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# **HEAT HOMELESS ENGAGEMENT ACCESS TEAM**

**SANTA CLARA COUNTY**

**PROGRAM MANAGER: NATESSA MARTINEZ**



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"I didn't choose to become  
homeless, but I choose to stay  
homeless."

-SCC unhoused individual





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# HEAT ESTABLISHED 2019



In 2019, the HEAT team began with a plan to have 3 clinicians and 3 wellness specialists.



The team operated consistently with two clinicians and two wellness specialists.



The focus was on making initial contact with the most vulnerable unhoused individuals in the county.



Alex Ralli was a key staff who worked during the inception of HEAT until April 2024. He personally developed much of the team and has much knowledge of the program development.



Over time, the structure of the team, the team members and leadership shifted somewhat.



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# HEAT IN 2025

- In FY 2023,-2024 the HEAT team began to develop internal policies, procedures, and plans to support more consistent and equitable outreach across Santa Clara County.
- The team also re-established healthy connection and communication with the OSH MH Clinicians and Contract Controller.
- The team also built stronger and more ethical relationships with countywide police units, city officials and other external stakeholders.
- There are many more opportunities for growth and connection in SCC on the horizon!



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# CURRENT STAFF AND PROGRAM FACTS

- SCC Outreach/HEAT team design has one program manager, three Community Health Outreach Workers (CHOW), and three Outreach Specialists.
- There are two Outreach Specialist vacancy as of 2.20.25
- This team has a great level of lived and professional experience including social work, crisis intervention, harm reduction skills, etc.
- One thing they hold most important is the ability to humanize individuals in their pain and vulnerability.
- The team understands the need to bring validating and respectful presence to each interaction they have with clients.
- Currently this team has over 250 enrolled HoH

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## HEAT PARTICIPATES IN COMMUNITY EVENTS.

On January 31, 2025, HEAT staff participated in Dave Cortese's Health Fair for unhoused individuals. This was a time for the team to connect with clients who do not have cell phones and are transient. Staff also conducted assessments on new individuals and enrolled new clients.





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**HEAT GOES TO GREAT LENGTHS TO GET THEIR CLIENTS THE SERVICES THEY NEED.**

- The HEAT team worked together to get a client to the doctors. This client was elderly and had limited mobility. The team executed a plan and supported his needs, even in rainy weather.



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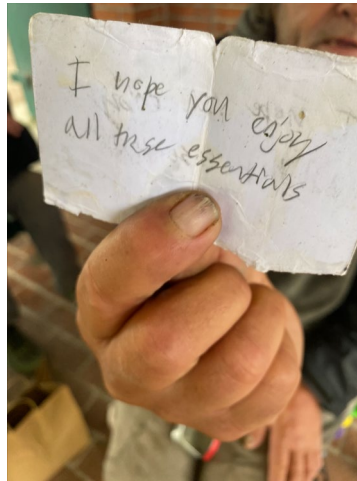
**HEAT STAFF BRING  
DIGNITY TO THOSE THEY  
SERVE.**

The team is equipped to meet clients in their homes on the street or at encampments. They create humanizing connections and validate the difficult situations clients are in while helping them access resources to better living.

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**HEAT STAFF listen to their clients share about their most valued possessions.**

This client was excited to share these mementos with the staff as they chatted about life and his journey.



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## HEAT STAFF COLLABORATE WITH CITY and COUNTY STAFF.

The team works alongside community liaison units to enter encampments safely. The team also works with OSH Mental Health Clinicians to support high acuity clients.



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# POPULATION SERVED & SCOPE OF SERVICES

## **Population served**

- Moderate to severe mental health issues.
- Homelessness is defined as someone living on the street, in a car or RV, or somewhere not meant for habitation
- This excludes people living in a motel they are paying for (as opposed to a motel paid for by a program) or who are couch surfing.

## **Scope of services**

- Our scope of services includes HEAT traveling into the communities where homeless people are living and engaging with them.
- While enrolled we:
  - Develop a history of homelessness
  - Help clients work towards becoming document ready
  - Conduct VI-SPDAT assessment
  - Provide items needed for unhoused/street/car living

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# COUNTY WIDE OUTREACH PLAN

- **County Wide Outreach Plan**

- This was newly developed in 2023 as a means to organize countywide outreach
- 13 cities are included in this plan
- Schedule rotates bi weekly.
- Different team members lead outreach plans in the different areas of the county.
- This includes the SJC Mineta International Airport and working with Airport security there.

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# INITIAL CONNECTIONS AND A TYPICAL OUTREACH DAY

- We start each outreach day by meeting at a predesignated site
- When we encounter someone who is unhoused we assess for safety risks.
- Often times, the person will brush us off or tell us they are not interested in services and we thank them for their time and move along. Other times, the person expresses interest, and we enroll and assess them right there.
- We then make a plan for maintaining consistent contact and coordinate care or obtaining documentation.

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# CET AND PSH PROCESS

- CET (Coordinated Entry Team)
  - This team works within the Office of Supportive Housing.
  - They communicate with HEAT team members and clients regarding program referrals.
- PSH (Permanent Supportive Housing) Process
  - Once the client has had a VI-SPDAT assessment, they get a score (that they are not allowed to know).
  - If the client is pulled for a program referral, we are contacted by CET and work with the client for an initial prescreen.
  - Once the client passes the initial prescreen, they continue to submit documents to CET, which includes ID and social card.
  - There is a timeline for these documents to be submitted.
  - Once the client submits all of their paperwork, they are matched with a PSH site.
  - If there is no site immediately available, they will be in interim housing for some time. (Pedro St, Bella Vista).

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# OSH MH CLINICIANS

- The HEAT team has access to work with two outreach clinicians through OSH.
- We refer clients to the team and manage their cases via bi weekly meetings.
- These clinicians are very supportive and work with many other clients at other sites.
  - J.A. and R.G.

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# CITY SUPPORT AND ADDITIONAL CONTRACTS

- Each city in the county is supported by HEAT
- Some cities choose to go into contract with OSH or Abode.
- With this comes extra support, responsiveness from the team or documentation/tracking.

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# LEARN, PLAN, RESOURCES

- LEARN
  - What are the site's needs?
  - Questions from site team.
- PLAN
  - How can HEAT Support?
- RESOURCES
  - Flyers, Here4You, HPS Flyers, etc.



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## **HEAT'S CONTINUED WORK.**

The team hopes to continue to work successfully throughout the county as they make first contact with many unhoused individuals.

For many individuals, the systems are difficult to navigate. But with the support of the HEAT team, they can have their first steps of success.