

## Episode 4: A Housing-First Approach to Ending Homelessness

*Welcome to Dwellings, a podcast from the City of San José Housing Department, where we talk with experts about ending homelessness, building affordable housing and exploring housing policies at the city and state level. I'm your host Alli Rico.*

*On today's episode, I'm joined by Joel John Roberts, CEO of PATH, and Ray Bramson, Chief Operating Officer for Destination: Home to learn more about the housing first approach to ending homelessness.*

**Joel John Roberts (JJR):** Hi, I'm Joel John Roberts. I'm the CEO of [PATH](#), People Assisting the Homeless, and PATH Ventures. We are a statewide agency that provides homeless services and builds permanent supportive housing.

**Ray Bramson (RB):** Hi, I'm Ray Bramson, I'm the Chief Operating Officer at [Destination: Home](#). Destination: Home is a public-private partnership that was formed over a decade ago here in Santa Clara County to help prevent and end homelessness for all of our residents.

**Alli Rico (AR):** So my first question to both of you is, um, what is the housing first approach to fighting homelessness?

**RB:** You know, housing first has been around for a while and, and to be honest, it's a pretty simple concept when you get right down to it. There's not a lot, there's not a lot to, it really it's the idea that, you know, we need to get out of the way of getting people into their homes. And we, for a long time, um, we've put barriers in the way and saying, somebody's not housing ready. Somebody needs all these other things before we can actually put them into the place that they're going to call home for the rest of their lives. And we, we know that's not true. We know if we get someone into a home and get them the necessary services and supports that they need once they're in that home, their entire lives are going to be improved dramatically. Uh, not just from their health outcomes, but from community determinants as well. So every, everything gets better when you get somebody into a home and you want to do that as quickly as possible, and you don't want to have to make them jump, um, jump through hoops or climb ladders to get there. You just get them there as quickly as you possibly can. And then you start addressing all the other underlying issues that, uh, and challenges that they may be facing in their lives. The home is the first stop, not the last.

**AR:** What, what were we doing as counties, as cities, as states - what were we doing to address homelessness?

**JJR:** I can share kind of how, um, homeless agencies on the ground, what they were doing, because really the response to homelessness back in the eighties and nineties was basically what agencies were doing. It came out of the faith community. Um, out of community groups and people were just wanting to do something to help people who are homeless, and PATH is a good example. It came out of the faith communities, um, the business

communities, um, back in the eighties and they said, we've got to help these people who are becoming homeless. And really it was, you know, we, we call it episodic homelessness, and it was people who were losing their jobs, you know, burning bridges at home and getting kicked out of their homes, dealing with addictions. And they would come to agencies like PATH, or other agencies. And we would have this concept of, like, a hand up not a hand out, that we would provide them a bed. But you had to your earn your keep in that bed. You had to follow rules. Um, you had to be clean and sober, and if you broke the rules, three strikes and you're out, you break the rules three times and you're just out of it. You don't get, you don't get a free bed. You don't get food anymore. You're just out. So for those people who followed the rules, it really worked well. I mean, we can get people into, uh, getting jobs and saving money and if they follow the rules, and they had chores and they did what we told them to do, it really worked. The problem is a lot of these people didn't follow the rules and, you know, people who are struggling with mental health issues or significant addictions, they couldn't follow the rules. And so they're ending up back on the streets or, or they would, um, go from shelter to shelter, to shelter, and go in there for a few weeks, break the rules, go to the next, get kicked out, go to the next shelter and just kind of, it was a cycle that where they'd basically ended up on the streets. And, uh, really what happened is, all of a sudden, we figured it out that there's a whole group of people on the streets who've been through the system that, um, that could never make it through the system, unless there was a new approach. And that's what housing, why housing first came about.

**AR:** Cause PATH is doing it from like an actual - not boots on the ground, that's the wrong word, phrase. But like building the, the actual housing. And then [Ray] had mentioned at the beginning, you're more - Destination: Home is more convening and gathering people. Correct?

**RB:** Yeah. You know, I mean, I think what Joel said is pretty spot on. I do think it doesn't hurt to have, you know, the, the 92nd version of how we got to this place of modern homelessness, um, to give a little bit of context, but I mean. What led to it was a whole series of factors, that included the dismantling of over a million SROs across the country. Basically, taking housing that poor people could afford and completely eliminating it, calling it substandard, and then destroying it. Coupled with a really, really bad recession in the seventies that had major, major economic impacts and consequences for a whole group, whole population of Americans. And then lastly deinstitutionalization, which started, um, which started in the fifties and sixties, but really came to a head in the seventies and the defunding of a lot of our mental health hospitals, um, up into the eighties. And what we were, what we ended up with was this huge surge in the street homelessness, uh, epidemic that we hadn't seen in, in some time in our country, since the thirties and forties, really in the time of the depression. And the response from our federal government was to one, create a whole bunch of giant shelters across the country, mass shelter. And two, to create this thing that you'll hear about a lot called the Continuum of Care. And it was this pipeline of, we're going to put somebody into emergency shelter. And once they're through their time in emergency shelter, if they're lucky, they're going to graduate to transitional housing and they're going to stay in transitional housing for a period of time. And eventually graduate to some form of permanent housing. Thing was, there's so many moving parts in that system, and it's so expensive to manage that it would frequently break down. People

would fall out of the system while they're in this long process of getting to permanent housing. And at the other end of the spectrum, there wasn't the permanent housing to deliver them to. So people would be trapped in this dead-end system, which never took them anywhere. So I think it took millions and millions of dollars and decades and decades of work. But we realized if we just get rid of this entire system, very ineffective, horrible outcomes. You look at emergency shelter by itself, nationally, when it's not connected to a system of care, you're talking about 20% or less of the people that are in emergency shelter, actually graduating to permanent housing. That's the most people are ending up back on the streets. So we needed a system that has performance and keeps people housed for the long, long term. And that's what housing first delivered for us.

**JJR:** You know, what I think is interesting, um, is that today, like this year and even last year, um, a lot of the, uh, political folks are kind of going back to the old days of addressing homelessness. Because there's so many people on the streets, they're kind of going back to the big shelters and, and, uh, um, you know, let's get, let's get them off the streets quickly and tent cities and things, and. It's interesting how we sometimes forget about our own history of where we've been.

**RB:** Yeah, no, I just feel sometimes I feel like we're just repeating, repeating mistakes of the past because of what we see in front of us. People - everyone's trying to come up with a solution and, you know, I think Joel has more experience with this than I do, but you know, I've got two decades in now and I'll tell you, there are no silver bullets and there are no easy answers and shortcuts. But when we have data and the data that's bearing out, showing that if you put somebody into permanent supportive housing, um, 9 out of 10 times, those people are going to remain housed, one, two, three years later, regardless of how vulnerable or how sick they might be, they still are staying housed. They're getting the support they need, that's what we have to drive us. We have to, we have to push more and more towards these permanent solutions that we know are working and figuring out where people can become a part of the community and then be able to stay somewhere for the rest of their lives if they want to.

**AR:** Especially now, like, Joel, you mentioned we're, we're starting to see more people talk about congregate shelters as opposed to actual housing. And if anything, I feel like this year has shown, like we cannot keep going with the congregate housing because it, it, if we have another pandemic, it's just going to make things worse. I mean, our, our homeless residents are already in dangerous situations to begin with. And then when we know we have an airborne virus like this, like doesn't make things better. So it is very interesting to, to know that we're as, as, uh, a field, is starting to look backwards instead of forwards, and –

**JJR:** I do, I do want to say though that, um, uh, you know, it's documented that people who are homeless are dying on the streets and it does take a long time to build housing. So there, there is that, you know, even though it may look backwards, there are reasons why we want to help people get off the streets, even if it's into congregate shelter, to protect them, to feed down, to make sure that they're healthy. The problem is that if you redirect limited resources towards that alone, then we're in big trouble. We're going back.

**AR:** Yeah.

**RB:** Yeah. I completely agree. I completely agree. I, I get, uh, I get the importance of getting people off the streets right now. It's just, unfortunately, we're in this scarcity mindset and if you start to see permanent housing dollars going towards other sources, we know that only, there's only a limited amount of money to go around and we've got to use every cent we have to, um, to make sure that we're, we're building real homes for people, um, building as many real homes as we can for people while trying to address the immediate situation too.

**JJR:** This is a political issue. And the reason why I say that is because if the neighborhood, if neighbors or businesses call up their elected officials and say, "we're angry because there's homelessness on our streets today, and if you don't get them off today, you failed. I'm gonna vote you out." And so what they're doing is they're thinking, okay, what are the quick solutions? Because if I'm an elected official, and I know it's housing first, and it's going to, we're going to build a 100-unit apartment building in my neighborhood, but it's going to take two or three years after I've been termed out, uh, then I might, I might just choose to take that money and build a shelter or not even build a shelter, even, you know, have an open lot and put, set up tents. So we we've got to figure out, we've got to convince the public that the long-term solution is really better than the short term, because it could get people off the streets today. But if they're like Ray said, they're stuck in that system for the rest of their lives, because we don't have housing, then all of a sudden, homelessness is going to just increase anyway. So we've got to figure out that political solution and convince people that the long-term housing part of, of addressing homelessness is more important than the short term. Does that make sense, Ray?

**RB:** Yeah, no, it makes every bit of sense and I, you know, Joel, to be honest, if you look at what San José is doing right now with some of the projects that are going on, you know, Evans Lane, um, and on some of the Caltrans properties, what's great is it is an immediate solution. They're looking at, they're looking at something that they can use the streamlining provisions and the CEQA exemptions right now to get housing built. But they're also creating interim communities that have the capability perhaps to be converted to permanent, to be, to have permanent uses and long-term uses, which is great. Cause you're, you're thinking about how we can do things quickly, but also how we can preserve and provide stability for people in the long term. And the same thing with [Project Homekey](#). I mean, we've got this rare opportunity to access state funds and buy hotels and motels and convert them into house. And, uh, San José, other communities are doing that too. So, every time that I see the opportunities to streamline, to bypass some of the entitlement processes, to do anything to move more quickly, I get really excited, especially when people are thinking, not just about, we're going to create this thing, that doesn't have really a long term plan. When people start thinking to that next level, oh, we can actually use this as a, as a real housing pipeline or as permanent housing. And that requires coordination collaboration, um, at the local level. So it's not just one - everyone is working together, it's the City and the County and the nonprofit partners, all working together to say, we're going to turn this into an asset and a resource and not, um, not a one-off and not something that isn't part of the greater supportive housing.

**AR:** Yeah, when I, uh, when I found out that the, the emergency interim housing units that we're building. They were already thinking about how we can move people in and then start working to convert that land into permanent housing. I was like, that's awesome!

**RB:** Exactly! It's like that fourth dimensional thinking, you know that then next vector, you're thinking not just about what we're doing, what we're physically doing here, but what we can do in the future. So the land is an asset and a resource and I love - and that's the type of work that we need to be doing. It just can't be - we can't afford to do these one-offs anymore. Um, that, that don't have, um, the don't have the bigger picture in mind.

**JJR:** There's also another aspect to this political or worldview of addressing homelessness. And, and in fact, my board of directors struggled with this early on when we started doing housing first, and it's the whole concept of low barrier approach. Um, and basically what it means is that, you don't have to follow the rules anymore, and you just come as you are and we'll help address your issues. So if you come in drunk, you won't get kicked out. We'll try to figure out a way for you to not be dependent on alcohol anymore. But it was, it was very difficult. I remember going to a community meeting in Long Beach and talking about housing first and they were saying, so how did these people get this free welfare housing? Um, as if they don't deserve it, unless they earn it. Um, and you know, it's a different paradigm. Um, and we could say it's a bad paradigm, but we have to educate the community that you don't have to earn your way out of homelessness. You don't have to earn your way into a home. And even when you're in a home, you should have the same rules as if you're not homeless. Like if I rent an apartment and sign a lease, I can be drunk in my apartment. No one's going to kick me out as long as I'm paying rent. Right? Um, the only difference is that if I'm in supportive housing and I might have a case manager, you know, talk to me in the hallway and say, you know, I heard you were really loud, drunk Joel, last night. Do you want to talk about it? But it's, it's a different political or, or worldview of how we look at things in terms of housing first.

**RB:** Yeah. The social wellbeing of our citizens, it has to be of paramount importance and I think this gets lost all the time. People like, oh, well, you're doing, you're providing them with free housing. You're doing this other thing for these people. And the reality is more people housed in a given city or county or region make things, a better community for everyone. Everyone's quality of life improves.

**AR:** Yeah.

**RB:** Less people sleeping out on the roadways, under overpasses, um, less folks that just don't know where to go every night. And all of these things that are associated with being stuck outside from health to violence, to, you know, any number of challenges. All that stuff starts to vanish if people have homes where they can go! This isn't charity. This is about improving the place where we live.

**AR:** We actually kind of, you both kind of touched on it a little, so it's kind of a nice segue. There are two programs that follow the housing first model. There's permanent supportive housing and then there's rapid rehousing. Um, and if I'm wrong about that, please correct me. Um, but can you talk about how those two, you've talked about it a little bit. Can we talk

more about how those two programs work, how they're, how they're different, how they fit within, um, the Continuum of Care?

**JJR:** Ray funds both those programs, so I'll let him start.

**RB:** It's a little wonky when you start to talk about it. But I talked about this, no silver bullet. And the reality is that there's different. Everyone has different housing needs and housing interventions and permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, are two interventions along the whole spectrum of options that we have for people, depending largely on their, the acuity of need. So there's a vulnerability assessment and it looks at a whole bunch of different things, from health to social, to economic history, um, and kind of looks at where those folks fall. And if you are physically or mentally disabled, um, uh, you know, have suffered from a severe illness, have terminal cancer, uh, have been on the streets for a long period of time. And you basically don't have - you're not going to be able to make work full-time and make enough money to support yourself on your own. The intervention is permanent supportive housing and permanent supportive housing is affordable, deeply affordable housing, like every other type of housing that we're talking about for poor people, but it is housing that also includes a rental subsidy. So there's going to be money that helps pay the person's rent because they're never going to be able to pay the rent on their own because of whatever disabled condition they have. Coupled with services, so then there's supportive services that are available to them onsite. And they're wraparound services, so it's anything a person needs from, you know, vocational training to case management to residential day and meaningful daytime activities, you know, a whole, whole range of things. But it's the idea that we've got a lot of people in our community that can, they have the ability to live independently. They're not so severely disabled that they can't live independently. Those folks need another type of intervention, which is much more intensive. These are folks that can live independently, have their own lease. They just need a little bit extra help because of their life circumstances. So that's permanent supportive housing.

**RB:** Rapid rehousing, it's a lower level of acuity. It's working families and adults, extremely low-income households that have experienced some kind of financial emergency that put them on the streets. And they're people that have a housing history, maybe even a more recent housing history. Probably had the ability to remain housed if they can get back to full-time employment, but need help. So they're going to receive a time-limited subsidy, rental payment for a period of time. And then coupled with some kind of like employment placement or training or vocational services to help them get back into that full-time employment, where after a period of time they can take on the full, their, um, their full rent and be economically independent and self-sufficient. And for those folks, you know, in Santa Clara County, rapid rehousing is a lot harder because rents are just too damn high. So what we're seeing more than anything is not only do we need to provide them with this rapid rehousing intervention, we also have to provide them with an affordable apartment too, because even if we can get them into a market rate place that probably once they get, even double full-time, working 80 hours a week for each person in the household, they might not be able to afford the rent on their own, at making minimum wage. So we know that, you

know, affordability and having affordable homes is also a core component to every housing intervention that we have.

**JJR:** We run both those programs. And I would say with rapid rehousing, it's only going to be, it's only going to work, like Ray said, um, the, uh, the rents are so high. Um, and, and the only way to lower those rents is not to increase the number of people in rapid rehousing because it's supply and demand. So if the demand goes up higher, then the rents are going to go up higher because there'll be less supply. So the only way to really make rapid rehousing work is by having more supply of available apartments for that. And one way of increasing the supply of rapid, of, of more apartments is by building permanent supportive housing. Um, the problem with permanent supportive housing is, is that cost is going up as well. So, you know, it's getting to a point where, uh, the cost of building a, a supportive or an affordable housing unit is as much or more than market rate. And that's not a good thing. So we've got to figure that out as well. But they're both good solutions, but it all, it all comes down to, again, the supply of affordable housing in, in, in the market.

**AR:** Yeah, because the cost of one affordable unit is reaching a million dollars, right?

**RB:** Yeah, in some places. I mean, we're trying, we're pushing every way we can to keep it down. We want to keep it down. Um, but you guys have projects right now ranging from \$700,000 to a million dollars a year at the very high end, so that's, it's not sustainable. Um, so that's why, uh, looking at, you know, new building construction techniques, trying to take advantage of City owned and County owned parcels, doing whatever, whatever we can to drive costs down is so, so critically important because we can't, we won't be able to keep up, even with, like, Measure A, the 2016 affordable housing bond. \$950 million, it seems like a lot of money. But when an acre of land of dirt goes for a million dollars or 15, or it goes for \$10 million or \$15 million an acre, all of a sudden that money starts to go really, really fast.

**AR:** That plus million per unit, seems like –

**RB:** Yeah, exactly. It adds up really quick. I mean, you know, there's, there are projects going on downtown that are going to build a lot of affordable units, but, um, required tens of millions of dollars of City and County subsidy to make them pencil and possible. And we're heading into a time of scarcity, not abundance. So there's a lot of concern about where is that money going to come from going forward?

**AR:** How does PATH work with Destination: Home or how, if you work together, which I assume on a level you do, how are you guys working together? And then within the greater Continuum of Care to, um, to address homelessness in San José and in Santa Clara County?

**JJR:** When, um, Destination: Home tells us to jump, we jump. We jump in the middle of things.

*[group laughter]*

**RB:** I mean, we, uh, we rely, uh. Destination: Home, as I said, we're an 11 person organization where we convene, we work on the issue of homelessness and work with cities and the County and all of our partners to make it happen. But, um, organizations like PATH

are the way that we actually get the work done. So, for instance, our relationship with PATH, Joel sits on the board of my organization, Destination: Home, so we have a close working relationship, but we're also - PATH is one of our supportive housing developers as well. So, you know, when they, they're looking at new developments, they come to us. We're funding a planner at the City of San José, um, to work specifically on supportive housing developments. PATH, as one of our supportive housing partners gets priority access to work with that planner so they can expedite the review process when it's complicated. Um, we provide, we provide support for acquisition and pre-development, so we'll provide - we have a group of developers. And what we're looking for when we have partners is, we want someone who has the capacity to build, but is also mission aligned and is thinking not just like, "this is a building I need to get up and put up and stick random people in." We want people that are thinking, "this is a community resource that is going to serve a population of folks that desperately need help. And we, as an organization, aren't just committed to building this building, we're created to committing and sustaining this community over time." And there's a small select group of organizations like that. And I remember when I was working at the City of San José, when, uh, when we went down and saw, um, [Connections in San Diego](#), which is another PATH development, much like [Villas](#). Every person working in that development knew not only like what the conditional use permit said and had it in their hands, but also was saying hi to every, knew the names of all the people that were walking by. Um, and, uh, I remember I was, you know, Jacky, Leslie, we were all down there and we're like, this is what we want in our community. And we've got, we've got a great group of developers like that. PATH, [Abode](#), uh, we've got some other partners, [Charities Housing](#), and [First Community Housing](#). These are, these are organizations that are nonprofits and committed to this work and really want to see a change for our most vulnerable residents. So it's, you know, it's, it's a pleasure to have partners like PATH.

**JJR:** I know it's like an old saying, but it takes a village to really provide solutions for homelessness, including building supportive housing. So it's, it's the developer, it's the service provider, it's the funder, it's the political leadership. It's a, um, advocacy. Um, and it's also getting the community to support it, to allow it to be built in their neighborhood and Destination plays several of those roles, as funder, as an advocate, as, uh, getting communities ready. And PATH plays a couple of those roles as developer and as service provider. So when we work together well, um, we build good programs and good buildings.

**AR:** I can imagine that, having... Since you have PATH and then you have PATH Ventures, that combination must make things, I don't want to say easier, but you're able to be there from conception through to like watching people come and move in and be, like, grow the community that, that you created for them. So that must be a really amazing journey to be on for all of the buildings that you work with.

**JJR:** It's, um, like Ray said it's having mission alignment. PATH's not the only one, Abode is very similar in the same way, where if you're designing a space, really designing it, you know, the people who are going to be in that space, you know, they slept in the park next door, or they slept in the river, you know, on the other side of town. So you can design based on that. And so, it's being mission aligned in the design phase, in the service phase, uh, even when



you talk with the community, and sharing what this means for the community. And it's not just a building.

**AR:** Are there any tweaks or changes, changes, upgrades, fixes, uh, to the current housing first approach that you're seeing or that you would like to see?

**JJR:** Can I share a different paradigm?

**AR and RB:** Yes! Please!

**JJR:** This has been a, uh, a difficult, and a crazy, and an emotional year for all of us. And part of that was when, uh, George Floyd was murdered and what that has done for like PATH and for many agencies and communities, it's kind of turned everything upside down. And to me, even the whole housing first movement, I feel it was, should be turned upside down. And the reason why I say that is because, here we are, we've created this really awesome model or housing first. Forget having people jump through the hoops, let's just get them into housing. Now we're finding out we're not putting the right people in those homes. It's a disproportionate number of people on the streets who are homeless that are people of color or black and indigenous people. And we're finding out that, you know, we very well could be housing the wrong people. Um, let alone, we've talked about the whole, um, uh, [VI-SPDAT, or surveying or the coordinated entry system](#) of prioritizing who goes into housing, you know, are we prioritizing the right people? Are we asking the right questions to people to get, for them to get into housing? For example, if, uh, if, if we're asking people about their criminal backgrounds, that also becomes a racial inequity question for many people. And I feel like, we have to figure out a new paradigm of how we approach housing, uh, if we're going to end homelessness for all people.

**RB:** You hit the nail on the head, Joel. I mean, I think, housing first, there's... it's perfect. We should not, we should not walk away from it for one second. You know what I mean? [UCSF study that just came out](#) looked at – it was called Project Welcome Home here in Santa Clara County – housing the most vulnerable people in our community, um, and randomized control trial and look, and the results were 86% of the people remained housed in the program. We're talking about very sick, very ill people, and they stayed housed. And it was a housing first model in permanent supportive housing. So that is fantastic. That said, how we assess people, how we look at how we prioritize the scarce resources? If we're not considering this with a race equity lens, and we're not thinking about the disproportionate number of people of color on the streets right now? I mean, I think in Santa Clara County, it's, uh, six to one African-Americans against 3% of our general population, but 18% of our homelessness population? Uh, we need to start figuring out what we do to affect some of these historical injustices. And we haven't been deliberately thinking about it yet. We've been thinking, we've been perfecting the tool. We've got a great tool to end people's homelessness right now. It's a fantastic tool, but it ignores social realities that we face in America today. And, you know, fortunately they're getting lifted up more and more, but if we're not deliberate about continuing to force the system to change, we're just going to revert back to our old ways.

**JJR:** We have, um, we, PATH, have 900 people who work for us around the state. The majority of them are people of color. And a majority of them are young, like in their twenties. And when we did, um, group video calls, which is the norm, you wouldn't believe the emotion and the anger coming from just our workers, our people who are, um, who are interacting with and serving people who are homeless. And how they just felt like my generation is doing it wrong and that their generation will fix it. It means turning it upside down. So we do have to figure out, even for the people who work on the front lines of homelessness, let alone the people who are homeless. To me, there's a new wave of change coming. And when I've talked with my board of directors about it, um, or leaders, there's just a new wave of change. And if we don't ride that wave, um, we're gonna, you know, we're talking about going backwards in terms of shelter and stuff, but if we don't deal with this racial inequity issue, we're gonna really go backwards.

**RB:** And we need to start involving the voice of people with lived experience more in our system, too. There's a lot of folks out there that know firsthand what it's like to sleep on the streets at night. And, you know, maybe they're home *[trails off]*, or maybe they're on the path to getting off the streets, but, um, not incorporating their voice more, and making sure that they're becoming part of our leadership structures, moving up in our organizations, um, sitting on our board of directors? If we don't do that more intentionally, we are missing the boat, because designing systems for people and doing things to people is a dead end. We need to start, we need to start working with folks and listening to people to know what they're talking about and making systems that work for everyone.

**JJR:** Can I add one more tweak? Housing first works and we can build a lot of housing, but if we don't prevent people from becoming homeless, we won't progress, and I know Destination: Home, Ray can share more about it because Destination: Home is invested a lot into it. But if you see the homeless counts around the state, um, the numbers are kind of at the same or going, or increasing. And yet the number of people were being housed is, is significant. And the only reason why the numbers aren't going down as significant is because we're not preventing people from becoming homeless.

**RB:** Yeah. For every one person that we're housing over, that we've housed over the past five years – and we've housed more people than ever before in Santa Clara County, over the last five years, over 14,000 people housed – three people become homeless. So we can't sustain those numbers. We will never get anywhere if we don't, we don't address that, that inflow issue.

**AR:** You're doing that - well, you're doing that a little with the Community Plan, right?

**RB:** Yeah. Yeah. So we have a homelessness prevention system that was launched in 2017 and we built it up to serve 1500 households annually right now, but that's. You know, that's one aspect of the Community Plan to End Homelessness. We have to look at, you have to look upstream and think about, you know, what's going on in our, in our criminal justice system, what's happening with folks exiting foster care? How are hospitals looking at housing plans for their most vulnerable residents, um, when they're exiting, um, when they're exiting back to the streets? So, uh, there's a, there's a lot of work to do across a

broad spectrum, but. We won't get to where we want to be, and we won't see the changes we want until we figure out how to turn the spigot off.

**AR:** We want to give people an action item that they can do once they're done listening to the episode so they feel like, oh, I know what I can do to help. So, what is one piece of advice that you would give a listener for how to get more involved in fighting and ending homelessness?

**JJR:** I guess, since I'm on the board of Destination: Home I can say this one. That I would ask, I would tell them to join the [Housing Ready Communities Initiative](#), that Destination: Home has. And the reason for that is, we can throw as much money in talent and ideas and innovation into housing. But if we don't have a community that allows us to build that housing, we can't do it. So, to me, that's really important. It doesn't cost a penny. It may cost you time to go talk to a City Council member or go to a community meeting or share your story. Um, but it's, it's not, it won't cost you a penny to do that. And it, to me it's very important, not just for Destination: Home, but for the PATHs of the community and the Abodes of the communities that are building, um, we can't do it without a community that's willing to say, you know, yes in my backyard.

**RB:** Yeah. Joel is just stealing my lines left and right here. *[group laughter]* Uh, so, but I mean, that's the thing. For everybody, anyone listening, anyone engaged, your voice matters a lot. And as we're seeing projects that are going on in this County right now, there are more than enough people who will show up and say, "no, we don't want this here, this isn't the right place, this isn't the right time." What we need is we need a lot more people who are willing to talk to their elected officials, write letters, show up at meetings and say, "housing is going to make a difference, housing is going to make my community a better place." Housing Read Communities is a great way to get involved, great way to volunteer, um, and learn more about what's going on in your community! Know what's, what's happening next. So it's, I think it's a mutually beneficial.

**JJR:** I think there's also, um, more happening on the political level. Uh, I think people are worried about what's going to happen with the economy and, um, with evictions and food insecurity. Um, so I think, uh, there's going to be even more talk about funding and changing policies and programs. And I don't think it should just be elected officials who make those decisions. I think it's gotta be people like us, that are influencing the elected officials. So I do think people need to be more involved politically.

*Thanks to Joel and Ray for the great conversation today. To learn more about the Housing Ready Communities Action Network, please visit [destinationhomesv.org/hrcaction](https://destinationhomesv.org/hrcaction). To learn more about the work PATH does or to get involved, please visit [epath.org](https://epath.org).*

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*Our theme music is "Speed City," composed and performed by Ettaine Charles. Thanks to San José Jazz for letting us use your music. If you like the show, please [subscribe](#) and share with your friends and family. If you're looking for more ways to get involved with housing and homelessness response, please [check out the show notes](#).*

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