

**How New Orleans Ended Veteran Homelessness
Webinar Transcript
September 1, 2015**

Mark Johnston: This is Special Needs Assistance Programs...the SNAPS office. I'd like to welcome you to this webinar that will instruct us on how New Orleans was able to end Veteran homelessness. My name is Mark Johnston, a Technical Assistance provider working with the Cloudburst HUD TA team. I want to underscore that the purpose of this particular webinar is to really show communities across the country that it's possible to end Veteran homelessness by December 2015.

We have with us here four of the key stakeholders that made that happen here in New Orleans. I'd like to introduce them now. Sam Joel- Policy Advisor to Mayor Landrieu, to his left Tyra Johnson Brown- the city's Director of Planning and Resource Development, to my right Martha Kegel- Executive Director of UNITY of Greater New Orleans- the local Continuum of Care lead and to her right, Garry LaBorde- the Assistant Chief of Mental Health Services for the VA Southeast Louisiana Veteran's Healthcare System.

Like cities across the country, New Orleans was making great progress on reducing Veteran homelessness over the last five years but given budget constraints, competing challenges, also trying to be ending chronic homelessness, youth and family homelessness, very few stakeholders in New Orleans felt they could actually end it by December 2015. That all changed when Mayor Landrieu and Martha Kegel, one of our panelists, attended the White House session with First Lady Michelle Obama and received that Mayor's Challenge to end Veteran homelessness by December 31, 2015. Sam, and then Martha, can you explain what happened when the Mayor and you Martha, returned home from Washington and hearing this challenge?

Sam Joel: Well, first of all, this is just really exciting. I want to thank HUD and Cloudburst for putting this on and overall we just really would love to share what we did down here in New Orleans and to help as best we can all the other cities in the country that are doing this really important work. The Mayor was jazzed when he got back from DC and he was ready to go to take on this big challenge. But even before then, going back to when he took office in May 2010, homelessness has always been a really top priority for our Mayor. Over the last four years, even before we took up the Mayor's Challenge, it was building a 10 year plan to end homelessness in New Orleans, it was convening a local Interagency Council on Homelessness, and really trying to build community with all of our partners including UNITY of Greater New Orleans, and the VA, and Volunteers of America, and a wide variety of other service providers in the city.

When the Mayor came back, he really thought that we'd done the ground work that was necessary to make it happen a year ahead of time to hit the Mayor's Challenge goal. We were ready to go, he called everybody in and we had a big old meeting with all the key stakeholders...the Continuum of Care, the VA, all of our Veteran partners, all of the different commands of the various military installations around the region along with several philanthropic representatives to sort of convey the clarion call that he heard from the First Lady and from the President and to then sort of get us started on the path that eventually led to a July 4, 2014 announcement that we were going to pursue the Mayor's challenge to reach it by the end of the year.

Mark Johnston: Martha, anything to add to that?

Martha Kegel: I think the First Lady's speech at the White House that day on June 4th was very inspirational. I know that a lot of us had tears in our eyes and I think even though I had been working on this issue with the VA for a while before that and we'd been making some good progress, it wasn't until then that I really felt deep in my core she really conveyed that this was a social justice issue and that this was a moral issue...that it was just immoral for us as a society to

allow people who had sacrificed so much so that most of the rest of us (including me) didn't have to...that we would allow them to have to spend years sleeping on the street, foraging in dumpsters for food. I tried to convey that kind of moral outrage and I tried to keep it foremost in front of all of us throughout the campaign. I know the Mayor came back and he was very excited at the time of the White House gathering with Michelle Obama and he immediately said that day that we were going to kick off the campaign July 4th at the World War II Museum and he is a very strong leader who takes very big goals and makes them happen, and makes them happen very quickly. Without his leadership, this could not have been done.

Mark Johnston: Thank you, Martha. Before we get into some of the changes that took place as a result of the challenge, we wanted to get into a little bit in terms of what was running well before then. We heard a little bit about that from Sam...some of the good foundational items being set up. Tyra and then others, what was already in place to help more this ball forward?

Tyra Johnson Brown: The City of New Orleans already had a good standing collaboration. One thing we had already participated in many previous initiatives. We were a part of boot camps, we were part of the 25 Cities Initiative, we participated in 100,000 Homes campaign. A lot of things we've learned from those different initiatives, we were able to have that already as a starting point for this Mayor's Challenge.

Mark Johnston: Thank you. Anything else from anybody?

Martha Kegel: I would just add that I think, because of our shared experience during Katrina, we really treated homelessness with a great deal of urgency already and that really helped us. We had already implemented across the Continuum of Care right after Katrina, a Housing First philosophy that we had started to put in place before the storm but really made it a system-wide policy afterwards. Without that, it probably wouldn't have been possible to do it in such a short period of time because we needed to house people fast and we couldn't wait for them to address all of their problems before they got housing, which was the old way of doing things. As we ourselves understood, because we were all homeless together after Katrina, you need your housing first. You need your housing first and then you can address all the rest of your problems.

Mark Johnston: I'd like to get into this notion of the sense of urgency that they felt here in New Orleans a little bit. It's kind of stunning for me to hear and recognize that they initially were going to be setting this goal in June to be ending Veteran homelessness a year and a half out and then he accelerated that to just six months out so from July to December was the goal...just a six month period/slightly less than six months to be ending Veteran homelessness. There was a real sense of urgency with that commitment by the Mayor and all of the stakeholders. I wanted to start with Sam...how did that urgency get manifested in the city?

Sam Joel: There was definitely a sense of urgency after we heard the challenge from the First Lady. Like Martha said, this is something that we feel in our bones and something the Mayor really feels is important to help our fellow citizens find housing. With that leadership in place and with the strong relationships we've built over the previous years, we were really able to hit the ground running. A lot of the stuff was the weekly meetings, the regular conference calls, the open lines of communication with all of our different partners. In addition to that, it was really, really important that we not only had the top line leadership...the Executive Directors or the Deputy Executive Directors of all of these different agencies with buy in, but certainly drilling deeper into these organizations to get buy in from everyone. We had both very strong top down leadership from the Mayor, and from Martha, and from everyone you see at this table but also it's really remarkable to see bottom up leadership...those front line service providers, those front line housing navigators really step up and make it happen for our clients.

Mark Johnston: Great. Tyra or others?

Tyra Johnson Brown: Also, we had the newsletters that actually was a way you could see the progress that we were making and that was something that went out to all of the providers so that everyone could know what we were doing. Just to reiterate with Sam just said as relates to the leadership team, that leadership team did have key players in it but those were your decision makers. After a navigator meeting that usually would occur the beginning of the week, if they were having any issues or had any problems, that was brought up in the meeting which would happen later in the week. We were able to address that and make decisions to resolve it. That went hand in hand together and it was a good match.

Mark Johnston: That urgency was manifested in weekly emails?

Tyra Johnson Brown: It was a weekly meeting. We actually sat down and...

Mark Johnston: I meant weekly emails and meetings but it was both was it?

Tyra Johnson Brown: It was both.

Mark Johnston: So...others?

Gary LaBorde: I think not only that but if you look at the Mayor's Interagency Council to end Homelessness, I think that started us into urgency for everyone to include the VA and our local state and federal partners as well. Not long before this challenge, the VA had the opportunity to open up a community resource and referral center and that was really the first time we were able to be exposed to working directly on a daily basis with that community partners in the same place under one roof. I think we were able to carry that over to this challenge. Ultimately the Mayor had given us a six month suspend state which was kind of shocking at first but that's what drove us to even be more passionate about it and continue the sense of urgency that we all had prior to this. At the end of the day, it kind of helped us move forward with this initiative.

Martha Kegel: I think having a deadline that intense and having a very public declaration of it as the Mayor did at the World War II Museum on July 4th in a very heavily publicized ceremony is really critical. I mean, you can dilly dally and take forever to do this or you can just get it done. How are you going to get it done? Well, there's a lot of panic involved with that. I mean, we had a lot of sleepless nights trying to figure out...Okay, how are we going to do this? But you know what? Having that deadlines forces you to do it. You're going to barrel through the problems, all the partners are coming together knowing that we have to resolve these problems. We can't set them aside to decide next year how we're going to address them. We've got to do it now. And what we found out with the pressure of this deadline was, as fast as we thought we were housing people before in all the campaigns that Tyra mentioned? Hey, we could actually house a person in one day if we have to and we can do it and still give them choice. We had ourselves well enough organized and everybody hyped up enough to get it done and I'm just so proud of us for what we accomplished.

Sam Joel: I'm telling you though, if it's one lesson that I would want to share with other cities or other states taking on this challenge it's that the urgency has to be felt all the way down the line in these organizations. We've really got to make sure that the Executive Director may be raring to go and have a lot of urgency but it's got to hit the streets and it's got to work on the streets. As you're making the effort over the coming months, make sure that you've got your eye on that street level stuff and not being at 30,000 feet so to speak.

Mark Johnston: Let me pick up on a point that Sam, you're making and Martha as well and let me point this to Martha. You have this sense of urgency, now you've got to really track progress. How did you manage that so that you'd actually know what progress you're regularly making and what kind of a backbone organization did you have to see the day to day operations happen?

Martha Kegel: The first thing that we did, which we did a week after the First Lady's speech was, we started compiling the master list. The master list, I think, was the single most important tool in our success. It was an effort to compile every single Veteran who we knew to be either living on the streets, abandoned buildings, cars or living in emergency shelters. Those were the populations that we focused on. We compiled it by going through HMIS, we compiled it by going through Point in Time accounts, we compiled it by looking at other people who were in our PSH registry who had not yet been put into the HMIS system and then we worked really closely with the VA. The VA gave us additional names that they knew about and then the VA helped us figure out were these people actually Veterans...that was the biggest shock to me was to find out that about 10% of the folks who were self-described as Veterans had not served even a day in the military. That was important, because in order to get this done, we needed to be very clear about who we were going to house. We needed to be as inclusive as possible in making sure that from that day forward we counted every additional homeless Veteran and we were actively looking for them, but we made sure that we were narrowly focusing on the people who were actually going to count as living on the street or in shelter in the next Point in Time count.

That was a really important, I think...target...that looming Point in Time count. For everybody working on this now it will be the 2016 Point in Time count. Think about who is going to show up and have to be counted as homeless in that count if you don't house them now. That's what you need to focus on. That helps everybody join together in one single focus. A lot of the programs are operating under different definitions of homelessness and focusing on that Point in Time count...who is going to count in living on the street or shelter in January 2016 if you don't house them now...that I think is a really important tool for success. The master list is something that we keep up every day. We still work on it and it will be a permanent thing that we work on. We have one person working pretty much full time on that master list even today just updating it, compiling it, everybody can see it, everybody's focused on it and then we keep all kinds of data about how many people we have, how many people are missing, how many people we're looking for, how many people in progress, where they are in progress and that is I think the key organizing tool.

Mark Johnston: Thank you, Martha. To keep this sense of urgency means you still have to follow all the rules such as determining if a person is a Veteran...as you're mentioning. The question I have for Garry is...before the challenge, how long was it taking the VA here to determine Veteran status and how did that change afterwards after the challenge was issued?

Gary LaBorde: Normally it would take anywhere from about three to four days. Looking at Veteran status and eligibility is something we do every day but once this became a priority...and our leadership made it a priority from day one...we were able to talk to our individual services that were doing this and we would do exactly what Sam mentioned earlier...getting some buy in at the grassroots level by saying this is a goal and initiative. This is basically the first step in the process. In order for us to move forward to identify who is eligible to be housed, we first must know if you're a Veteran or not. What we did was, we turned the three or four days into 24 hours and on some days it was even shorter than that. Again, that was making it a priority and that was getting the buy in from everyone on the ground and of course from our leadership as well.

Mark Johnston: Thank you.

Martha Kegel: If I can just add to that, I think the close working relationships that we have been our local VA and the local Continuum of Care is something that we worked really hard to build. It wasn't there at the very beginning but I think today it is sort of the envy of the country. We've really developed this great communication.

Gary LeBorde: It works very well. You'd be surprised how well you can communicate the more frequently you do it. I think all of us felt a sense of being overwhelmed when this six month timeframe came about, but once you get everybody in a room and you look at the barriers and the

people that are responsible for breaking down those barriers are also in the room and you can go back and communicate that effectively, you'd be surprised at what you can do.

Mark Johnston: Given this change on determining Veteran status so quickly, Tyra (from the city) what impact did that have?

Tyra Johnson Brown: It had a great impact. Being able to identify those Veterans and making sure that they're eligible for the different housing programs...that helped a whole lot because now you were able to actually say...Okay, I found this Veteran. He is eligible for whatever services, get with the navigator, have a plan for them and move them along through that process.

Mark Johnston: Excellent. Any other observations on this question? Sam and then Martha, did the reduction in homelessness just immediately begin once the challenge occurred or did it take some time?

Sam Joel: Like we were saying earlier, we'd done a lot of work over the previous years to focus on permanent support of housing in New Orleans. But this was a whole different phase of the effort particularly focused on Veterans, of course. It did take some time to really make sure that we were prioritizing our Veterans and frankly, it was the end of the summer/beginning of the fall and we sort of had a moment where we weren't really hitting our marks and so what we had to do was sort of figure out what was not happening for our clients and then try to fix the problems and then move forward. That sort of effort to continuously improve our practices and continuously speed up the process was sort of a defining characteristic of this whole effort. If it didn't work the first time, we tried and tried again. My main thing is don't get discouraged. We certainly had all sorts of problems in the very beginning part of this process but the more you do it, the more you get your wheels turning, the better it will be...just keep at it.

Martha Kegel: I think that's one of the reasons why it's so important to have these weekly leadership meetings at City Hall...weekly meetings of the stakeholders- the people that actually have control over the funding. Without that review of the weekly data, where are we now? How many Veterans have we helped now? How many are there left to house? You can't really know how you're going to have to fine tune the process and you can't really see otherwise how people on the ground are actually implementing or not implementing what you've asked them to do. There were a lot of people already in the pipeline for the VASH housing and the Continuum of Care housing program and the SSVF...Supportive Services for Veteran's Families program that were not necessarily this particular target population because all those programs have eligibility that allows them to serve more broader populations so getting each of those programs to really prioritize took a lot of fine tuning and a lot of review of the data.

One thing that was a big change in the Continuum of Care was just getting everybody to understand that we could not meet this goal and this deadline if we did not put Veterans into Continuum of Care slots that were not designated specifically for Veterans, but for which Veterans were eligible. Part of this was because we didn't have enough VASH. Part of it was because we had a number of Veterans...a lot of Veterans, probably half of them at least, were not even eligible for VASH so there was no way that we were going to be able to house all of these people unless the CoC...the Continuum of Care, actually commandeered its resources for this campaign. We started off saying...Okay, seven out of ten open slots are going to go for this population of Veterans sleeping on the street or in emergency shelter but we already had so many non-Veterans in the pipeline that it took a while for that to actually go into effect. By that point, we were in a panic, remember? At one point we actually did pretty much commandeer almost all of the housing other than we always had plenty for non-Veteran families and we always took people who were going to die if we didn't house them next regardless of whether they were a Veteran. We really had to prioritize the Continuum of Care housing slots to get this done and a lot of people don't understand that is part of what this is going to take. Now, once you get to functional zero, you won't

be having to do that very much but to get there, you're definitely going to have to use Continuum of care resources.

Mark Johnston: So Sam, you and others have been mentioning that it took a while for this really to accelerate. Given that you had even less time to do it to achieve the goal by December of this last year, how did you get more units in line to be housing these Veterans?

Sam Joel: Well, overall we lived and breathed this. This was a top priority and we were relentless in our pursuit of this goal so that's the first thing. And right, there were a lot of different moving pieces to this effort and there are a bunch of things that have to happen before someone can go from living at the overpass to being in a house. One of them, of course, is you've got to have not only the voucher (the resource) but the unit. And so, who is going to provide these units? Where are they going to come from? Martha and the Continuum of Care had done a lot of great, great work creating a pipeline for landlords but what the Mayor did was really try to take that to the next level and that included grassroots efforts of sending the letter to the thousands, and thousands of landlords in our Housing Authority lists, that was going to the meetings with the landlords to make the pitch in front of them and to ask them to help us with this effort. Certainly, just having an all hands on deck approach was really, really important to finding those units.

Mark Johnston: Others? Other observations on that one? Sam, I'm going to ask you another question. How important was it from your perspective, and I would like Martha and others to join in here...how important was it to have a committed leader on this? We've heard a little bit about that but I just don't want to understate it.

Sam Joel: Like with anything, leadership matters a lot. The tone was set from the top by not only the Mayor but certainly the leadership at the VA, and the certainly the leadership at the Continuum of Care, and the leadership of all the different agencies that we had partnered with. Leadership though, has many different forms. Leadership is both the top level folks down but it's also down to up and so we had all sorts of great leaders involved in this initiative. All it took though, was maybe a few key folks in the beginning to say...Yes, yes we can do it and then all of a sudden people started to follow those leaders, like the Mayor and that was really important.

Mark Johnston: So just to follow up to Martha then...Martha, clearly the Mayor was critical for it happening here. There are many communities out there that don't have a Mayor yet that has committed to ending Veteran homelessness. What should they do?

Martha Kegel: I go back to when after Katrina we had two huge homeless camps in downtown New Orleans and at that point our then Mayor was too busy working on other aspects of the recovery to really focus so much on the homeless aspect and so when we needed to coordinate a lot of partners and very complex coordination issues, we asked somebody else in the community...Judge Calvin Johnson, who was a retired Judge, very well loved in the community, great stature in the community, everyone respected him...he was then the new director of the Mental Health System, having retired as a Judge and we asked him to quarterback it. I think that if for some reason your Mayor is not available that will definitely be hard but you can get around that by getting another big stature person to lead this effort and we had prior experience with that.

I think the key for any problem you encounter...this is the main point I think...is if plan A doesn't work, find a plan B. If plan B doesn't work, find a plan C. There is always a way around every hurdle you face.

Sam Joel: We went all the way to plan Z [laughter].

Mark Johnston: Martha, I'm sure as many in the audience are hearing this, that you all have this great Mayor, you must have a lot of extra resources that you got from HUD or just an unusual set of perfect system etc. that made this happen. To what extent is there any validity to that?

Martha Kegel: None. There is no validity to that. We are far from perfect. We have many problems. We have strength. There's no doubt about the fact that we have strength. We have this longstanding collaborative, we have the urgency of having experienced homelessness together, we have a really well established system of recruiting landlords because we've had such a big problem with homelessness since Katrina, so we have some advantages but we have a lot of disadvantages too. At the time we started this campaign and certainly a few years before that, we had definitely one of the highest per capita rates of Veteran homelessness in the country. We're a pretty small city and we had huge numbers of homeless Veterans. We also had half of our Veterans sleeping on the street. It was really hard to find them. Like many cities...most cities in America...we didn't have other resources other than the federal resources so we had a lot of disadvantages and I feel like if we could do this here, then it can be done anywhere.

Mark Johnston: Thanks, Martha. In terms of the sense of urgency, there's all these different items you've identified so far and it gets down to really prioritizing the resources though. I wanted to get a sense from several of you how you prioritize what you did. I'd like to start frankly with Gary, if you wouldn't mind. For instance, HUD/VASH...how did you really prioritize or redirect HUD/VASH to be more effective?

Gary LaBorde: I think all of us here, and to include the VA, we've always housed Veterans. We were doing what we were asked to do, but we weren't doing it in a coordinated effort and that's the same thing with HUD/VASH. Every day we try to house Veterans and we do make it a priority but what we had to do was develop a team within HUD to focus on this subgroup of Veterans that we were trying to house in Orleans Parish and it was to find someone who could take the lead on that in HUD/VASH, develop that individual, give them the information that we need to let them know what the initiative was and what our goal was and made it a priority and that's what we did. We had a separate team in HUD/VASH that would focus on the list of Veterans that we had. Not only that, the HUD/VASH team as well as everyone here at the table and all of our community partners...we know every step of this process. You talked about leadership a little while ago...the key to that, not only finding a sub-team and HUD to do this very effectively, but you have to do this at every step of the process...someone that you can pull to the table and say this isn't working as efficiently as it should, what can we do about it? Someone you can go to and say...Okay, we want to house everyone in 30 days or less...why can't we make it three weeks? We've done it in three weeks...why can't we make it in two weeks...and have those individuals at the table to make that happen.

When we looked at HUD, we got a team together, they prioritize it, they focus just on that group and they continue to do so today.

Mark Johnston: Okay, thank you. So we've heard from the VA about prioritization, Martha has described the prioritization they use for Continuum of Care funding...are there any other observations before we move on, on prioritization? I think we've covered it well but if you have something burning let's get it out there.

Martha Kegel: I think it's important to talk about SSVF for a minute because the SSVF program has a very broad eligibility...basically, low income Veterans. We found that, at least in our community, there was a barrier to their serving homeless Veterans was that they needed to be able to show that after the eighth month consecutive limit...you could only serve someone in that program for eight consecutive months...so that means that at the end of that eighth month, the person would no longer be able to get rental assistance. Well, in order to serve a literally homeless person, they needed to be able to show that the person would be self-sufficient at that point. That was a big problem because a lot of the folks we were dealing with were just not going to be able to be self-sufficient in that length of time so we needed to really get all that changed.

It really required a lot of work back and forth with the federal agencies, with the local agencies and basically it even required me to send a letter that just said I will guarantee that if that person needs

additional assistance we will guarantee it. How was I going to guarantee that? I wasn't entirely sure but you have to be willing to step up and do what has to be done in order to get the right people served...the most vulnerable people need to be served by this program. We really changed the whole SSVF system in our community so that SS could be very effectively used as a bridge to permanent supportive housing either on the Continuum of Care or at VASH, but because SSVF doesn't require proof of disability and all the documentation for that at the get go, it had the agility to house people very, very quickly and then it would be enough time for us to then come up with a permanent resource that people with disabilities might very well require. There are a lot of ways that every program needed to change its prioritization in order to fulfill this goal.

Sam Joel: Can I make one other point about prioritization is that prioritization requires coordination and when you prioritize a group like you have to do with this initiative, you have to have the down line logistics in place, the coordination in place to make sure that prioritization actually happens on the street.

Mark Johnston: Tyra, I've got a question for you. I am guessing that during this process, as the timeline is quickly shortening, there would be times of fixation on what the number had to be that you had to reduce Veteran homelessness by to claim you'd actually done it. How did you as a community, help insure there wasn't such a fixation?

Tyra Johnson Brown: What we did first in the communities that they're doing out there is you're going to start with that Point in Time count and from that, we were able to set our goal based upon that but we couldn't just go off of that. Because, as you know, Veterans as well as any population fall into homelessness every day so we had to make sure that we were not just worried about that number but as a community, any Veteran that was coming into homelessness and being able to house them to get them through that process and that's what our focus was on. Yes, we had the weekly meetings, we actually had a thermometer to show us how we were moving through the process but also had from that master list anybody who was coming on as a Veteran that had been identified...that we would get them through that.

Mark Johnston: Thank you. So Sam, I'd like to ask you from the Mayor's Office perspective...we've heard a lot about the great contributions of the Continuum of Care, about the VA, about your city agencies that help on this...to what extent were you able to use other groups in your city to help achieve this goal?

Sam Joel: When we took on this challenge, we knew that we needed help and we knew that we weren't going to hit our goal unless everyone was on board. What we really tried to do was think broadly about who could help, even beyond the agencies and the service providers and all the folks already in this sphere. One group that turned out to be really, really important was our local VFW and our local military commands. We're very blessed to have a great presence of the Coast Guard, and the Navy, and the Marines and others round the region and so we built an army of 150 something Veterans and active duty military who scoured the streets for us looking for our homeless Veterans and that significantly supplemented the day in and day out efforts of the VA and of UNITY to locate and house our homeless Veterans. Really just survey the landscape. Survey your city or survey your state and really try to zero in on those folks who could lend a hand, who could walk the streets to try to find your Veterans maybe once a month, who could help carry furniture up a staircase to move in some of your Veterans, who maybe would want to donate some money or donate some lightly used furniture...all that stuff was really, really important. It takes everybody to hit this goal.

Mark Johnston: Earlier this year, I was able to interview the key stakeholders in New Orleans including these four panelists and a resounding theme that I heard over and over again was the key is partnership, when I said what was really the key to solving this problem. I'd like to actually ask each of you to think about that for a moment. Maybe we can start with Tyra. What were ways that you either created or strengthened partnership in your city?

Tyra Johnson Brown: One way was just the partnership with Housing Authority, the meetings and all. It was strengthened I think mostly because of us coming together, having that common goal, talking about the issue, resolving the issue and just that collaboration that you constantly heard over and over...that was key through it all was the coordination and collaboration.

Mark Johnston: I'll just preface this when I wait to hear from Sam here but, as I recall when I asked you that question you said there were three solutions here. It's partnership, partnership and partnership [laughter].

Sam Joel: Why did you steal my line?

[Laughter]

Sam Joel: That is 100% right. You've got to bring everybody together and you've got to have all of your partners on board. That starts with communication, that starts with giving people the benefit of the doubt, that starts with trust and really it's incredible once you start talking to each other and working with each other and then all of a sudden you're a team and that's certainly what we found in New Orleans.

Mark Johnston: Thanks.

Martha Kegel: I think trust is very important. You've got to be able to have the trust in one another that if something is not working you can pick up the phone, go over to the person's office and just tell them and trust that it won't be taken the wrong way and you'll just work in a very positive way on a mutual solution. At the same time, if you've accidentally hurt a partner's feelings, you've got to attend to it. You can't just ignore it. You've got to attend to these really important relationships and you've got to express appreciation. One of the things that we did on the ground level was we gave all kinds of gifts and things to the people that were doing the work on the ground just to express our appreciation because they were working many, many, many more hours under great stress than they were paid to do. Just praise each other because this takes a lot of work, it's very stressful and you've got to appreciate one another.

Gary LaBorde: I think communication is one of the most significant things you can do...communicate early and often with everything whether it's good news or bad news. Take our use of real-time data every time that we met, significantly helped seeing those numbers go down, I think not only told us and we were able to show the leadership as well, but the individuals on the front line that...Look, we are doing this. This can work. When someone comes to you and tells you that's not how we've done it, that's just a starting point. Me personally, I think we heard that several times. We were all housing Veterans before; we've all done this. Well, we do it in very different ways. Don't feel too uncomfortable knowing that you're going to have to do your process a little bit different for the overall goal of housing Veterans very quickly and to keep it going, to actually show the reduction in numbers weekly during our meetings and communicating very frequently and often.

Martha Kegel: I wanted to say that it takes a village to house homeless Veterans and especially as we were getting towards the end of the campaign we would be like...Okay, you have too many Veterans on your list; you can't handle all of them. Not in any way an insult, you have just taken on too much so this person where will take on this case. We worked as a group actually, case managing and housing the last 150 Veterans. It was a group effort.

I also really want to give a shout out to one of our partners who is not here which is the Housing Authority of New Orleans. Early on, this is probably the first thing that city did was go to the Housing Authority and get them to agree to set aside 200 vouchers for this campaign, which we used as graduation vouchers. In other words, because we didn't have any freestanding case management services in the community that could be partnered with these vouchers, what we did

was use them to graduate people who had been in VASH for a long period of time and were stable enough that they didn't need case management but they still needed the affordable housing and the same thing with the Continuum of Care permanent supportive housing. We used them to graduate people that had been in those programs long enough and no longer needed the services but still needed the affordable housing and that way we freed up a lot of slots that we could actually serve chronically homeless Veterans, Veterans with very challenging behavioral health issues because we had the case management services available through VASH or through the Continuum of Care permanent supportive housing resources and the Housing Authority was an awesome partner on this and remains to this day in speeding up that process and being willing to do things that were unusual and that's what it takes.

Mark Johnston: Just to clarify, in terms of the 200 vouchers, I'm presuming that the vast majority of those are turnover vouchers...they didn't have just 200 vouchers sitting there?

Martha Kegel: Right, they were turnover vouchers.

Sam Joel: And they committed it to this effort.

Tara Johnson Brown: The last thing I wanted to say is accountability. Do not be afraid to hold everybody accountable for their part. If they're responsible for doing something and they did not do it, you call them to the table. You have to do that and that puts the urgency into it also. You have to be able to make everybody accountable for their part.

Mark Johnston: With all that effort, you actually achieve the functional goal of ending Veteran homelessness by the 1st of January so the question I have both for Gary and for Martha is, what things were you able to institutionalize so that it wasn't just a one off where you're doing something for six months and you're done, where you've now got something in place that can carry forward to keep that number at functional zero?

Gary LaBorde: I think if you look at it overall, the entire process has been institutionalized. I know from the VA standpoint, I think everyone here...we don't want to go back to where it takes over 30 days to house a Veteran. We don't want to get to that point where we were before. We want to continue to do it quickly so anywhere from the eligibility check within 24 hours which we continue to do today, to meeting with our community partners on a regular basis...for those of you out there that are starting this now, the difficult part is going to be maintaining it. Once you reach this goal, it's just as hard to maintain it as it was to develop the strategies to be successful to reach this goal. I would say that we institutionalized this entire process. We institutionalized feeling comfortable speaking to our community partners. We institutionalized identifying every step of this process and when we identified a barrier, addressing it very quickly with the individual that owns that process. In the very beginning, our goal was to house individuals within 30 days and to meet that goal we had to house so many every month to reach this goal. The first couple of months we weren't meeting that goal. That thermometer didn't move very quickly but once we broke it down into small pieces, identifying every process and saying...Okay, this process takes 15 days, the other process here only took three days...who is responsible for that process and are they at the table? Those types of small strategies and things that we've done, we've institutionalized that and we continue to do that today.

Martha Kegel: The last thing you want to do after doing all this hard work is to see it unravel and it will unravel immediately if you don't already have your plan in place for how you're going to maintain it. You don't want to have done all this work and then very quickly you're back to having all these Veterans sleeping on the street in the shelter long-term. Even though you're really busy right now, it's really important to spend some time at your leadership meetings even while you're working on getting to functional zero, to talk about what kind of rapid response system you're going to have in place the day that you meet functional zero so that you're maintaining the goal and you're actually living up to that commitment to house every newly homeless Veteran within an

average of 30 days, and you know that you're housing them because you're scouring the streets, and you're scouring the shelters every night looking for them. You've got to attend to that.

I have to say that as proud as I am that we were the first city to effectively end Veteran homelessness and get to the functional zero, I am prouder still by far that we have maintained it and we have always maintained it ever since January 2nd when we got to functional zero in the first place. We do that by maintaining the same systems that we put into place. The same staff members that I commandeered to run the campaign at UNITY as the backbone organization are continuing to do that today. I don't really have funding for this quite yet so we're in a bit of a deficit position but we are looking for long-term funding for the system. I am not going to go back to where we were before where we have people who served our country living long-term homeless. Even a few months homeless is totally unacceptable.

As of today, we've housed an additional 94 homeless Veterans since getting to functional zero and we've done it within an average of 23 days. That is awesome. We are really excited about that. We look at that data every week. We still have our navigators meeting every week and are doing all the work it takes to house people rapidly.

Mark Johnston: I've asked Martha a few times over the last few months how it has been going on maintaining a functional zero. One example that I will always remember is that the outreach team here was interacting with a particular individual 252 times saying...I don't want to be housed, and finally they changed their minds because they saw these outreach workers really cared and the system is in place to not just get to functional zero at a point in time but carry that goal forward indefinitely.

We have time for one final question that I'd like each of our panelists to answer and that is, as you reflect on the fact that there are lots of communities that have been doing great work on ending Veteran homelessness but aren't quite there yet, what particular piece of advice would you have for them? I'd like to start with Tyra.

Tyra Johnson Brown: To be innovative. There is no one way of doing things. You have funders that come through restriction but be innovative, think outside the box...it can work.

Sam Joel: I would say be completely an utterly relentless and just make it happen. The other thing, and we've said this a few times, is the downline logistics...the operational pieces of this are really complicated and really big and so zeroing in on creating that unbroken chain from identifying the homeless Veteran on the street to getting them perhaps to a community center, to getting them into temporary housing, to getting them eventually into permanent housing...having each piece of that path laid out clearly with not just some general idea of how it works but okay...Steve, you're responsible for taking this homeless Veteran to the shelter, using this van that we're going to provide, at this time. It's those details that really make this whole effort work. I would say really focusing on the operational things.

Mark Johnston: Martha?

Martha Kegel: I would say ask for help. Two really important pieces of help that have to be mentioned are community solutions which is running the Zero 2016 campaign and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, which helped us tremendously.

Gary LaBorde: I'd say leadership is a huge one...having leadership at the higher levels like we had at the VA and the Mayor's office but most importantly is having the resources there available now. It is very difficult to engage a Veteran on the street and tell them...We're going to house you...and you don't have any housing apartments or anywhere to send them. You lose your credibility at that point. You really need to have it all in place so that when that individual goes to that shelter that night, the next morning you have a staff member that's going to meet them there, and that very

afternoon you have someone that's going to assist them with their eligibility and make that determination and the application process follows right behind it. If the inspection takes 30 days or 15 days, you need to have someone that's going to be right there to say...No, it doesn't have to take that long. I'm going to pick up the phone and call this individual at the Mayor's office and they're going to make it happen and then you're going to also have housing units sitting there waiting for that Veteran. Until you have that in place, it's going to be very difficult for you to house Veterans quickly and to meet your goal but the only way you can do that is to have buy in from the leaders, take that a step down to the individuals who own the processes, meet very frequently and you can be successful.

Mark Johnston: So in closing for this webinar, I'd first of all like to thank our panelists for being here today but more especially for giving us these real world, real life examples about how they pulled it together as a group. To you as the audience, I really want to underscore the fact that you can do this. I would hope that when you've heard the various insights from these great panelists, knowing that you have peers in your community just like them that you could be recommitted to ending Veteran homelessness and actually do it. Thanks very much for tuning in today.