

Here's how one 'angel' got 12 people off the streets in Redondo Beach

Lila Omura with Harbor Interfaith Services has been working since July to gain trust in the homeless community



James Holscher holds the keys to his new apartment in Compton alongside Lila Omura with Harbor Interfaith Services. The 30-year-old had been living on the streets in Redondo Beach for about 18 months. (Courtesy Lila Omura)

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Laura Lynch, 52, had been homeless in Redondo Beach for the better part of 10 years. She said she stopped counting the years, and even her age, while living on the streets.

"At some point you just shut it out," she said. "So I don't have a real concept of time."

She spent her days wandering the South Bay streets and her nights sleeping on the sand or under one of the piers. It wasn't so bad, she said, to listen to the waves at night and stare at the stars.

Recently, however, all that changed when Lynch was handed the keys to a studio apartment in Hollywood.

"I can't stop decorating and putting things away," she said this week. "I'm having so much fun. I'm so grateful."

Lynch, who was raised in Manhattan Beach, is among 12 people experiencing homelessness in Redondo Beach who were placed in apartments since July thanks to the non-profit Harbor Interfaith Services and outreach housing navigator Lila Omura.

Lynch was among the [175 counted in Redondo Beach in 2018](#) as experiencing homelessness in the city. Last year, the City Council approved [\\$250,000 toward homeless outreach services](#) such as paying for Omura's salary, and the efforts are paying off.

Lynch called Omura her angel for helping her receive a city of Los Angeles Continuum of Care Certificate for permanent housing and a small amount of furnishings such as a dresser, bed and television.

"She (Omura) had the most angelic soul and the most beautiful spirit I've ever known," Lynch said. "She's just the most magical person."

For Omura, seeing Lynch and others now in permanent housing represents an incredible accomplishment. Tasked with approaching some of the city's most acute members of the homeless community — known to police, emergency responders and city prosecutors — Omura was faced with an uphill battle.

"When I was first assigned to Redondo Beach I had a few meetings and everyone told me to forget about the individuals underneath the pier," Omura said. "They had been there for about three years and I was told they wanted to stay there."

So Omura started going to the pier for three months straight, five days a week at 7 a.m. as they were waking up. At first, she said, they resisted.

"I sat there on the bench and said I was from the agency and I was there to help them," Omura said. "Of course at first they told me to get out of there."

Then slowly, she said she began to win their acceptance.

"Finally, one individual — an older guy who had been there a long time — said 'Ok, I need to get an ID,' and he jumped in my truck and there we went," Omura said.

With his acceptance, Omura was able to reach others.

"He was able to vouch for me," she said. "And that's when the fun started."

Omura, who has spent the past two years as a social worker, left her career of 30 years as a commercial purchasing agent to do something more meaningful, she said. Though she doesn't make as much money, Omura said the change was worth it for the peace of mind and fulfillment she has now.

"It's incredibly rewarding," she said.

Omura credits the teamwork among herself, city prosecutors and the police department for working together to help get people the assistance they needed. In addition to getting them housing, the team works on clearing their court record.

From tent to apartment

James Holscher, 30, had been camping in a tent behind the U.S. Bank on Catalina Avenue in Redondo Beach for about a year and a half. His presence began to draw complaints from residents.

Holscher said the police knew he and others were there, checked up on them everyday, but never told them to leave. It was about time to find a new camping spot when Omura stepped in. Now, he has the keys to a one-bedroom apartment in Compton, and he's thrilled.

"It's amazing," he said. "I'm still kind of getting used to it. It's still hard to get used to being in the house after being on the streets for so long."

Now that he has a roof over his head, Holscher said he plans to go back to work possibly in the automotive or engineering fields. He also said he wants to get back into the life of his daughter, who is 5 years old.

"What Lila has been specifically doing is rolling up her sleeves and doing whatever it takes to get these folks in permanent housing," said Shari Weaver, coordinated entry system director. "A lot of labor of love goes into that."