

THE POLICE AND THE HOMELESS

Creating a Partnership
Between Law Enforcement and
Social Service Agencies
in the Development of
Effective Policies and Programs

Edited by

MARTIN L. FORST

Baltimore's Project Connect

By Gordon Scott Bonham

In
The Police and the Homeless
M. L. Forst (Ed)

Pages 197-215

Charles C Thomas Publishers, Ltd.
Springfield, IL:

1997

Homelessness in America is reaching epidemic proportions and it will not disappear in the near future. Because of shrinking budgets at the federal, state, and local levels of government, traditional social service agencies have failed to adequately address this pressing social problem. And as in many instances when social service agencies cannot respond, law enforcement agencies are asked to step in and solve social problems. This law enforcement approach to the problem of homelessness is not effective. At best, it moves homeless persons from part of town to another. Current policies to criminalize homelessness will prove frustrating and futile for all parties concerned.

The city of Baltimore demonstrated a homeless outreach project from 1992 through 1994. Homeless outreach Team (HOT) workers convinced two-thirds of the homeless people they encountered to accept case management services and place in permanent housing one-fourth of those accepting case management. Analysis shows they may have convinced

almost all to accept case management if they could have had up to five outreach encounters with each homeless person. They may also have placed three-fourths in permanent housing if enough interactions with them. Successful placement in housing was primarily a function of program characteristics and not due to measurable characteristics of homeless people themselves. The HOT project involved city and transit police as part of a coordinating team, as a source of referrals to the HOT team, and as a source of information for evaluating the program.