On August 17, 2016, the Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement Team (HOME) received a referral from a retired Sheriff Deputy pertaining to a 30 year-old homeless individual with mental illness who was known to wander the streets of Little Tokyo, Union Station and La Placita areas. From a distance he gave the impression of a young Goth; he dressed in black and wore heavy boots. As you got closer, it was obvious the soles of his boots were worn and weathered, full of duck-tape and super glue. Along with this outward presentation, his demeanor was guarded and he demonstrated paranoid delusions and tangential speech. For confidentiality reasons, we will refer to him in this narrative as Jason.

Jason’s case was assigned to Ran Mullins, Medical Case Worker II at the HOME unit. For a couple of weeks, he and other team members (Mary Gonzalez- Veleta, Dario Tejeda, Anthony Jimenez, Carlos Juarez, Darryl Everege, Tyrone Barlow) canvased the areas where he was known to frequent with little success.
In mid-September, Ran and a colleague found him near the California Endowment, walking in a tired manner and looking disheveled. They approached him and offered him a bottle of water and socks which he accepted. During this interaction, they offered him case management services, emphasizing resources that address basic needs such as shelter. Jason declined the offer and instead asked if he could get assistance finding his wallet which he had lost months earlier. The team used this request as a starting point and gladly offered to help him apply for a California ID card (necessary to access most resources). Although Jason declined at that moment, Jason later accepted the help.

During the outreach phase, the team noticed that Jason presented symptoms associated with psychosis. They also noticed that he had Asperger-like behaviors. Although Jason displayed moderate symptoms, staff did not witness behaviors that would justify a 5150 evaluation. As outreach progressed, the team found that Jason had immersion foot/trench foot with blisters and swelling in his right toes. The HOME team immediately addressed this with steadfast persuasion and empathy and Jason was compelled to seek medical attention at St. John’s Medical Mobile Clinic.

On November 21, 2016, Ran was able to communicate with Jason’s mother (Samantha). Through collateral information, coupled with interactions with Jason, Ran found that Jason had a mother and multiple siblings in Toledo, Ohio. During phone conversations, Jason’s mother decided to come to LA and re-engage with her son, who she had not seen in four years (only having periodic phone contact with him). While Ran and Jason’s family were planning a visit, the team lost contact with Jason. Despite this, Jason’s mother and younger sister (Britney) decided to come to LA, determined to reconnect and convince him to return to Ohio.

Ran and the rest of the team worked hard to locate him. They partnered with the Business Improvement Officers of Chinatown, Union Station Security Team and other community members that were familiar with Jason’s description and situation. Time was of the essence, since Jason’s mother only had three days to find him. Ran also had to bear in mind that Samantha faced personal constraints related to her job.

On December 1, 2016, with the help of Chinatown BID and Union Station Security Teams, the HOME team was able to locate Jason near Union Station. Samantha and Britney were contacted immediately by the Union Station Security Lead Officer, who had located Jason, and the family was reunited.

When Jason saw his mother he looked at her and with a tired look told her, “Mom, can I go home with you?” Everyone cried, including the Union Station Security Team. However, the ordeal was not over. He still needed proper documentation to clear TSA and fly back home. Fortunately, Samantha had brought his birth certificate as requested by HOME staff. Also, Jason was able to obtain verification of mailing address, SSI
benefits and social security number from a local SSA office, shortly after the family arrived.

Jason now had two business days to obtain the CA ID or a “receipt document” from the DMV office that would hopefully provide him the proper identification at the airport. Ran and the HOME team worked arduously in drafting an advocacy letter addressed to the DMV which Jason used for leverage when the DMV asked for documentation that would identify him as homeless with a mailing address.

 Needless to say, the letter and the persistence of the HOME team worked! The DMV gave Jason a printout receipt identifying him and stating that his ID was being processed in Sacramento. Jason and his family (mother and sister) went to the airport on Saturday, December 3, 2016, and he boarded the plane.

On that same evening Ran received a message from Jason’s mother saying, “Just talked to TSA, we are good... we are all going home!!! I can’t thank you enough!!! I will stay in touch and let you know his progress... THANK YOU! God bless you! Each and every one of you! You are awesome!”

Finally, on December 4, 2016, Ran received another message from Samantha stating, “We made it. We are HOME SAFE!”

*The mission of HOME is to provide field-based outreach and engagement services to unserved or underserved individuals who are homeless, mentally ill, and residing in locations where outreach is not readily available. HOME will outreach to youth, adults, and older adults.

HOME engages homeless persons residing in parks, on streets, and under freeways to offer compassionate, knowledgeable, collaborative assistance in accessing medical, psychiatric and social services.

Team members provide consultation, advocacy, transportation, and intensive case management in order to empower individuals to develop their goals, become self-sufficient, and successfully transition to stable community living. The program will ensure coordination and linkage to services and support, including housing, mental health services, access to healthcare, and benefits establishment. Collaboration with other public and private social service agencies are vital components of our program.
Thanks to HOME Team members for all their hard work, including:

Gary Walendzik, Program Head
Luis Orozco, Supervisor
Ran Mullins, Medical Case Worker
Ada Ramos, Licensed Psychiatric Technician
Antonio Jimenez, Licensed Psychiatric Technician
Carlos Juarez, Psychiatric Social Worker
Chantal Mendoza, Mental Health Counselor RN
Dario Tejeda, Psychiatric Social Worker
Darryl Everage, Mental Health Services Coordinator
Tyrone Barlow, Community Worker
Mary Gonzalez-Veleta, Psychiatric Social Worker
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