask the questions again, and then I'd love for both of you to jump on this. All criminal justice processes eventually end up in court unless diverted, yet rarely are courts and judges included in the community discussions and response to homelessness. How do we change this and how do we get prosecutors interested in this work?

McDonald: Well, here in Hillsborough County, we've got several boutique courts. So we do have very good buy-in from the judges, prosecutors, public defenders. One of our greatest allies is Marie, who I think is listening, who we work very closely with. We talk very often, we have a boutique for homeless. We're officially called the Municipal Ordinance Docket, which is a Municipal Ordinance Violation. [inaudible] is called the homeless court. And that is another point to intercept folks before they get too far down line the criminal justice system. And that works very well.

McDonald: Basically we get a chance to work with them and keep them out of the jail and which is not going to happen unless they're really a prolific offender here in our judicial circuit takes an administrative order to do all this. So we've had some very forward-thinking prosecutors and public defenders and judges. So along we get the discussion going on any one of those levels. Take the prosecutors, you can dangle, "Hey, how would you like a smaller caseload?" Maybe we can resolve this better. And they are prosecuting every single ordinance violation or misdemeanor there. It saves a lot of money.

McDonald: I've yet to meet a court, or public defender, or prosecutor that has too much money or too big of a budget, or I've yet to run into anyone in public service that has too much money and resources. So if you can find a way to save money and make the system more efficient, ultimately comes back to one's solving the problem. If we can do that, if the courthouse, then it's win-win for everyone.

Gillespie: Yeah. I was going to add that, I talk to a lot of people. I spend a lot of my time talking to people who are working in homelessness. And so organizations like the Continuum of Care, who is the group of partners within a community where the money from HUD for ending homelessness flows down. And then they disperse that in the community and the conversations among Continuum of Care partners is always, how do we get the criminal justice system at our meetings. How do we get them involved? How do we link our data and look at the overlap between the people we're all serving?

Gillespie: So I think that various systems all want the same thing. And it's just figuring out to do that, how to come together and invite each other to your meetings and see your shared goals. See your shared populations. Obviously from where I sit as a researcher, data has a lot to do with it. The second you can identify the list of people who you're both trying to problem-solve and serve, that goes a long way towards figure out those shared solutions.

Gillespie: And then the other thing I would say, the programs that we see have the best results, whether it's a supportive housing program or a rapid re-housing program, those service providers are in court with their clients all the time. So they're reminding their clients, "We have court on this day. We're going to meet here. We're going to walk together to this place, or I'm going to walk you to the public defender's office. We're going to figure it all out together." They show up and may say to the judge, "This person is in a housing program. If they're released, they have a house to go to. I will be there with them working on this service plan." That can go a long way as well.

Gillespie: So when we look at why certain programs are successful in reducing arrests and reducing time in jail, often there's a huge piece that the service providers are doing to help navigate the criminal legal system for their clients.

Smith-Kea: So thank you both, being mindful of the time. Thank you so much for your time, Sarah and Daniel, and thanking the audience for joining us as well. We heard a lot of amazing nuggets and things that we need to pay attention to and try and implementing our own communities. Collaboration is key. We need to start talking with each other. I remember last year we brought together a few folks at Arnold Ventures, law enforcement practitioners, homelessness practitioners, and at the end of the conversation, it was ah, aha! We are all on the same page. We literally just do not talk to each other enough.

Smith-Kea: And so I encourage folks who are on this webinar to really go back and push yourselves and to talk to each other and learn more. We are here. Bonnie will come back to us shortly and you'll have our contact information, and we look forward to hearing from you. So thank you all, and looking forward to everything.

Sultan: Thank you so much. So I guess everyone in the audience can now see how excited we were and why we were so excited to have such an incredible panel of experts. Nikki, we just wanted to stop and thank you. That is not easy to facilitate with questions coming in from all over the country. Thank you so much for responding to everyone's responses. I see Daniel giving the silent clap. So absolutely the same. Sarah, Daniel, thank you so much for all of your presentation. Again, engaging with our audience, not easy to do.

Sultan: And so I wanted to be sure that I shared everyone's contact information to keep the discussion going. Just as Sarah and Nikki and Daniel said, continue sharing, continue developing this community. And so let me share everyone's contact information. I just wanted to thank everyone for taking their time. We know everyone's very busy. We certainly know a lot of our law enforcement audience out there are dealing with a lot right now. We really thank you for taking time out of your day to do this for all of our housing folks out there. Thank you for beginning our conversation with our law enforcement individuals. And with that, we will give everyone a close. Thank you. And thank you for being part of our day. Take care everyone.