

Spotlight on SLNC's Homelessness in Silver Lake Committee

The SLNC's Homelessness in Silver Lake Committee does important in-the-trenches work to respond to homelessness in a compassionate and effective way. We spoke with Committee Co-chairs Darius Derakshan and Nithya Raman to learn how this vital committee is serving Silver Lake—and how residents and stakeholders can be involved.

1) What is the mission of the Homelessness in Silver Lake Committee?

We hope to build a neighborhood-level movement in Silver Lake to respond to homelessness in a proactive, compassionate, and effective way. We believe it is especially important to increase community involvement and awareness at this time to ensure that funds from Measure H and HHH are spent to address our community's most pressing needs.

2) What types of issues are presented to the committee—and what are the biggest challenges?

In the brief four months that we have been an active committee, the #1 thing we hear the most is the community asking for ways to get directly involved and help with the alleviate the suffering of those experiencing homelessness. There are concerns that come up regarding public safety and cleanings, but for the most part, there seems to be an unmet demand for action, and we hope to solve that.

3) Your committee has been very active over the last months. What has been accomplished and which projects are you most proud of?

As co-chairs, over the last couple months, it's been a whirlwind. We have attended several homeless coalition meetings, HHH oversight committee meetings, visited homeless shelters like Recycle Resources and met with the fantastic community volunteer Rebecca Prine for advice, had a talk with Miguel Santana for insight and guidance, held one-on-one meetings and conference calls with virtually every homeless authority in Los Angeles from LAMP to LAHSA, did a half-day ride-a-long throughout CD13 with People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) and their fearless outreach team, partnered with leaders like Dorit Dowler-Guerrero who pioneered the active engagement in Silver Lake that we hope to continue, participated in the mayor's Homelessness Civic U program, and had many a late night planning session to digest our research and craft our neighborhood's response to this human crisis right in our backyard. It's been challenging, but fulfilling.

Our committee also drafted a motion, which the Silver Lake Neighborhood Council Governing Board ultimately approved, for a \$1,500 Neighborhood Purpose Grant (NPG) to People Assisting the Homeless ([PATH](#)), which will be used to support PATH's outreach programs to homeless people in Silver Lake.

I think the two accomplishments we are most proud of are the (1) cross-neighborhood formation of SELA (Silver Lake, Echo Park, Los Feliz, and Atwater) Neighborhood Homeless Coalition, as well

has (2) the Welcome Home Program, where our wonderful partners at PATH helped our neighbor Gonzalo find permanent housing. We then teamed up with our friends in the Los Feliz Neighborhood Council, Cat Kim and Janet Kim, to help Gonzalo turn his house into a home by making sure he had all of the household essentials, from bed sheets to dishes to dusters. With donations from our combined neighborhoods, Gonzalo received an incredible amount of household essentials that he would have otherwise struggled to purchase.

4) How does the homelessness committee interact with the City of Los Angeles? Can the committee help navigate the municipal bureaucracy?

It might be too soon to articulate a fully-baked response; however, for starters, we plan to assist our neighbors experiencing homelessness with navigating the bureaucracy as well as keep our city/county accountable in how they address the issue of homelessness and execute measures H and HHH.

5) Does Silver Lake have unique homelessness issues and if so, have they changed over the past year?

Every community has a unique relationship with homelessness, and our community is no different. Unlike Venice, Hollywood, and Skid Row, we have our own challenges as well as our own opportunities, and we look forward to meeting these head on.

6) What are your goals for the remainder of 2017?

Our goals are still being fleshed out, however, we do have a few things that we hope to get off the ground shortly, which include hosting our first Homeless Engagement Training Day with the help of Rebecca Prine and Dorit Dowler-Guerrero; creating and printing two separate Outreach Cards, one for housed community members and businesses and another one for community members currently experiencing homelessness; launching a Hygiene Kit Drive that would be used for engagement; and then begin performing bi-monthly Saturday Homeless Engagement.

7) How can people get involved with this committee?

We have two simple AND effective ways: Attend our meetings, which are held the First Tuesdays of every month at the Silver Lake Public Library at 6:30 p.m., and [reach out](#) to us to volunteer with our SELA Neighborhood Homelessness Coalition where you'll learn how to directly assist those experiencing homelessness.

Co-chair Bios

Darius Derakshan manages several advertising categories for *The Los Angeles Times* and is the co-chair of the Silver Lake Neighborhood Council's Homelessness in Silver Lake Committee. He is also the co-founder of the SELA Neighborhood Homeless Coalition and volunteers regularly at PATH. As an active member of the East Area Progressive Democrats, he has been focusing on flipping congressional seats from red to blue.

Nithya Raman is a business owner and co-chair of the Silver Lake Neighborhood Council's Homelessness in Silver Lake Committee. She also is the co-founder of the SELA Neighborhood Homeless Coalition. She previously worked for Miguel Santana at the Los Angeles City

Administrative Office and helped author the definitive 2015 report showing that homelessness was costing Los Angeles \$100 million a year. Earlier, she founded and ran a nonprofit in India that worked to improve conditions in slums and informal settlements.