

LOS ANGELES, Nov. 23, 2013 /PRNewswire/ -- Today, United Way of Greater Los Angeles hosted the 7th Annual HomeWalk to end homelessness, a 5k run and walk in Exposition Park in downtown

Los Angeles

. Lakers star

Kobe Bryant

, the event's Honorary Chair for the third straight year, addressed over 12,000 participants and gave the official start to the runners and walkers. With 58,423 homeless men and women in Los Angeles County

, over one-quarter of whom are chronically homeless, United Way and its partners are working to drive community awareness and action as part of the organization's ongoing campaign to end homelessness. Over the past seven years, HomeWalk has mobilized nearly 50,000 walkers, raised over

\$4 million

and will have moved 14,000 people off the streets and into permanent housing.

"Our communities continue to suffer and, by mobilizing Angelenos today, we can raise the funds and awareness necessary to create pathways out of poverty and move our homeless neighbors into permanent housing," said Elise Buik, president and CEO, United Way of Greater Los Angeles

"HomeWalk provides a platform for thousands of Angelenos to present a united front against homelessness, and that support is also echoed in the business community. The event is made possible through the generosity of numerous sponsors, including the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and Wells Fargo."

"Homelessness is not specific to one neighborhood or one type of person. It impacts all of us and it will take a community response in order to end homelessness in Los Angeles," said Kobe Bryant

. "That's why it inspires me to see everyone come out to HomeWalk. There's nothing we can't achieve as long as we work together."

Homeless statistics in Los Angeles County:

United Way Of Greater Los Angeles Hosts 7th Annual HomeWalk

Written by Australian Business

- 58,423 homeless people are in Los Angeles County; 6,955 (12%) are veterans
- 40% of those homeless are women and children; one in four children live under the poverty level
- Over one-quarter of those homeless (26%) are chronically homeless
- 43% are unsheltered, living on the streets or in cars
- Almost one third (32%) of homeless people in Los Angeles have a bachelors degree or higher
- One of the leading reasons for homelessness is the loss of a job; unemployment in the Country is 10.2% and over one-fifth (22.5%) of workers in the County earn less than \$25,000
- Over half our households (57.6%) spend over 30% of income on rent, so just one crisis can push a family into homelessness

"For the third straight year, Kobe Bryant has helped us connect with even more people who are interested in fighting homelessness. His foundation, the Kobe and Vanessa Bryant Family Foundation, has made great strides in protecting and providing for homeless children, and we are honored to have him join us in getting the word out about HomeWalk and the serious state of homelessness in L.A. County," continued Buik. "We are also grateful for the continued support of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, which again this year has matched walkers' donations of \$100 or more. With the support of advocates like Kobe and Vanessa, the Hilton Foundation, sponsors, our public officials and Los Angeles County residents, we will continue to make a powerful impact," continued Buik.

Today's event commenced in downtown Los Angeles' Exposition Park with elected officials, local celebrities and athletes and thousands of participants beginning the Walk at Figueroa street. The 5k route led participants through an educational journey displaying sobering scenes that illustrate homelessness and the pathway out of homelessness and into permanent housing.

The epidemic of homelessness in Los Angeles County is one of United Way's core priorities in its efforts to create pathways out of poverty. HomeWalk is part of United Way's work to raise the public awareness and create solutions to end homelessness. For more information please go to www.homewalkla.org.

About United Way of Greater Los Angeles

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United Way of Greater Los Angeles is a nonprofit organization that creates pathways out of poverty by helping homeless people move into housing, providing students with the support they need to graduate high school prepared for college and the workforce, and helping hard-working families become financially stable. United Way identifies the root causes of poverty and works strategically to solve them by building alliances across all sectors, funding targeted programs and advocating for change. For more information, visit www.unitedwayla.org.

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