

YBCBD Approach: Opioid Crisis and Discarded Needles

January 16, 2018

Issue Overview

San Francisco and Yerba Buena face a worsening opioid crisis and an increase in discarded needles used to inject drugs. The number of needles removed from Yerba Buena streets by our service teams increased dramatically from an average of 50 per month in 2016 to 870 per month in 2017. We picked-up 1,800 syringes and needles last November alone. By comparison, the adjacent Central Market Community Benefit District removed 2,137 needles in July 2017 and 4,511 in November. In San Francisco, about 22,500 people inject drugs, according to one estimate from 2015. Nationally, nearly 64,000 people died of drug overdoses in 2016 with the majority coming from opioid-related drugs like opioid painkillers, synthetic opioids and heroin, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

YBCBD Approach & Services

City agencies are primarily responsible for confronting problems such as drug addiction, homelessness, mental illness and uncivil behavior. However, community benefit districts, health organizations and many others also can and do play an important and supportive role. Connecting people in need to available resources — and doing so with compassion, respect and dignity — is our top priority, and the best way for us to address this issue. We also monitor areas of our district and assign resources to “hot spots” to address issues of concern, such as discarded needles.

The YBCBD’s Community Guides, Social Services Specialist, SFPD bike patrol officer and Clean Team undergo comprehensive training to help people in need and address public health issues. All are trained in proper collection and disposal of discarded needles.

- **Community Guides.** Our guides provide assistance to people in need, such as shelter referrals, connecting individuals with the San Francisco Homeless Outreach Team and helping those in distress from health issues. A few examples of their training courses include: mental health first aid; CPR/basic first aid; de-escalating confrontational situations; transgender sensitivity; and more.
- **Clean Team.** In addition to daily comprehensive cleaning and graffiti abatement services, our Clean Team works with the Department of Public Health and the Department of Public Works to safely remove needles and syringes, human waste and remnants of encampments. Examples of their training include: safe working tips; addressing hazardous materials; customer service; CPR/basic first aid; and more.
- **Social Service Specialist.** In 2016, we hired a specially-trained Social Service Specialist to connect people in need with available resources. In 2018, we will add a second specialist. By building trusted relationships with our street population and helping them navigate the complex system of available resources, there is a better chance of success than just providing a shelter referral or directions to a place for a hot meal. In other instances, our Social Service Specialist will take time to help a person make an appointment to sign up for housing benefits and then escort the individual to the appointment.

- **Collaborating with the City.** We work closely with City departments and social service agencies and are learning from their efforts. YBCBD staff actively participate in City efforts to address neighborhood concerns. We serve on the Southern Station Community Police Advisory Board and the Better Market Street Citizen’s Advisory Committee. Staff attend hearings on issues related to pedestrian safety, transit, housing and homelessness and participate in the bi-monthly meetings of local community benefit districts to share resources and information.

- **Community Participation.** The YBCBD provides several ways for the community to report the need for cleaning and quality of life services, including assisting those in need and picking up needles. All issues are received, reviewed and prioritized by a dispatcher who sends a Community Guide, Clean Team member, the Social Services Specialist or the SFPD bike patrol officer to address requests. To request services:
 1. [Download our mobile app](#) called YBCBD Assist
 2. Contact us in any of these ways:
 - YBCBD Assist App
 - Dial 415-543-9223
 - Text 415-559-1362
 - Email dispatch@ycbd.org
 - Click YBCBD.org and go to the contact page to access [YBCBD assist](#)

The largest portion of our annual budget — \$2.4 million — is allocated to clean and safe services. With our dedicated staff, clean and safe teams, and volunteer committees and Board, we will continue to work with the City, community organizations and our property owners to be part of solutions to the opioid crisis and other complex neighborhood issues to advance the quality of life for everyone in Yerba Buena.