



Summary: Saffron Strand 2011 Conference “Overall Evaluation”

Our 2011 Conference – “Sustainable Solutions to Homelessness: Integrating Employment, Health Care & Housing,” May 16-17 in Richmond -- provided professional and public education that contributed in many ways to reducing homelessness in Richmond and in other communities of Contra Costa County as well as Alameda County, Solano County, San Francisco County, Santa Cruz County, San Diego County and Los Angeles County:

- Total participation of about 150 professionals and others working with the homeless as well as public officials, volunteers, and concerned citizens of Bay Area communities
- More than 30 municipalities represented, mostly in the Bay Area, but a number from other California communities and communities in other states
- International, national, and local Bay Area, Contra Costa, and Richmond-based authorities sharing their expertise and experience as plenary speakers, panel discussion members, and workshop leaders
- Networking opportunities with colleagues from throughout California and from British Columbia, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Washington (state), Washington (DC), and Wisconsin
- Overall very positive plenary and workshop evaluation results covering the full two days and more than 2 dozen educational and networking activities

As we did for our First Annual Conference in 2010, we measured performance of the 2011 Conference through administration of an “Overall Evaluation” and individual “Workshop Evaluations.” These evaluations enabled us to gauge the effectiveness of the Conference in whole and in part. Also, the evaluations have become part of the information for use in planning our Third Annual Conference, scheduled for May 21-22, 2012.

During the second day of the 2011 Conference, we distributed the anonymous and voluntary “Overall Evaluation” questionnaire to about 150 conference participants and received back 40 completed questionnaires (27% response rate).

Comparison: 2010 and 2011 Conferences

As in 2010, participants in the 2011 Conference included a wide range of professionals and others working with or in frequent contact with homeless people in Richmond, other West Contra Costa communities, and communities throughout the Bay Area. Professional disciplines of the 2011 Conference participants included health care, social services, public education, workforce development, veterans’ affairs, and others. Their job titles included program director, nurse program manager, bilingual (Spanish) medical social worker, vocational rehabilitation specialist, youth activities specialist, executive director, psychologist, behavioral coach/community liaison/resource coordinator, rapid responder, information technology specialist, and others. Conference participants had diverse educational backgrounds, including a variety of social science and health care bachelor’s and master’s degrees, a PhD in Psychology, an MBA, and some with “some college” and “high school/GED.”

Compared to 2010, the 2011 Conference attracted both a wider range of professionals as well as participants from a wider geographic area, including 9 counties in California, which total was 5 more than in 2010.

As they did in 2010, 100% of respondents rated the overall quality of the Conference in 2011 as “excellent” (85% vs. 67% in 2010) or “good.” Respondents also appreciated the quality of the conference workshops, with 100% rating the workshop quality “excellent” (65% versus 71% in 2011) or “good.” Once again, no one rated the conference quality as “average,” “below average,” or “poor,” even though the 2011 Conference was twice as long, extending over 2 full days in contrast to the single day of the 2010 Conference.

Respondents approved of the timing of the 2011 Conference (Monday-Tuesday in mid-May), with 100% stating the timing was “excellent” (65%) or “good” (35%), which was a higher rating than for the timing of the 2010 Conference (Monday in early May). However, as in 2010, there was a wider range of response among other general conference questions. For example, somewhat fewer (80%) approved the 2011 Conference schedule (9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with plenary session, luncheons, and workshops), down from 2010 (86%).

Ratings for the quality of service improved over last year (57% in 2010 vs. 75% in 2011). Similarly, quality of facilities improved (57% “excellent” or “good” at the Craneway Pavilion in 2010 vs. 85% at the Richmond Memorial Auditorium and Convention Center in 2011). Although respondents rated the quality of printed materials somewhat lower this year, they scored the 2011 Conference higher for timeliness of registration materials and usefulness of the Saffron Strand website. As in 2010, no respondent rated the 2011 Conference as “below average” or “poor” in any question or category.

As in 2010, the 2011 questionnaire respondents had considerable conference experience: Some 95% of respondents had attended at least one conference in the past year and 30% had attended 3 or more conferences. They chose to attend the 2011 Conference “Sustainable Solutions to Homelessness” for a variety of reasons, ranking the top five reasons as (1) “program reputation,” (2) “professional development,” (3) “workshops,” (4) “recommendation of colleague or employer,” and (5) “plenary/keynote speakers.”

Verbatim comments about the 2011 Conference

What participants liked best about the Conference:

- The friendly atmosphere, very accommodating atmosphere, great volunteers, excellent staff, very organized overall.
- Home grown but very professional! Nice to be away from governmental ideology!
- Friendliness of Saffron Strand staff. Great plenary session & workshops.
- The awards are wonderful in recognizing special folks!
- Award ceremony very moving.
- Warm gathering of advocates, service providers, clients all who respect the dignity and potential of people who are homeless.
- The quality of all speakers was amazing. I learned so much.

What participants liked least about the Conference:

- More breakout sessions. Not 1.5 hr. time slots. Maybe 45 min. time slots to allow attendance to more sessions. For the sessions that I was not able to attend, perhaps have a materials tab. Cold rooms.
- Too short.

- Cost –I would have liked to bring more of my staff but could not due to cost.
- Only that I wish more people could have been here to experience this conference!
- Where were the homeless people?
- Room freezing.
- Too cold, bad food.

For more information about the Saffron Strand 2010 and 2011 Conferences, including PDF downloads of the programs, please visit <http://saffronstrand.org>.

2011 Conference Findings

The Saffron Strand 2011 Conference “Sustainable Solutions to Homelessness: Integrating Employment, Health Care & Housing” found:

- The most promising and cost-effective employment-focused solutions to homelessness involved the integration of vocational rehabilitation, education, and innovative skills-building programs with supportive health care and housing programs for the homeless, thereby providing a “continuum of transition” out of homelessness, in contrast to the conventional concept of “continuum of care” for the homeless.
- Conference workshop participants identified a number of gaps, incentives, and disincentives in existing programs for the homeless, including the economically unsustainable “housing-first” public assistance model, and explored ways to integrate new solutions that encourage and support “employment-first” approaches.
- Expertise in plenary sessions and workshops explained the best practices of traditional programs for the homeless and new perspectives to expand solutions and achieve better results through multi-discipline, multi-program collaboration and integration.
- Programs to optimize employability and career potential of homeless persons already existed in other states, such as Massachusetts, and many of their best features may help reduce homelessness in Richmond and other communities in Contra Costa County and other Bay Area counties.
- Specific proposals for employment-focused solutions to reduce homelessness included expanding Saffron Strand’s membership-based “intentional community” beyond Richmond, which would help get more homeless adults back to work and help reduce public expenditures for emergency, health care, and law enforcement services involving the homeless.

About Saffron Strand

Saffron Strand, Inc. is the Richmond, California-based 501(c)(3) non-profit membership organization which builds the job skills and increases employment of homeless adults in Richmond and other Contra Costa County communities. Our mission includes education and training on homeless issues with the goal of increasing economic self-sufficiency of homeless persons and reducing unemployment, poverty, and public expenditures for emergency, law enforcement, and medical services related to homelessness.

For more information about Saffron Strand, please visit <http://saffronstrand.org> or contact Yvonne Nair (tel. 510.275.9594, e-mail Yvonne@SaffronStrand.org).