



CALIFORNIA TRASH HOT SPOTS HOMELESS ENCAMPMENT CLEAN-UP PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

Like many states across the nation, California is experiencing a housing crisis, leaving many individuals homeless across the state. Homelessness is not confined to California's cities and streets, and many individuals have found refuge among its rivers and streams – unfortunately, introducing significant amounts of trash and bacteria into California's waterways. The State Water Board has an important opportunity to address this source of trash by enacting a "Trash Hot Spot" program throughout the state, which includes tools, guidance, permit language, and policies that reduce the generation and presence of trash in waterways located outside of city limits. The State Water Board can further encourage local municipalities to partner with different agencies and nonprofit organizations by providing tools and resources to the Governor's Homeless Task Force to reduce the presence of trash along California's waterways.

California's rivers, streams, and beaches have a tremendous problem with trash. In 2015, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) adopted its Trash Policy to eradicate the presence of trash in California's rivers, streams, and beaches caused by the runoff of trash from California's cities and streets by 2030. After the adoption of this policy, the State Water Board is now exploring programs to prevent the introduction of trash outside of California's cities – trash generated by 'trash hot spots,' defined as high use beaches, recreational areas, and homeless encampments. Controlling this flow of trash is critical to protect the health of California's beaches, rivers, and oceans.

Trash generated by unhoused individuals camping along California's rivers and tributaries has a large impact on the health of California's coast and waterways. Different strategies to prevent and eradicate the trash caused by encampments range from encampment evictions to engaging the homeless individuals in keeping a 'clean camp' and cleaning the spaces around them. Strategies to control the amount of trash generated by those unhoused in California are further complicated by a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals decision (*Martin v. Boise*, 2018) that ruled a city cannot criminalize, or in some cases evict, a homeless individual for sleeping on public property when there is no available shelter. Encampments located outside of a city's jurisdiction also cause a host of challenges regarding liability, access to the encampments in hard-to-reach spaces, and limited resources to engage and clean-up areas along California's rivers and streams.

This document outlines strategies employed by five programs in California facilitated by local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) primarily motivated to protect the health of their local communities and waterways.¹

Programs At A Glance

	<i>Year established</i>	<i>Trash removed</i>	<i>Homeless engaged</i>	<i>Volunteers</i>	<i>Geographic Range</i>
Clean River Alliance/ Russian Riverkeeper	2015	108,803 lbs (2018)	112 (280 serviced)	2,200	70 miles
Clean Camp Coalition/ Inland Empire Waterkeeper	2018	26,020 lbs	63	<i>Metric not tracked (N/A)</i>	2 miles
San Diego River Park Foundation: Trash-Free River Program	2000	287,616 (2018)	<i>Metric not tracked (N/A)</i>	7,597 volunteer hours (2018)	21 miles
American River Parkway Debris Removal and Homeless Workforce Training Program	Mid-2019	24,260 lbs	8	<i>Metric not tracked</i>	23 miles
Downtown Streets Team	2005	200,208 gallons (2018)	1,476	<i>Metric not tracked (N/A)</i>	11 communities; 4 with creek programs

¹ For the purposes of this document, the financial needs of each program vary, but this information is treated as proprietary information. Please contact the individual programs for more information regarding the financial needs of each program.

Russian River: Clean River Alliance & Russian Riverkeeper

Location & Entities Involved

Located in the unincorporated area of the lower Russian River watershed, the Clean River Alliance (CRA) – a program fiscally sponsored by the Russian Riverkeeper – serves a number of Sonoma County beaches and tributary creeks throughout the Santa Rosa plain. The program partners with the following organizations, which provide volunteer and financial support: County of Sonoma, the City of Santa Rosa Creek Stewardship Program, Russian Riverkeeper, Russian River Wild Steelhead Society, Sonoma County Chapter of Surfrider Foundation, Stewards of the Coast, Vets Connect, local wineries, local schools, and local shelters.

Program Approach

After spending years volunteering to pick up trash at Sonoma County beaches, CRA founder, Chris Brokate realized that the devastating amount of trash that entered the Russian River following heavy rains came from encampments along the riverside and its tributaries. Brokate founded the CRA with the goal of preventing trash from entering the river at its source and educating those living alongside the river and surrounding local communities the value of keeping a ‘clean camp.’ By engaging homeless individuals to cleanup their own camps and volunteer alongside the CRA, the amount of trash entering the Russian River has dramatically declined, leading to beach clean-ups at the mouth of the Russian River to be canceled – due to the lack of trash.

CRA’s main method of collecting trash is to enlist the help of individuals living in homeless encampments by distributing trash bags to individuals directly with the request that they fill the bags with waste from their camps and from any other areas they wish to collect trash. Trash bags are also distributed by service providers. CRA then collects the bags a week later, on a predetermined date (e.g., every Thursday at the same location). CRA also organizes town clean-ups, beach clean-ups, adopt a highway clean-ups, and canoe clean-ups. CRA educates those living in encampments the principles of living in a ‘clean camp’ (e.g., pack it in, pack it out) and promotes central living locations to encourage the use of portable restrooms and communal kitchens to reduce the impact of numerous camps strewn throughout the watershed.

The program follows these key principles:

- (1) Communicate and partner with local homeless service providers and outreach teams prior to any clean-up activity to build a relationship and enroll campers’ support;
- (2) Provide Clean Camp Education materials at homeless shelters, food pantries,

- homeless service centers, or directly to campers;
- (3) Distribute bags to campers one week prior to trash collections;
 - (4) Work in teams of two for safety and legal reasons when approaching new camps. Teams of both a male and female work well for engagement, while having too many people can overwhelm the campers;
 - (5) Establish safe camps with trash pick-up, portable restroom, communal kitchen, and visits from local health agencies to reduce the impact of numerous, disparate camps;
 - (6) Establish trust by being consistent and showing up when you say you will.

CRA's approach to this trash reduction program is to work with members of the unhoused population, rather than evicting individuals from their camps. Despite accusations by local community members that CRA is enabling the homeless by allowing individuals to continue to live in encampments, the CRA is committed to engaging the unhoused population in an effort to reduce the generation of trash from existing encampments. The reasons for this programmatic approach include:

- (1) When individuals are admitted into shelters, they are not allowed to bring all of their possessions with them, meaning these items must be abandoned.
- (2) When people are evicted, their possessions and waste remain in the camp. Without engaging the unhoused population, no one knows whether that individual is gone permanently and whether the items are abandoned.
- (3) If people are evicted from one camp, they will often find somewhere else to go or return later. Evictions often lead to less engagement with nonprofit and local agencies in the future.
- (4) Unhoused individuals want to live in a clean space and have proven to be willing and engaged in the clean-up effort.

Results and Program Expansion

In 2017, CRA organized over 200 clean-up events, with over 1,000 volunteers. The program removed over 170,000 pounds of trash from creeks, the Russian River, and ocean beaches in a single year.

Following the success of the program, students from Ukiah High School approached CRA in 2019 to begin a program in the City of Ukiah as a senior project. Over the summer of 2019, CRA engaged with the local City Council to gain political support for the program and to work with the local service provider to partner with the program. While located along the upper Russian River, the new program will be limited to the city limits of Ukiah (i.e., within a municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) permit) and will partner with the City of Ukiah to financially support the project.

The program elements are anticipated to be shared among the following entities:

- (1) The City will pay for the cost of trash bags;
- (2) CRA will work with service providers to ensure the providers are the primary points of contact with the unhoused community, including the distribution of trash bags. Until the partnership with local service providers is solidified, CRA will engage the unhoused community to educate individuals about the program and distribute trash bags; and
- (3) A local waste hauler will pick up the bags from “staging areas” within the city limits, where homeless individuals can drop off filled trash bags.

In creating this program, the staging locations for trash drop-offs must be selected carefully. The program will not likely be successful if homeless individuals have to transport trash over a long distance (e.g., over a quarter to half of a mile). Staging areas may also pose problems for homeless individuals if the site is close to an encampment, given that the staged bags will inform the public that a camp is nearby. Ultimately, the locations need to be relatively close in proximity to encampments, but off the main road.

CRA is hopeful that the structure of this new program will prove to be beneficial for the city and promote the ongoing existence of the program. Generally, partnering with a municipality has its benefits due to the greater number of tools and resources available to support the program, such as trash collection services that already exist within city limits.

Additionally, service providers already exist within the community and are in contact with the homeless population within the city limits. These providers can inform homeless individuals of the program and assist individuals who participate in the ‘clean camp’ program to qualify for transitional housing. In addition to improving homeless services within the city, the program is anticipated to reduce the burden on law enforcement to manage and evict encampments, and reduce the overall amount of trash generated by encampments.

Further, less trash will be abandoned because the program will decrease the number of encampment evictions, which have a large negative impact because as people are forced to move, they often leave their trash behind, and move to another area that is not serviced by local volunteers or professionals. Further still, the city will be aware of abandoned sites due to the increased engagement with the homeless community who can alert CRA volunteers or local service providers of abandoned camps.

Santa Ana River: Clean Camp Coalition (Inland Empire Waterkeeper and Rivers & Lands Conservancy)

Location & Entities Involved

The Clean Camp Coalition – a coalition comprised of local environmental NGO’s (Inland Empire Waterkeeper, Water Resources and Policy Initiatives, and the Rivers and Lands Conservancy), local service agencies (Path of Life Ministries and City of Riverside’s Homelessness Services program), and local water agencies (Riverside County Flood Control) – aims to improve local water quality and improve the health of individuals experiencing homelessness by providing trash services along the Santa Ana River and partnering with service providers to increase access to local shelters and other assistance programs. Currently, the Clean Camp Coalition works within a two-mile-long project site of the upper Santa Ana River, between Market Street Bridge and Van Buren Bridge in Riverside. The Coalition serves approximately 20 camps with the intention to expand to an eight-mile-long stretch of the Santa Ana River that includes 187 camps.

Program Approach

Inspired by the success of the Clean River Alliance in the Russian River watershed, the Clean Camp Coalition was created to apply the principles of the Clean River Alliance along the Santa Ana River to prevent trash generated by homeless encampments from entering the river. The Coalition works directly with homeless individuals to supply individuals with trash bags, and once a week, provide trash pick-up at a pre-arranged location. The Coalition also connects homeless individuals with service providers from Path of Life Ministries, which operates an emergency shelter in the City of Riverside. Successful engagement with an unhoused individual generally requires 300 points of contact to reach that individual and establish trust in order for that individual to participate in local services. By engaging with homeless individuals through the clean camp program, the Coalition seeks to increase contact with those experiencing homelessness and increase the likelihood these individuals will participate in local programs and services.

The Clean Camp Coalition centers its program on the following components:

- (1) Locating & Mapping Existing Camps;
- (2) Engagement & Building Trust;
- (3) Trash Collection;
- (4) Water Quality Testing.

Locating & Mapping Existing Camps: The Coalition began its program by mapping existing encampments in person and on foot, using a smartphone map application to drop “pins” and track individual encampments. This resulted in a more accurate count than either the

Police Department, which uses aerial mapping, or the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which has a three hour time limit on its homeless population count. The Coalition found that both of these existing methods resulted in a large underestimate of the unhoused population living along the river. The Coalition believes that having an accurate count is important because it informs the city and county on the amount of resources to allocate to the issue.

Engagement & Building Trust: While mapping the encampments, the Coalition also builds relationships with individuals living in the camps. The Coalition explains to unhoused individuals along the river that the Coalition's purpose is to improve water quality throughout the Santa Ana River, rather than facilitate evictions, which increases the likelihood these individuals will engage with the Coalition and local service providers. Coalition staff also hand out backpacks that have information about the Coalition and local services printed and trash bags and a small care kit inside. Once the initial contact is made, and the first round of trash bags are used, members of the Coalition then routinely hand out trash bags to that site.

Trash Collection: After trust is built, the Coalition supplies engaged individuals with trash bags, requesting that the program participants collect trash within their own camp and surrounding area, and drop off the filled trash bags at a pre-arranged location. In addition to the trash bags that the Coalition supplies, the Coalition team will also collect any other trash or larger debris – such as furniture – that is left at the predetermined site. The Coalition initially collected the filled trash bags and disposed of the debris using a truck owned by the Rivers and Lands Conservancy. The Coalition then performed a Rapid Trash Assessment, which provided valuable information on the trash being collected (e.g., in the first few weeks the majority of the trash collected was fresh food trash, but after a month, there was much older trash being brought which signified a willingness to participate on the part of the individuals in the homeless encampments). The Coalition, a team of four, transitioned to collecting the trash on a weekly basis and depositing the trash into a rented dumpster that was then collected by a local waste collection service for a nominal fee. Now, the Coalition has contracted with a third-party organization to perform the weekly trash collection.

Water Quality Testing: The final program component is water quality testing to determine the source of contamination in the Santa Ana River. The Coalition has partnered with Cal State Fullerton Professor Gedalanga, who specializes in environmental DNA technology, to test water quality. By determining the sources of contamination, the Coalition intends to use this information to guide a tailored response to address and prevent continued contamination of the Santa Ana River. Specifically, the Coalition seeks to quantify how much harmful bacteria in the water comes from human contamination in order to understand the scale of the problem. This information will additionally help identify the microbial community from which the bacteria stems, and in turn, qualify the bacterial contamination as a point-source, rather than non-point source of water quality pollution. Ultimately, once collected and analyzed, this data will be used to advise decision-makers to craft tailored approaches to address bacterial pollution in the Santa Ana River.

Program Challenges

Key challenges faced by the Clean Camp Coalition in implementing this work is the physical location of the camps within the riparian area, as these camps are easily concealed and trash is hard to remove due to the difficulty in reaching debris and damaging habitat. Jurisdictions along the river are also varied and complicated, making it a challenge to access or identify the responsible owner of the area.

Within an eight-mile-long stretch of the Santa Ana River, there are over fourteen agencies including the Army Corps of Engineers, the Riverside Flood Control and Water Conservation District, the San Bernardino Flood Control District, the Riverside Police Department, the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, the California Fish and Wildlife Services, the Federal Fish and Wildlife Services, among others.

Further political challenges limit the services rendered by the Clean Camp Coalition, such as supplying portable restrooms or other sanitation efforts. Local communities in the area are very cautious about providing services to the homeless individuals, especially services seen as enabling homeless individuals to remain living near the river.

Results & Program Expansion

In one year – from October 2018 to October 2019 – the Clean Camp Coalition collected 26,020 pounds of trash.

Inland Empire Waterkeeper and the Rivers & Lands Conservancy are facilitating discussions regarding potential program implementation with Conservation Districts, other environmental groups, as well as City representatives in order to effectively and systemically improve waterways beyond this two-mile project site and improve waterways throughout the Santa Ana River Watershed.

The San Diego River Park Foundation

Location & Entities in Involved

Founded in 2001, The San Diego River Park Foundation collects data and removes trash along the lower, more developed 21 miles of the San Diego River. The San Diego River Park Foundation does not have a formal homeless engagement or encampment debris removal program, although the organization has worked with local resource providers including the McAlister Institute, Veterans Village of San Diego, PATH San Diego, the San Diego Homeless Outreach Team, San Diego Regional Task Force on the Homeless, and the City of San Diego's Environmental Services Department to share information regarding the presence of active and inactive encampments along the riverway.

Program Approach

Throughout the year, The San Diego River Park Foundation coordinates volunteers to collect data that informs its "State of the San Diego River" report and informs clean-up efforts organized by The San Diego River Park Foundation and other land managers. This data includes trash, invasive nonnative plants and water quality. Trash observed and collected along the river are organized into six categories, defined primarily by source: active encampments, inactive encampments, litter, stormwater debris and dumping, as well as a category for "special removal needed." This data is made available to the public on their online portal: <http://immappler.com/sandiegorivertrash/>, with sensitive data password-protected.

The San Diego River Park Foundation's Trash-Free River Program is volunteer-powered, consisting of:

River Assessment Field Team: Trained volunteers survey the riverbed to document trash by location, quantity, trash description, and access using The San Diego River Park Foundation's custom smartphone app, called Mapper. Small teams of 3 to 5 volunteers led by staff cover various segments at least twice a week, with each segment being updated every 2 to 6 weeks. Volunteer teams are deployed to survey areas that haven't been recently surveyed, following large storms, or following/preceding clean-ups or outreach that may have affected the condition. The survey teams update data by locating new trash sites, updating information on existing sites, and removing sites that have been successfully cleaned or are otherwise no longer present.

Targeted clean-up events: These efforts are informed by data collection. Events vary in size and scope based on the survey data, but may be performed by smaller, more experienced teams of 10 to 25 volunteers, or by larger community clean-ups with 75 to 150 volunteers.

Point-in-time surveys: Twice each year, volunteer teams are led by trained captains to collect data to conduct a 'River Blitz,' surveying every segment of the riverbed over a 10 to 14 day period. These comprehensive surveys are conducted in April and October, with the spring survey focused on invasive plants and the fall survey focused on trash.

In the context of encampments, the primary role of The San Diego River Park Foundation is to collect data of the locations of inactive/active encampments and the locations of trash hot spots – meaning those areas that are consistently cleaned up, but continue to generate trash long after trash was originally removed. The organization uses this data to advocate for responsible parties to commit appropriate resources to address the site condition, and to advocate for policymakers to address the conditions that introduce trash into the River. In recent years, the amount of trash associated with encampments has ranged from 59 to 97%.

Because The San Diego River Park Foundation does not have a formal homeless engagement or encampment debris removal program, volunteers do not remove trash from an active encampment. The San Diego River Park Foundation uses a nonconfrontational approach when encountering unhoused individuals along the river and only removes trash from an active encampment if someone is present and requests help from the volunteer team. All volunteers are trained to identify both 'active' and 'inactive' encampments to prevent removing items that are not abandoned. Volunteers are trained to look for staged items, cookware, protected bedding, and other indicators that someone intends to return to the area.

Data collected by The San Diego River Park Foundation is shared with the local homeless outreach team and homeless task force, with sensitive encampment data shared via organization-password to the data portal. Beyond connecting active encampments with local service providers, the data collected by The San Diego River Park Foundation regarding the location and state of inactive encampments informs the organization and its partners of the resources needed to clean up an inactive encampment – which may range from a small team of The San Diego River Park Foundation to hazardous waste removal organized by the city or county.

Given the diverse ownership and patchwork management challenges for riverbed parcels, varying access to the riverbed portion of the parcels, variation in jurisdiction, and the fact that city service providers have historically lacked sufficient manpower to walk riparian areas in search of encampments, the data collected by The San Diego River Park Foundation is invaluable to share with local resource providers to increase contact with those living in encampments along the river.

This way, each organization plays to their strength – The San Diego River Park Foundation frequently walks the river area and can share data regarding the presence of encampments but is not dedicated to nor staffed to conduct homeless outreach. Meanwhile, resource providers can save time by acting on the information shared by The San Diego River Park

Foundation to conduct outreach and increase contact with unhoused individuals living along the river. Importantly, The San Diego River Park Foundation's data can improve the success of service providers in making contact with unhoused individuals along the river.

Challenges

Addressing trash hot spots poses an ongoing challenge for any river system, given that the clean-up efforts are ongoing and not done after a single clean-up event. The San Diego River Park Foundation has dedicated a special focus since 2017 to building partnerships and gaining the buy-in needed to share its data with the various land managers and resource providers in a format that is usable and results in improved management of the San Diego River. Successfully reducing and eventually eliminating the trash generated by encampments and trash hot spots requires ongoing time, management, and resources to continue serving that area.

However, the fact that the riverbed is divided into many dozens of parcels with variable land ownership and management strategies, and that these parcels are usually not physically denoted in the field in any way (such as property boundary markers, fences, or other), presents a coordination challenge for different organizations and agencies working along the river. It is often not clear to many owners and land managers where their property lines are and what their management obligations are. The San Diego River Park Foundation has taken on the task of compiling this information, but it is not easily shared or kept current.

The San Diego River faces additional hydrologic challenges given its location within an urban environment and the amount of pavement surrounding the river, which results in water levels rising quickly when it rains. This rapid rise in the river level means that encampments are quickly flooded during storm events and often entirely under water, resulting in the contents of the encampments to wash into the river and out to the ocean.

Results & Possible Program Expansion

In 2018, the annual survey results demonstrated that the total trash along the San Diego River associated with homeless encampments had decreased to 58.6%. This is a significant reduction, given results of the annual trash survey revealed that from 2015 to 2017, the percentage of the total trash in the riverbed associated with homeless encampments had increased from 74% to 97.2%, a spike that coincided with an increase in encampment evictions and enforcement in other parts of the City of San Diego following the Hepatitis A outbreak of 2017.

The San Diego River Park Foundation is committed to achieving a trash free river and welcomes the opportunity to lend its information and data collection services to enter into non-traditional partnerships and concerted coordination between environmental stakeholders, homeless service providers, law enforcement and emergency responders,

land owners/managers and others to streamline efforts throughout the city that may be served by the data, and in turn, serve the river.

Sacramento County: American River Parkway Debris Removal and Homeless Workforce Training Program

Location & Entities Involved

The American River Parkway Debris Removal and Homeless Workforce Training Program took place along a 23 mile-stretch of the American River, from Discovery Park in Sacramento to the Nimbus Fish Hatchery, as a contractual agreement between Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks and PRIDE Industries, which partnered with Sacramento County Housing Service Providers, to increase employment opportunities for unhoused individuals along the American River Parkway.

Program Approach

On January 29, 2019, the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors voted to authorize the Director of Regional Parks to execute a contract with PRIDE Industries to begin the American River Parkway Debris Removal Homeless Workforce Training Program with an award of \$387,200 for a six month pilot program ending in December of 2019.

This program intended to give homeless individuals jobs and training while also addressing the accumulation of trash along the American River Parkway. Ten homeless individuals were to be selected to participate in the program, and for four days a week during a period of ten weeks, these individuals would meet at a predetermined location, transported to the American River Parkway, and paid a minimum wage to perform cleanup work along the river. Each afternoon, program participants would engage in a job training program to receive various certifications in construction and other employment opportunities. At the conclusion of ten weeks, the program participations were to be introduced to employers and receive job interview training, help creating a resume, and help obtaining job-appropriate clothing. In addition to job placement assistance, the program participants would receive help to find permanent housing. The pilot program was designed to last 40 weeks, with four groups of trainees, for a total of 40 participants. After 40 weeks, the program will be reassessed to determine if changes are needed to make it more effective.

Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks contracted with PRIDE Industries, a

nonprofit organization experienced in supporting people with barriers to employment, to conduct this pilot program. PRIDE Industries developed a framework to manage the work group and to provide debris removal services for the American River Parkway using a workforce of homeless individuals from the encampments at the parkway and surrounding areas. The program was designed to provide paid positions, job training and coaching, certification programs for technical skills, employment development opportunities, and job placement of homeless individuals willing to participate in the program.

PRIDE Industries provided case managers to work with the program participants, develop work schedules for clean-up services, and refer individuals to employment development and/or training programs. PRIDE Industries also provided the vehicles needed to haul and dispose of collected debris, and provided dumpsters for the collected trash and debris. In this model, PRIDE Industries would identify and mark items that require heavy equipment to haul away and coordinate with Sacramento County Regional Parks for pickup. The program supplied containers to collect sharp items, such as needles, but was not required to handle biowaste.

Results & Program Expansion

The pilot program, unfortunately, did not reach its target number of participants due to challenges in enrollment. Due to background check requirements and drug screenings required to participate in the program, interested participants were unable to join the program and the pilot program had two cohorts with four participants in each cohort, resulting in 8 participants total. The first cohort worked from June 4, 2019 to August 2, 2019 and the second worked from October 8, 2019 to December 12, 2019, resulting in 24,260 total pounds of trash collected from the American River Parkway.

Downtown Streets Team

Location & Entities Involved

The Downtown Streets Team is a nonprofit organization that operates in the South Bay, North Bay, East Bay, San Francisco, Santa Cruz, Sacramento, and Modesto. Downtown Streets Team operates in ten counties, soon to be eleven, throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, Monterey Bay Area, and California's Central Valley. Downtown Streets Team programs that specifically target debris removal in creeks and waterways have taken place in San Jose, Santa Cruz, and Sacramento, with a forthcoming program in Salinas. Downtown Streets Team generally works within highly blighted areas within municipal boundaries.

Program Approach

Downtown Streets Team is not a water quality or watershed-focused organization, but instead centers on eradicating homelessness by engaging unhoused individuals in community beautification projects (such as litter removal and creek restoration), providing these individuals with services, and ultimately transitioning Team Members into permanent housing and employment within one year of involvement in the program.

Team Structure: Team meetings are held every week in each community with meetings lasting 45 minutes to an hour. Interested participants are required to attend a number of meetings before formally joining a team in order to learn what the program entails and to demonstrate a commitment to joining the team. Established teams operate five days a week, with some shifts limited to two to three days each week.

Downtown Streets Team does not require any additional barriers to becoming a Team Member. Once a potential volunteer has attended the requisite number of meetings to become a Team Member, that volunteer may participate in the program. Downtown Streets Team recognizes that everyone has their individual story and path to homelessness, and that some are not necessarily ready for work in a traditional setting. Team assignments may be tailored to individuals with specific needs, and volunteers who drop out of the program are welcome to try again in the future.

When Team Members are on shift, they gain individual agency by representing themselves, the organization, and all individuals experiencing homelessness – essentially, perception is power and Downtown Streets Team offers the opportunity for individuals to work hard within the community and show that they can in fact contribute to the community around them.

Peer-to-Peer Model: The Downtown Streets Team model is generally effective both in a downtown municipal setting or along a creek-bed, so long as case management services are blended with a peer-led community to support Team Members, increase trust, and develop confidence within the community. Based on the experience of Downtown Streets Team, volunteer Team Members are more successful in engaging their peers to join the program than professional service providers.

Other unhoused individuals see Team Members be successful – whether by feeling as though they have a purpose and positive contribution to make to the surrounding community, or by transitioning to employment and housing – and Team Members are often recruited by the peer-to-peer network. Team Members often report that during the hours they are working – the hours they wear their Downtown Streets Team shirt, also considered a “yellow shield” – they feel seen in a positive way, and seen as hard-working members of the community.

By having members from the unhoused community interact in teams, a level of accountability is created within the team itself. Established Downtown Streets Team Members work hard to represent themselves well, and have similar expectations when a new individual someone joins their team. Further, those living in encampments know exactly who is picking up their trash and tend to adopt more respectful and proactive practices to manage their own litter. (**Tip:** use clear bags to prevent others from rummaging through trash before it is collected).

Project Selection: The individual programs and projects are determined by the city's size, features, and focus. Some cities do not have a large impact of homelessness within their waterways, whereas others may highlight their rivers and creeks as a priority issue. The funding structure is also different for every community with some programs financed by cities' general funds, grants from water districts, or grants from the California Environmental Protection Agency.

Healthy Creeks, Healthy Communities: Downtown Streets Team has partnered with four municipalities to focus on encampment engagement within creeks and waterways. The most successful project to-date took place in the City of San Jose. Throughout the duration of the project (termed "Clean Creeks, Healthy Communities"), the City of San Jose partnered with Downtown Streets Team to engage the homeless population and remove trash from the creek by supplying incentives, training, and a path out of homelessness for participating individuals.

The Downtown Streets Team operated during the first two years of a four-year term project by providing weekly creek cleanups and outreach to the homeless population. Downtown Streets Team transitioned out to the program during the final two years of the project, with going maintenance of the creek and prevention of further trash pollution managed by the community and City staff.

During this project, Team Members collected trash at homeless encampments five times a week, and over 200 33-gallon bags of trash were removed each day. Additionally, over 40 encampment residents joined Downtown Streets Team due to the peer-to-peer contact between Team Members and those residing in the encampments. The Clean Creeks, Healthy Communities initiative successfully housed over 200 households from the encampment and removed a total of 8.5 million gallons of debris from Coyote Creek in San Jose. Downtown Streets Team volunteers were responsible for 78% of the debris removed.

Challenges

Political will is dynamic and challenges the existence of homeless engagement projects, such as the Downtown Streets Team. After two years working within encampment along Coyote Creek in San Jose, a series of violence and fires at the encampment increased concern within the local community, resulting in the decision made by the City of San Jose to evict the

encampment and prevent re-encampment of the area.

Results & Program Expansion

Between 2016-2017, nearly 4,000 tons of debris was removed from urban waterways that lead into the San Francisco Bay, accounting for 74% of all debris removed in urban waterways located within the City of San Jose. The impact of Downtown Streets Team, however, surpasses the debris collected and removed from urban waterways. In 2015, Downtown Streets team successfully housed 454 individuals with 166 Team Members starting and retaining jobs for over 3 months between all cities it serviced. Downtown Streets Team is expanding into paid employment programs, which have launched in Marin, San Francisco, and San Jose to help transition individuals into an employment program with heightened responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Trash generated by individuals living along rivers and tributaries has a large impact on aquatic ecosystems and the health of California's coast and waterways. River corridors are also inherently unstable environments, due to the presence of vector-borne illnesses and potential flooding as channelized creeks or strong rainfall can cause rivers to rapidly rise resulting in encampments washing into waterways. The individuals living in these corridors, however, often are not readily willing to accept services. Despite this, these individuals cannot be ignored.

A number of programs, organizations, and municipalities have attempted different strategies to prevent and eradicate the trash that enters our rivers and streams from homeless encampments. While there are varying degrees and definitions of success – from unhoused individuals maintaining a clean camp to transitioning into permanent housing – it is clear that a program is more likely to both decrease the presence of trash in California's rivers and increase the likelihood an individual will connect with services if partnerships are formed.

It is vital that every organization and agency involved plays to their strengths – for example, data collected from organizations focused on water quality should be shared with local resource providers who can then make contact with these individuals and/or engage County or City services to pick up collected trash from the area.

Regardless of the program approach, addressing the challenge of homelessness and the associated trash and debris along California's waterways requires coordination, empathy, and trust among the unhoused population in order for a program to thrive.