

Howard County Plan to End Homelessness Update June 2013

Since the adoption of a Plan to End Homelessness in December 2010, Howard County has made substantial progress in creating a system to assist homeless citizens in achieving stable housing. Driven by a heightened commitment from county government and new federal requirements, Howard County is in the process of shaping loosely-connected services for those in housing crisis into a Coordinated System of Homeless Services (CSHS), developing new housing resources for people leaving homelessness, and using a robust data system for tracking and accountability.

Here's an update on some of the accomplishments since the Plan to End Homelessness was adopted:

- Coordinated System of Homeless Services (CSHS). Launched in September, 2012, CSHS provides smooth linkages to services for homeless or at-risk households. Key elements, in place or in development, include:
 - Single Point of Entry. Crisis counselors at Grassroots Crisis Intervention Services provide intervention, with the goal of resolving the immediate housing/homeless crisis. Households needing further intervention and shelter programs are referred to the system's case management team.
 - Case management. Individuals and families whose homelessness cannot be averted by a crisis counselor are referred to a case manager who will perform an in-depth assessment, connect clients to resources to gain stable housing, and be accountable with the client for achieving housing stability. Currently, case management is provided by Grassroots and Bridges to Housing Stability, two non-profits with extensive experience in working with the homeless population. Additional agencies will assume case management responsibilities as the system grows.
 - Flexible Financial Assistance. Replacing an expired federal assistance program, county funds are available to help households retain their housing or secure new housing. Grants are used to address problems that keep people out of housing, such as back rent or a security deposit.
 - Housing Locator. This function cultivates community relationships to find permanent housing placements for homeless households.
 - Employment. Having identified a variety of employment obstacles facing homeless job candidates, Committee members are working with the CSHS coordinator, agency staff and community volunteers to implement best practice employment supports to help improve both employment opportunities and job success.
 - Housing Stability Subsidy Program. Administered by the county's Department of Housing and Community Development, the program freed shelter space by providing subsidies and support services for seven very vulnerable households during this fiscal year – the first time county funds have been used for such a program.
 - SOAR Program. Trained counselors use this system to expedite applications for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)
 - Addiction treatment. Dedicated resources for the homeless population are administered by the Health Department to provide rapid access to addictions treatment on request. This includes in-patient treatment, which results in the Health Department Addictions Treatment Center assuming case management responsibility for the individual for six months.
 - Day Resource Center, Shelter, Transitional Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing. These existing housing and shelter programs serve over 200 households at any given time.

- Housing First Plan. After an assessment of the current homeless population, the Committee to End Homelessness has projected the need for 100 new housing units aimed at increasing capacity for the currently homeless population to leave homelessness. The new units include:
 - Permanent Supportive Housing (residences with support services provided)
 - Small Efficiency Apartments for the most vulnerable chronically homeless households. A site has been acquired for about 30 units to be developed and managed by Volunteers of America. The site will also accommodate a new Day Resource Center managed by Grassroots.
 - Recovery Houses for persons in recovery from addictions. The first three Recovery Houses have already opened.

- Homeless Management Information System. To provide for accountability on cases, to allow partner agencies to share information, to generate reports for system improvement and policy-making, and to meet expanded federal requirements for reporting, the county is developing a more robust Homeless Management Information System. The Department of Citizen Services is taking the lead in this initiative. Already, public and private agencies participating in homeless services have been trained in using the system. A new HMIS Administrator is leading the way in making the system better able to generate reports tracking key outcomes.

- Community Outcomes. The Housing First Plan, the Coordinated System of Homeless Services and the Homeless Management Information System are geared toward these measures:
 - Reduce the number of homeless.
 - Reduce the returns to homelessness.
 - Reduce the length of homeless episodes.
 - Reduce the number of newly homeless households.