

CORE Creeks Team Executive Summary

Overview - The Coordinated Outreach, Referral, Engagement (CORE) Creeks Team is an innovative program that helps the homeless by not only providing them with needed services, but by engaging them and giving them a sense of purpose through trash removal from the creeks sides where they live, thus reducing their pollutant Loading.

Challenge – As part of the Clean Water Act’s National Pollutant Elimination (NPDES) Discharge Program, and the resulting San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board’s Municipal Regional Stormwater Permit (MRP) requirements and increasing goals for cleaner stormwater coupled with limited funding sources, the Contra Costa County Public Works Department (PWD) Watershed Program wanted to find an alternative way to reduce trash in creeks, while helping the homeless and positively engaging them to reduce this pollutant. After all, homeless encampments along these waterways are a significant source in these waterways of trash, which is directly discharged from the encampments into the creeks. Abatement of encampments requires substantial public works resources of labor and time that must be taken away from other public works necessities, such as flood control channel and road maintenance and does not offer supportive options to those displaced homeless individuals.

Solution – The PWD-Watershed Program reached out to partner with the County’s Health Services Department (HSD) and their Coordinated Outreach, Referral, Engagement (CORE) Teams that provide services to homeless individuals. The CORE Teams serve as an entry point into the County’s coordinated system for unsheltered individuals and work to locate, engage, stabilize, and house chronically homeless individuals and families by facilitating the connection to shelter and services.

Innovation - The County already had CORE Teams in non-waterways to seek homeless individuals and offer services and collect metrics. Why not enhance their capacity in giving homeless individuals purpose where they’re living by creating a CORE Creeks Team with trash bag distribution and documentation of trash collection? Thus, the CORE Creeks Team was established. The CORE Creeks Team provides sturdy, thick, 40-gallon plastic bags and leads the individuals within an encampment on frequent clean ups of their encampment and adjacent areas. The risk of the encampment being abated provides an incentive for the

homeless individuals to use County programs offered and leave the waterways. Although the CORE Creeks Team cannot offer monetary incentives for cleaning up and maintaining a cleaner encampment, the CORE Creeks Team engages and encourages the unsheltered individuals to clean up after themselves because a cleaner area draw tends to reduce the level of negative attention and complaints they would otherwise receive from the surrounding community. Encouragement of the homeless to participate in the encampment cleanup efforts by CORE Creeks Team members, many of whom were previously homeless themselves, helps to engender greater self-esteem in the individuals, and motivation to take advantage of the variety of social services offered by the County. The County, in turn, is able to achieve trash reduction credits in the MRP for the frequent encampment clean ups led by CORE Creeks Team.

Results – Over the past year, more than 1,800 trash bags were distributed and 100,000 lbs. (approximately 50 tons) of trash has been collected by the CORE Creeks Team and homeless individuals. The trash has been responsibly disposed of in landfills and not in waterways. This amount translates to a 10 – 15% trash reduction and will be reported in the next MRP Annual Report. Because the CORE Creeks Team has a smaller geographical area to cover than the other CORE Teams, the Creeks Team can visit each known encampment area on average twice a week and have been able to serve more than 500 unique individuals, 30% of who were placed in warming centers, shelters, or substance use disorder treatment.

Replicability – The County has a relatively new system in place for providing homeless services through HSD. The PWD-Watershed Program wanted to find a unique way to fulfill one of the MRP requirements to reduce trash levels in the creeks. So when the two Departments shared their overlapping agendas, the CORE Creeks Team was born. Cities within the County and the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) District have heard of the success of the County's CORE Team. A number of Cities are now looking to fund their own CORE Teams, and the PWD has highlighted the success of the trash collection aspect of its CORE Creeks Team, while encouraging other agencies to see if this program may satisfy their MRP requirements as well.

Program Contact – John Steere, PWD-Watershed Program, Watershed Planner, 255 Glacier Drive, Martinez, CA 94553, (925) 313-2281, john.steere@pw.cccounty.us