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Survey Seeks To House Homeless

[By Juan Carlos Rodriguez](#)*Journal Staff Writer*

Close to 100 volunteers, police officers and others on Monday fanned out across Albuquerque in the predawn hours to reach out to some of the city's most vulnerable residents.

Beginning at about 4 a.m., teams searched underpasses, parks and other areas where some people sleep, to collect information that might end up getting the homeless a permanent shelter.

The effort was part of the "Albuquerque Heading Home" initiative announced earlier this year by Mayor Richard Berry, in which 75 housing units will be made available to homeless people. This week's outreach is coordinated by the nonprofit housing advocacy group Common Ground.

The teams, made up of volunteers including Berry and City Councilor Rey Garduño, were charged with finding homeless residents and asking them to respond to survey questions about their physical and mental health, their history of drug or alcohol abuse and financial status.

Brenna Greenfield, a 26-year-old clinical psychology doctoral candidate at the University of New Mexico, said she volunteered because she wanted to see what Albuquerque is doing for the homeless and because she might be interested in studying homelessness issues more in depth in the future.

"It seems like the process is really good," Greenfield said. "I like the idea."

Albuquerque's homeless population is estimated at 3,000 to 4,000 people.

Berry said interviewees described health problems ranging from tuberculosis to hepatitis C. Some had been homeless for decades, including one man who said he had been living on the streets for 53 years. "We certainly saw the human suffering side of the equation this morning. And that's who Heading Home is really geared towards, is the 20 percent of the homeless population who are chronically homeless," Berry said. "We want to help alleviate some of that suffering as well as do something positive for the cost side of the equation."

Berry said chronically homeless people can cost taxpayers money through emergency room visits or police and fire calls.

"Down and out" calls cost taxpayers at least \$644,000 last year, or about \$178 for each rescue response, the city said.

Albuquerque teamed up with Common Ground to participate in the 100,000 Homes campaign. Nearly 70 U.S. cities are taking part in the effort to identify the most vulnerable homeless people in a community and try to get them permanent shelter.

Becky Kanis, director of the 100,000 Homes campaign, said it's rare to see a mayor get so personally invested in the effort. "It makes a huge difference," Kanis said.

The 75 housing units are expected to cost about \$515,000, \$138,000 of which will come from the U.S. Veterans Administration. The rest is available in the city's budget for Family and Community Services, Berry said.

The homeless people enrolled in the program will be given vouchers to pay for rent at an apartment, or a case manager will otherwise arrange for housing. Participants could stay in the home as long as they comply with their lease agreement and don't cause problems.

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