



70 Million S3E9 Annotated Transcript:

Where Housing, Not Jails, Is the Answer to Homelessness

In California, so-called quality of life laws criminalize panhandling, living in cars, and blocking sidewalks. Reporter Sarah McClure chronicles how arresting homeless individuals entangles them in a cycle of poverty and incarceration—and how three groups are breaking the cycle.

Mitzi Miller: 70 million adults in the United States have a criminal record. In Season Three, we'll explore how our rapidly changing reality is impacting those in custody, and the policies that keep them there. I'm Mitzi Miller. Just a warning before we begin this episode. We are going to talk about some troubling details, which involve gun violence. Some listeners may find it disturbing.

Music

Miller: Homelessness is a national crisis. Today, there are more than [half a million](#) people homeless in the United States. That's a population greater than the cities of Miami and St. Louis.

Studies have shown if you're formerly incarcerated, you're almost [10 times](#) more likely to be homeless. And if you have served time, you're 7 to 11 times [more likely](#) to have experienced recent homelessness than the average person.

When you're homeless, you risk being threatened, fined, arrested or jailed for sleeping outside, panhandling, even sitting too long on a bench.

Today, laws, policies, and practices that impact homeless communities are being [challenged in court](#) as illegal, unconstitutional, and as cruel and unusual punishment.

Last year, the U.S Supreme Court upheld a 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decision, *Martin v. Boise*.

[News clip](#) from KPIX CBS: *For homeless advocates, it was a tremendous victory when the 9th US Circuit court ruled it was unconstitutional for the city of Boise, Idaho to move homeless people simply for sleeping on public property.*

Miller Advocates consider Martin v. Boise groundbreaking, but it [doesn't protect](#) homeless people's belongings, which can still be cleared out.

[Video clip of Walter:](#) They, uh, took my tent, five covers, all my clothes...I lost everything.

[Video clip of Nicholas:](#)

I once left a bag of my personal belongings with my friend. This is when I first became homeless out here years ago, and it was in his tent and I had went to use the bathroom somewhere. I had my birth certificate, social security card and everything. I came back, they swept it up. Everything was gone.

Miller: That's Walter and Nicholas describing sweeps in Los Angeles, California. A sweep happens when [police are called](#) to accompany sanitation workers to clear out homeless encampments. People can end up losing important belongings like a social security card or clothing. Last year, Los Angeles spent [over \\$30 million](#) to conduct sweeps.

Sweeps, tickets, arrests, incarceration — all add up for individuals on the receiving end, *and* for taxpayers who fund those efforts. Opponents to what has become a standard approach to homelessness say the practice is traumatizing, costly, and ineffective.

While policy changes take time, some are pushing for a public health and housing-first approach. Reporter Sarah McClure has our story from Los Angeles County.

Sound of LA Door morning meeting: Everybody here?"

Sarah McClure: It's early, just before 7 a.m.

Sound of LA Door morning meeting: Morning, morning, morning...

McClure: I'm in South LA, in a room with about a dozen team members at Project 180's office. Everyone is still waking up, drinking coffee out of to-go cups.

Project 180 is a nonprofit that provides mental health and substance abuse treatment services working primarily with criminal justice populations. They're one of several partners working with the [Los Angeles City Attorney's Office, under a program called LA DOOR](#). That's LA Deflection, Outreach, and Opportunities for Recovery. A quick note here: Project 180 is partially funded by a [Safety & Justice Challenge grant](#) provided to L.A. County by the MacArthur Foundation, which also provides grant funds for this podcast.

Speaker 1: Mr. Dawson, he was supposed to show up on Wednesday for his intake...

At their office this morning, everyone is sharing the status of clients, or individuals the team is helping.

Sound of morning meeting.

Jose Rodriguez: Okay. Mental Health.

Speaker 2: I have three assessments today and then I'm seeing two clients.

Rodriguez: Awesome. Substance?

Speaker 3: I'm doing outreach this morning and I have three assessments this afternoon.

McClure: Since launching in 2018, LA DOOR has enrolled more than 600 people in their services, but they've helped many more in the community. The vast majority of clients, roughly 90 percent, are homeless.

There's a whiteboard in the room, and in the center of it, written in all caps is the word "TEAM." On the walls are maps of Los Angeles with red outlines around "hot spots" — areas where the team does outreach at homeless encampments. They focus on 10 hotspots in South and Central LA. Today, we're visiting South LA's hotspots.

Rodriguez: So we're gonna go to hotspots five, four and two.

Sound of "Straight Outta Compton" playing on radio

Damon Davis: Some South Central natives right here.

McClure: I'm in the car with Damon Davis and Suzy Urbina, two peer case managers with Project 180. We're headed out, but there's a stop first.

Davis: We're over here at Ralph's, what is this?

Suzy Urbina: 120th and Vermont.

Davis: 120th and Vermont. We're gonna come over here and get a few cases of water we can pass out. We'll probably go through most of them today. It's been over 100, or over 90 degrees every day, this week. So it's very important for our clients to stay hydrated.

McClure: Five days a week, the team visits hotspots. They visit the same places the same day of the week, so encampment residents can know when to expect them. Even before clients enroll with LA DOOR, the team is out there providing

assistance, from water bottles, hygiene kits, to wellness checks — sometimes for months — to form relationships with people living in encampments.

We arrive at our first encampment. It's between Inglewood and Compton. It's fenced in, there's graffiti everywhere, even on an LA Department of Transportation street sign that has made its way into the encampment. A red Toyota truck missing its trunk bed and front wheels is parked. On top, a red toaster.

We wait for Damon to give us the greenlight.

Davis: I'm about to go into this encampment right here. It's up and down as far as, like, safety so I'm going to go check with the supervisor...and make sure that it's going to be okay for you guys to come in, you know what I mean?

McClure: Damon estimates there's about 50 people living in the encampment.

We walk closer. A 60-something man is sitting on a stool. He's wearing a RUN DMC t-shirt and is missing part of his right thumb. Damon says hello right away and hands him a bottle of water.

Davis: Hey, how you doing, sir? We're doing pretty good, man.

JR: Everyone calls me JR. Everything I try to do is just right. That's what JR stands for. I'm just an ordinary, older-than-dirt man.

McClure: JR says he's from Washington, but now he lives in a blue tent not far from where we're standing.

JR: This is Tent City. They call it Tent City.

Unknown Speaker: This is the land of the dark.

JR: This is where we have no running water. No toilet, we're on the side of the freeway.

McClure: I'm told that JR is kind of the "mayor" around here, watches out for everyone.

JR: These people are lost. And their only alternative is drugs, stealing, robbing somebody. There's no guidance.

McClure: That's why LA DOOR is here. Roughly half of their clients struggle with substance use or mental health issues, and the other half struggle with both.

JR is grateful that Project 180 has helped him.

JR: When I first started, I did everything they asked, you know, they say I'm in the computer. I'm high up. I do have health issues but I think LA DOOR is good for the community, it's good for society.

McClure: One thing that has caught JR's eye lately is the sheriff. He says he's seen them driving around the encampment, and wonders:

JR: If this is the case and you have workers, you know, that goes through here. Why not help? The quicker you get up, the better off you'll feel, but people are looking at you, 'huh ain't none of my business.' It's all of our business!

Davis: That's right.

McClure: LA DOOR's team has visited this encampment, "tent city," over a hundred times. It takes patience, but the team has found success by building relationships and trust with residents.

One way they build that trust? No police escorts. Peer Navigator Suzy Urbina says bringing police to encampments makes residents "standoffish" and works against building any kind of trust.

Sound of car ride.

Suzy Urbina: A lot of the other outreach teams don't even get out of their cars to talk to people. And they show up with police. A lot of the people that are living here, this whole encampment, are not okay with them.

They see the police and they feel like: Who are you guys looking for? Why are you guys here harassing us? Are you guys going to give us all tickets? Who's getting taken to jail?

So, a lot of our clients are afraid to disclose any kind of information because they think they're going to be put in jail or something.

Car sound fades out.

Jamie Larson: We don't need police to be the escorts in the field.

McClure: Jamie Larson is a prosecutor in the LA City Attorney's Office. [Three years ago, she spearheaded LA DOOR](#) under her office. Before that, she worked with shelters and the Community Justice Center in San Francisco.

Larson: One thing that's really nice about LA DOOR is that we aren't relying on officers to be the tip of the spear, so to speak, with the first contact. These teams are going out on their own unaccompanied.

McClure: And, she says, they "work a beat."

Larson: *They're working consistent areas that have had entrenched populations for long periods of time. They're not reactive to city council demands. They're not reactive to someone calling and saying, 'there's a tent on my block, come get it.' There's a lot of value to that model.*

LA DOOR was designed to test the experiment from the perspective of a prosecutor's office of what happens if you really prioritize a public health approach to these issues. In other words, if you try to have police step back. If you try to say, 'we're going to respond to this with a public health approach. We're not going to respond to this in a criminal justice system.' Is that workable? Is that a better solution?

McClure: Part of LA DOOR's success, says Jamie, has also been its team members. Many have lived similar experiences as the people they serve.

Larson: *What LA DOOR really does is rely on a team of people who themselves have survived homelessness, who themselves have survived institutions, who themselves have survived poverty or exited a gang, or have a recovery story.*

McClure: People like Damon.

Sound of car ride.

Davis: *I, myself, I don't usually divulge but I was homeless for a while. I'm an alcoholic, you know what I mean? I have to remember back in my darkest day when I was on skid row, you know, with a half a pint of vodka in my back pocket and a dry crack pipe in my sock.*

McClure: Damon has been sober and housed for nearly a decade. Two years ago, he joined Project 180.

Davis: *My experience has helped me so much with building connections with people. They know that I understand where they are, I've been there and how to get out.*

McClure: One time, he says, a client came to his office and ended up talking and crying for two hours.

Sound of car ride.

Davis: *I just was able to share my experience and a lot of things that I had learned in life and tools that worked. He was able to turn his life around.*

Some people, they don't want you to tell them, "Hey, go do this and then everything's going to be alright." They want somebody to kind of take them by the hand and then lead them towards some kind of light, some kind of hope.

And then, after a while, just like a kid, when you teach a kid how to ride a bike, you let 'em go and the kid doesn't even know you let 'em go and he's riding his bike on his own.

McClure: LA DOOR also provides supportive housing and case management through its two other partners, Ms. Hazel's House, and West Angeles Community Development Corporation, or CDC. Most of LA DOOR's clients are referred through Project 180, and sometimes through police and the courts.

Larson: *Sometimes it happens quickly, sometimes it takes months or years, but whenever a person is ready to come indoors, LA DOOR has access to our own housing to place people in.*

McClure: At Ms. Hazel's House location in South LA, men, women and transgender people can access this housing — 29 beds, in fact.

Larson: *It's meant to be something in between a shelter and in between, a permanent solution to get people who are ready to take next steps, out of the hypervigilance, the toxicity, the danger of life in a homeless encampment, the hustle of life in a homeless encampment.*

And it is the clients who stabilize in housing who have the best long-term success.

McClure: One of these clients is 53-year-old Andrea Smith. She came to LA DOOR in June 2019.

Andrea is petite, she's wearing a maroon dress with matching maroon tights. Wavy black hair frames her face. But the first thing you notice about her is her smile. It's wide and infectious. It hides trauma, including her time being homeless for nearly 40 years.

Andrea Smith: *I felt unloved, unworthy. Because sometimes, when you're homeless, it feels like don't nobody care. It's only you by yourself, cause that's how I felt, you know, sleeping at the park when it's pouring down rain and everybody's going to their house. I didn't have a house to go to.*

And I don't like smelling, couldn't take a bath, couldn't wash my feet. My teeth real yellow. Hair falling out.

Out there it's like loss. My spirit was lost. My soul was lost. I felt just lost.

McClure: And, she felt targeted by law enforcement.

Smith: *I've been harassed a lot since I've been homeless.*

One day I did have a tent up in there and the police knocked on the tent. And, it's like, you know, this is a \$2,000 fine and you can't be here and all of that.' Well, all we want to do is sleep. You know I'm tired.

It was like hard cause the police, every time they see us, they mess with us.

McClure: Andrea has been homeless since the age of 16, and she's been arrested three times, for domestic violence, substance use, and drug paraphernalia.

Smith: *I was looking at 25 years to life for cutting my partner, you know, cause I was in my addiction.*

I was using crack cocaine. I was smoking outside. I had no house to go to, you know, so I'm smoking at the church, I'm smoking by the wash house, I'm smoking at the corner, I'm in the alley.

I just lived [for] the smoke. I didn't have nothing to live for.

McClure: Andrea's trauma didn't stop there. When she was eight months pregnant with her first child, she says she was shot in the belly by gang members:

Smith: *I wasn't banging, I was just at the wrong place at the wrong time. They shot me in my stomach. My baby lived, it was 10 pound, 13 ounces.*

I've been through a lot, molested, you know, um, family members and, you know, and drugs, you know, losing my son.

McClure: At one point, Andrea's 20-year-old son was shot in the back of his head by gangs. She also lost her mother to cancer.

Smith: *I was getting abused. I was in a domestic violence relationship out there. It was sad because I needed help, I wanted help, but then I didn't know how to reach out to get help.*

McClure: Andrea's experiences are not uncommon. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, nearly [45,000](#) homeless people, nationally, are victims of domestic violence. Scholars have even noted how [trauma](#) is both a cause and effect of homelessness, pointing out victimization as a contributor to homelessness.

Before coming to LA DOOR, Andrea recalls a particularly difficult point: having to clean herself at a Jack in the Box.

Smith: *The peoples up in there, they let me come in the bathroom every morning and wash my face and clean my body. They also gave me soap and towels and stuff. It's embarrassing. It's shameful. It's like, people look down on you.*

It's like, "Oh, she homeless." Or I have an odor, I'm smelling because I can't keep my clothes clean, I can't, you know, wash my face.

McClure: One day, Andrea was done.

Smith: I was sitting on the grass and I just took a hit of some dope and I was like, I'm tired of this so I took the pipe out, threw it down.

I got up and I went to project 180 on 46th and Broadway. And that was my "in" to get my life back together.

McClure: She knocked on the door and met Michael, a case manager there.

Music

McClure: LA DOOR helped Andrea get a California ID, birth certificate, medical insurance, drove her to appointments, even lifted her self esteem. She was enrolled in a three-month program to help her with her addiction.

The Public Defender's Office is looking into clearing up her criminal record. She's been sober for two years.

Through their partnership with the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office, LA DOOR is helping dozens of clients clear certain convictions and at work on active, ongoing cases.

But the expungement process can take time. Jamie says LA DOOR can help clients quash bench warrants, reduce charges from felonies to misdemeanors, get in compliance with probation and have cases dismissed through collaboration with the City Attorney's Office.

These violations can be pretty minor, like failure to appear, jaywalking, and littering.

Larson: We're taking active steps to remove these legal barriers, which I don't know that many prosecutor's offices across the country are able to do.

It's been really helpful for the Project 180 team, the West Angeles team to be able to have these conversations with clients and say: Look, you've got this warrant out and we can resolve it, we can address this together. Let me put you in touch with the public defender.

McClure: Many times, LA DOOR helps a client in court.

Larson: *When the LA DOOR client walks into court, they're accompanied by their case manager to help them feel a little bit more comfortable.*

And they also have a letter saying what they've been doing, being in the program and saying that this is a City Attorney prosecutor-run project. That gives so much credibility to the work that the client is doing at LA DOOR, that they often have a very good outcome in court.

McClure: For Andrea, she says she wishes police would have tried something different than blaming her when she was homeless.

Smith: *A better approach for me is like, can I help you? That'd be better than accusing you of doing something or talk to them or let 'em explain themselves, instead of just like, "well, you did this and you did that."*

McClure: The day we meet, Andrea tells me through LA DOOR's help of a housing voucher, she's now looking for a place of her own.

Smith: *I am so forever been grateful and it feels so good today that I don't have to drink. I don't have to smoke dope. I don't have to do none of that. All I can do today is live, you know, live and enjoy. I ain't got to worry about where I'm going to eat. I ain't got to worry about where I'm asleep. I ain't gotta worry about who's gonna hurt me. And I'm happy and it don't get no better than this y'all. [laughs]*

McClure: Not far from where Andrea Smith found herself homeless for years, was another homeless woman, Annie Moody.

Sound of video of LAPD arrest of Annie Moody.

LAPD: *Ms Moody! Hi, sergeant [name] from Los Angeles Police Department, ma'am. It's time to take down your tent.*

Annie Moody: *I guess that means I'm under arrest again.*

McClure: That's Annie saying, "I guess that means I'm under arrest again." Footage from a 2013 LAPD body cam shows officers walking up to her blue tent. Its front cover is slightly unzipped. While she sits inside of her tent, a police officer speaks to her.

LAPD: *Ms. Moody I need you to take down your tent for me, it's past 6 o'clock. It's about, a little over, a little past 8 o'clock right now.*

McClure: Within a minute of approaching her tent, LAPD arrests Annie.

LAPD: *Ma'am are you refusing to take down your tent for me?*

Moody: Yes.

LAPD: *Okay. I'm placing you under arrest. Ma'am if you could step out for me, please.*

Moody: *No problem.*

LAPD: *Thank you.*

McClure: A woman wearing rose-colored glasses can be seen emerging from the tent. Annie cooperates with police and places her arms behind her back as an LAPD officer handcuffs her. A female officer is assigned to her.

LAPD: *OK, Ms. Moody, this officer is going to search you.*

Sound of car door closing.

LAPD: *OK, very good guys...I think we're good to go.*

McClure: In the mid 2000s, Annie Moody became homeless in Los Angeles. Over the next several years, [she was arrested](#) by LAPD more than any other homeless person in the city — over 100 times.

Off and on, she spent a total of [15 months](#) in jail.

Aaron Jansen: *The amount of money that they spent prosecuting this woman, they could have bought her a house.*

McClure: Aaron Jansen is a deputy public defender for Los Angeles County. 70 Million was not able to reach Annie but we talked with Aaron who [defended her](#) in 2013.

Jansen: *We couldn't figure out why they were picking on this one woman who was homeless. She wasn't doing anything wrong. She was just living on the sidewalk as a homeless person. She wasn't committing any crimes. The crime that she was supposedly committing was sitting, sleeping, or lying on the sidewalk. That was a misdemeanor under the Los Angeles municipal code.*

McClure: He's talking about [41.18](#), the city's "[sit-lie](#)" law which makes it a criminal offense to sit, lie, or sleep on a public sidewalk *anywhere* in the city of Los Angeles.

Citywide. That's over [500 square miles](#) with nowhere to sit, lie or sleep outside — that's an area bigger than San Francisco, Chicago and New York City.

Most of Annie's charges had to do with 41.18. Though some were for disorderly conduct, marijuana possession, and selling cigarettes from her tent.

Still, Aaron believes the LAPD were directly targeting Annie. From the body camera footage you can see that there are other tents in the vicinity but police go directly to hers.

Jansen: They would order her to remove her tent and she would never do it. She would say, just take me to jail. And so that's what they kept doing.

They would just use that pressure to try to break her, to get her to take a deal where she would be on probation. And she would never do that. She would say, just give me the jail time. I'm not doing probation. I don't want to be on probation.

McClure: At some point, Aaron heard that the police referred to her as “Operation Bad Moody,” — her last name is Moody — and he subpoenaed all of the police text messages and emails.

Jansen: When I read through them, I was really appalled. They were making fun of her. It clearly showed that they were targeting her. They were celebrating when she gets arrested and convicted.

McClure: The messages between police officers about Annie included:

“Take care of her for me!”

“You guys got her, congrats.”

“If she’s out in a couple of days, we’ll do it all again! I’ll be damned if I’m gonna let her thumb her nose at us!”

“We will take care of it — she’s going back to jail ASAP.”

The email exchanges between officers also showed that they called Annie a “problem child.”

But all this patrol didn’t come cheap. Court and law enforcement records, analyzed by *The Los Angeles Times*, show that prosecuting Annie cost taxpayers at least a quarter of a million dollars.

Jansen: When you look at the judicial resources of the time to take to do these jury trials, the public defender's fees, the DA's time, the judge's time, the juror's time, the courtroom's time, the LAPD's time to book her and to constantly have to assign this manpower to her — when you add it all up, it's hundreds of thousands of dollars just to prosecute this one woman for sitting on the sidewalk.

McClure: Aaron challenged Annie’s convictions in court, arguing that she was exercising her constitutional right to go to trial. He called what the police were doing:

Jansen: Selective prosecution, that they were prosecuting her vindictively because she was exercising a constitutional right.

If you're being targeted in violation of the constitution, then you have a right to have that case dismissed.

McClure: And Aaron had the emails to argue his case.

Jansen: I got these emails to try to show that look, they have this whole operation just targeting her because she always goes to trial. She always fights her cases.

McClure: Ultimately, the court didn’t agree. But the judge did end up releasing Annie and giving her credit for time served.

And those emails?

Jansen: It was somewhat embarrassing for them. And so after that, they stopped prosecuting her pretty much.

McClure: The Los Angeles Police Department told 70 Million, “At this point we are not able to comment.”

Music

McClure: “Quality of life” laws, like the kind that were used to penalize Annie so many times, are used across the country. And a lot of them target those who have no housing options. Many cities impose camping bans that restrict a broad range of activities like sleeping outside and the use of camping paraphernalia — like blankets. [The National Homelessness Law Center](#) found that 72% of 187 cities surveyed have at least one law restricting so-called camping in public.

Roughly half of cities surveyed also have laws restricting living in cars. And within the last decade or so, these laws have increased by over 200%.

In Los Angeles, there are over a dozen of these [types of laws](#).

They bar people from sleeping on the sidewalk, [living in a car](#) to storing personal property in public — like clothes or a tent. City data shows that

between 2018 and 2019, there were nearly 40,000 service requests to clear [homeless encampments](#).

And during the first six months of 2020, the LAPD used force 444 times on homeless people — making up 36 percent of department wide uses of force, according to the LAPD Biannual Report on Homelessness.

End music

Sara Rankin: A lot of these laws just mean that somebody is going to get a civil infraction or a ticket.

McClure: Sara Rankin is a professor at [Seattle University's](#) School of Law, where she directs the Homeless Rights Advocacy Project. She specializes in the criminalization of homelessness.

Rankin: These tickets have conditions and requirements like, show up to a specific court or pay some sort of fine or fee. And those are conditions that are extremely difficult for unsheltered people to meet.

They can be sick. They can lack money. They lack transportation. Many people are caught in the grips of mental illness or substance use disorder. Lack an address where they can receive followup notice. There are so many reasons.

McClure: The impact goes beyond a fine, says Professor Rankin.

Rankin: It's not simply a slap on the wrist. That ticket can mutate into a misdemeanor, and so once someone is saddled with a misdemeanor, that means that they're then ineligible to access shelter, food services, a whole host of other benefits that might otherwise support that person's ability to emerge from homelessness.

McClure: They're like compounding barriers. Landlords and public housing managers *may* discriminate against prospective renters with a criminal record, a history of eviction or a lack of rental history. If you apply for a voucher like Section 8, you'll have to go through a criminal background check, which could make you ineligible for housing assistance.

Recent national data is hard to come by, but the [United States Interagency Council on Homelessness](#), the federal group responsible for preventing homelessness, estimates it costs taxpayers \$87 per day to jail a person compared with \$28 per day to provide shelter.

And, none of these criminalizing policies and practices have proven to end homelessness. Why? Experts say it's because it doesn't address underlying causes, like lack of housing.

Rankin: What we want to be able to do, ultimately, is really aggressively bring quality, permanent supportive housing to scale.

McClure: Professor Rankin, again.

Rankin: We need to be shifting our funding priorities away from law enforcement-led responses — which are shown to be among the most expensive and least effective interventions — toward non-punitive solutions, like supportive housing and outreach workers.

McClure: Today, nearly 80 communities and three states, including New Orleans and Virginia, have ended veteran homelessness through housing that is at times coupled with supportive services — like mental health and substance abuse treatment. [Riverside, California](#) eliminated veteran homelessness by providing permanent supportive housing.

Rankin: What we want to be doing ultimately is moving towards diversion that does not involve law enforcement at all. There's a number of these programs that have been really successful in a number of different jurisdictions, where instead of deploying law enforcement to respond to unsheltered homelessness, they dispatch outreach workers.

McClure: Like LA DOOR. And there's another group using a housing and criminal justice diversion approach called the [Office of Diversion and Reentry](#), or ODR.

In 2015, the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors — authored and supported by Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Sheila Kuehl — created ODR, a county program that contracts with community-based providers that diverts individuals from incarceration into housing and supportive services.

Mark Ridley-Thomas:

This is essentially the way in which we speak the language of alternatives to incarceration.

McClure: Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas recently voted along with the five-member [Board of Supervisors](#) to expand ODR's program, with the goal of diverting [500 people](#) in the next year.

Ridley-Thomas: We're trying to break up the cycle of homelessness to incarceration. Incarceration back to homelessness.

McClure: [ODR serves](#) individuals who are homeless, who suffer from a serious mental health disorder, and who are incarcerated in the Los Angeles County Jail and State Prison. Participants are given intensive case management, mental health services and housing for [as long as they need](#), sometimes years.

Dr. Kristen Ochoa: It's not rocket science. It's so simple, all you need to do is keep people safe by giving them housing, community, showing them that we're really here to stay, we consider our commitment to our patients for life.

McClure: Dr. Kristen Ochoa is the medical director at ODR.

Ochoa: When we say permanent supportive housing, we really mean it's forever.

McClure: Today, [ODR has diverted](#) over 5,900 individuals from jail to community-based services through their programs — placing a little over half in housing. [90 percent](#) of the program's participants have kept stable housing, and stayed out of jail or prison. It's also cost-effective. ODR's diversion program costs about \$110 a day, compared to a day in jail which they say costs over \$600 a day.

The program has helped many incarcerated people who had experienced a mental health issue and were at risk of being homeless, people like Stephen Baker.

Stephen Baker: They came to visit me, they came and gave me a visit.

McClure: At first, he says, he wasn't sure it was going to work out.

Baker: I wasn't thrilled with it. I thought it was going to be just like any other diversion program, you know, they come and they say, we're from this type of program. And then I tell them it's not going to work, I got priors. They weren't accepting priors in a lot of programs.

McClure: But, then:

Baker: I came back approved and I was shocked.

McClure: ODR told him that housing would be better than putting him in jail, for his crimes, such as trespassing. What happened next, says Stephen, shocked him.

Baker: They came to the jail, they came to the jail and actually really took me out of jail.

McClure: Today, Stephen has been with the program for four years, he's housed and seeing professional clinicians for his mental health care.

Baker: We're human like anybody else, we can, we can come back from being really damaged to being a-okay.

McClure: Earlier this year, after COVID-19 hit, California Governor Gavin Newsom made a big announcement. He was launching [Project Roomkey](#), a first-in-the-nation plan to temporarily house tens of thousands of [vulnerable homeless people](#).

California Governor Gavin Newsom [announcing](#) Project Roomkey: Project Roomkey would identify 15,000 hotel rooms throughout the state of California.

McClure: The governor's plan would use converted hotel and motel rooms, even RVs, to safely isolate medically vulnerable and elderly homeless people.

Project Roomkey would house just 14% of the state's total homeless population. Still, the program has temporarily housed [22,000](#) people across the state — since April.

Heidi Marston: My name is Heidi Marston. I'm the Executive Director of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.

McClure: Or, LAHSA for short.

Through LAHSA's partnership with Project Roomkey, nearly [4,000](#) homeless people in Los Angeles County received rooms.

Marston: We continue to grapple with is, how do we make progress when the number of people who are falling in and coming to the front door of our homeless system is outpaced by the pace at which we are able to move people out.

McClure: At the end of June, Governor Newsom announced [Project Homekey](#), calling it, "the next phase" when it comes to the state's response to protect homeless people during COVID-19.

The [\\$600 million](#) program is expected to help California cities and counties purchase hotels, apartments and other buildings, and convert them into *long-term* housing for homeless people.

Marston: People will go. We saw it with Project Roomkey, when we're offering people, hotels and motels, we're filling them up within a week and they're staying full. It's about creating the resources and giving people the opportunity to move inside, because they will.

McClure: In Andrea Smith's case, it wasn't the tickets or jail time that turned her life around — housing was the key factor.

Smith: From the grass to a bedroom, it's wonderful. From sweeping the floor with leaves to a broom, I'm grateful. From eating with my fingers to a fork or a spoon, thank you. I have my own bed. I ain't had no pillow and now I got five

or six pillows on my bed. I'm very grateful to have this place. I'm very grateful for LA DOOR, Project 180, I am very grateful for Ms. Hazel's house.

McClure: It's clear from listening to Andrea Smith, Stephen Baker and others that programs like LA DOOR, ODR, and Project Roomkey don't just have potential — without a doubt a public health and housing-first approach to homelessness are transforming lives.

Now, it's a question of whether we'll see the policy changes and investment needed to actually end homelessness, and the criminalization of it.

For 70 Million, I'm Sarah McClure.

Miller: Special thanks to Mark Horvath of the nonprofit [Invisible People](#) for the voices we heard at the beginning of the show describing the impact of sweeps. Invisible People uses video interviews of homeless people to educate the public about the issue.

Thank you for listening. For more information, toolkits, and to download the annotated transcript for this episode, visit [70millionpod.com](#). 70 Million is an open-source podcast, because we believe we are all part of the solution. We encourage you to use our episodes and supporting materials in your classrooms, organizations, and anywhere they can make an impact. You may rebroadcast parts of or entire episodes of our three seasons without permission. Just please drop us a line so we can keep track.

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