

Results of Homeless Court

In its first two years of operation Homeless Court cleared 561 cases with an 85% success rate. Defendants performed 11,032 hours of community service, of which 5,897 constituted volunteer hours over and above those required to clear their sentences. Forty-four people achieved sobriety, 33 found housing, 25 found employment and 13 regained custody of their children.

Community Partners and Referral Agencies

In order for a case to be placed on the Homeless Court calendar it needs to be referred by a caseworker in a social service agency that assists the homeless. If you need to be connected to a referral agency, go to the Self-Help Legal Access Center in Room 400 of the Ventura Superior Court, Monday-Friday, from 8:00 am to noon, and 1:30 pm to 4:00 pm.

Some of our community partners are:

Referral Agencies

Cal-WORKS West Ventura Job and Career Center (805) 654-3434

Catholic Charities -Ventura (805) 643-4694

Community Action of Ventura County, Inc.

Oxnard (805) 985-1555

HELP of Ojai, Community Assistance Program (805) 640-3320

Lutheran Social Services - Thousand Oaks (805) 497-6207

Ventura County Rescue Mission (805) 436-4602

Salvation Army - Ventura (805) 648-4977

Samaritan Center - Simi Valley (Thursdays from 7:00 -10:00 AM only) (805) 579-9166

Simi Valley Department of Community Services (805) 583-6759

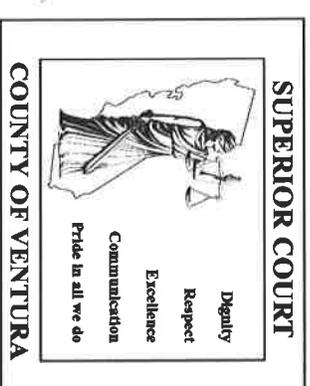
Turning Point Foundation - Ventura (805) 652-0596

Ventura County Behavioral Health (805) 289-1709

For additional information please contact the Ventura County Public Defender's Office (805) 654-2201

HOMELESS COURT

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA COUNTY OF VENTURA



*Our Court is Here
for the People we Serve.*

What is Homeless Court?

Homeless Court is a special Superior Court session for the homeless to resolve outstanding minor offenses and warrants arising out of the condition of homelessness, such as sleeping or drinking in public. Homeless Courts have been found to reduce court and jail costs, build community collaboration, improve access to court, and assist the homeless in getting needed services and jobs. Improving access to court for the homeless is accomplished by bringing the court to the community. Court sessions are held at local shelters or agencies that serve the homeless.

Homeless Court builds on partnerships between the court, businesses, local shelters and service agencies, law enforcement, and the Offices of the District Attorney and Public Defender. It attempts to resolve community problems created by homelessness with practical solutions. Initial referrals to Homeless Court originate with the shelters and service agencies. The prosecution and defense review the cases before the court hearing, both to make sure the offense is eligible for disposition through Homeless Court and to institute alternative sentencing. Homeless Court is designed for efficiency to have cases heard, resolved and sentenced all in one hearing.

What Cases are Eligible for Homeless Court?

Defendants who participate in the program are selected by their social worker using criteria based on the defendant's ability to comply with the terms of alternative sentencing and a willingness and desire to make an improvement in his or her life. A basic requirement is that the individual meets the federal definition of a "homeless" person, and that he or she has already completed the community service work.

Homeless Court only resolves cases of a minor nature, that do not carry any mandatory jail sentence, including all infractions and certain misdemeanors related to homelessness.

When and Where Does Homeless Court Meet?

Homeless Court generally convenes bimonthly on the last Friday of the month at 11:00 a.m. at one of the facilities that serve the homeless community, such as the Salvation Army in Ventura, Community Action of Ventura County, Inc., in Oxnard, or Samaritan Center in Simi Valley. Homeless Court may not convene certain months because of holidays, or reasons related to the court's calendar.

What is Alternative Sentencing?

Alternative sentencing substitutes community service, volunteer work, counseling and/or participation in agency programs for fines, fees and/or custody. The alternative sentencing structure is not coercive or entirely punitive in nature, rather it is designed to allow those who want to account for their wrongdoing to make a meaningful contribution to their community and, hopefully, reintegrate into society. The quality, in addition to the quantity of the homeless individual's time spent in performing community service, is to be considered in evaluating the individual's success.

The court order and sentence are designed to provide a constructive alternative to fines and custody. Instead of only punishing the individual or imposing a traditional sentence, the Alternative Sentencing Strategy provides attainable goals and benefits. These goals and benefits are selected by the participant and his or her social worker to improve the likelihood of success. The desire is to empower the individual and enable him or her to overcome the adversity that fosters or causes homelessness, while at the same time giving the community the benefit of community service work performed instead of financing the incarceration of the individual.