



www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless

BREAKING NEWS

Weathering the Snow Storms of 2010

Over the past two weeks, the region has experienced record accumulations of snow. In spite of the two major snow storms that gripped the Northern Virginia region earlier this month, **the community providers and clients seeking assistance stepped to the plate by helping one another out**, demonstrating old school neighborly care and refusing to let the trying weather and impassable roadways impact their desire to further the community.

A staff member of the Patrick Henry Family Shelter who walked from his home over a mile away to get to the shelters during the latest snow storm is one example of the high level of commitment of our community to help the most vulnerable of our neighbors. **"I just wanted to be here and keep providing our residents with the sense of safety and the knowledge that the regular services would continue.** The storm brought out great things in our residents. People think about helping people who are homeless, but here **I saw people who are homeless helping people who were not.** Residents helped neighbors dig their cars out and shovel the walkways. They are the real heroes."

Hypothermia Prevention Prevails

The storms provided a true test for the Hypothermia Prevention Program in Fairfax County. Back-to-back snow storms made life trying for residents, but for those without a home, it was a question of pure survival. **During the 10-day time period following the first of the early February snowfalls, an average of 234 were served each night.** These individuals are those in need of shelter but cannot take advantage of the county's regular shelter and winter programs because they are already full.

Our countywide community truly came together to shelter homeless individuals from the brutal weather conditions. The extreme burden placed on the service delivery system by the deep snows and hard winds was overcome as staff and volunteers committed to keeping homeless individuals safe indoors and supplied with food. **The weather severely disrupted the program's normal staffing patterns, food deliveries by volunteers, and other support services provided by the community, yet sheltering at each and every one of the sites across the county did not cease for even a moment.**

A True Community Partnership

All four of the **nonprofit providers** that operate the hypothermia program in a particular region of the county had planned ahead to be sure individuals could get to sheltering sites, and sites opened early on Feb. 5 as the snow began to fall during the day. **For the entire weekend, the homeless guests were discouraged from leaving the sites to avoid the consequences of the drastic weather conditions.** One individual appeared at a site during the storm with evident frostbite and was subsequently treated by emergency medical technicians. **Fairfax County's Fire and Rescue Department** responded to several calls made by the hypothermia centers when such professional assistance was needed. In addition, a nurse-practitioner employed by **the county's Health Department** provided hands-on support to the program and is a valuable link between on-site staff and emergency medical services. Many of the homeless guests had chronic or acute health conditions that are exacerbated by living in a state of homelessness.

To properly manage the sites during and after the snow storms, some staff and volunteers stayed for continuous days and nights as well. Staff and volunteers could really only be relieved once others could get to the sites to take their places, but guests were well fed thanks to the volunteers associated with the **faith communities**, and guests were kept entertained by playing cards and board games in addition to watching movies and television.

Nonprofit and Faith Communities Pull Their Weight – and Then Some!

When skies cleared, the central county program operated by FACETS, reported that a huge sense of community was experienced by all as guests helped to shovel walkways and parking areas around the host church sites so staff and volunteers could get their cars in and out. **FACETS normally operates two church sites simultaneously, each planned for a manageable capacity of 25 guests for a total of 50. However, during the snow storms, the number of guests served each night was between 75 and 83.**

The Ventures in Community-Hypothermia Outreach Program (VIC-HOP) in South County operated by New Hope Housing in coordination with the Rising Hope United Methodist Church mission site, reported the guests were so grateful to be able to stay indoors that they kept the facility clean by mopping floors, cleaning bathrooms and even whipping the windows. **VIC-HOP normally reaches its capacity of 25 guests on a daily basis** and then transports additional individuals to the Eleanor Kennedy shelter overflow program. During the snow storms, since transporting became too difficult and the Kennedy Shelter program had more additional people seeking shelter than normal on very cold nights (an average of 12 versus 7), **several more guests, 3-7 on average, stayed at the VIC-HOP Rising Hope site.**

In the central part of the county, the program operated by **Volunteers of America (VOA) also served elevated numbers of clients and experienced unique challenges as well.** The men's church site program normally serves 25 guests, but averaged 36 during the snow storms, and the women's program that normally serves 7-10 women, spiked to 12 and 14 on the worst nights of the storms. A third group of about 10 guests remained at the shelter itself which was ready to take in those who might seek shelter in the middle of the night. One complication resulted when the power was lost at the men's church site, and although utility authorities estimated it would come back on soon, it did not until the next day, but guests remained warm in their sleeping bags and were grateful to be out of the elements. Staff said guests slept well because they were tired from shoveling, both for the church and others in the area, as the spirit remained energized.

Because VOA operates the Baileys Crossroads Community Shelter and utilizes it as a resource for the hypothermia prevention program, **food was stockpiled in the shelter pantry ahead of time in anticipation of the storms.** Transporting guests from the shelter after dinner to the church sites and back to the shelter for breakfast in the morning was difficult, but as the program's coordinator reported **"the vans get good traction when they are filled with 12 guests and their belongings."**

In the northern part of the county, Reston Interfaith (RI) successfully operated its hypothermia prevention program out of the North County Human Services Building, and in coordination with its operation of the nearby Embury Rucker Community Shelter. **They secured staff ahead of time whom they knew would be able to get in to work, and they made sure those same staff would be able to commit for several days.** RI hypothermia site does not have the capacity to allow more than the 25 guests that normally stay there, so additional guests were directed to stay at the Rucker Shelter itself. In addition to the "normal" winter program that houses 12 guests, the shelter on average served 31 guests each night, with a high of 43. Both sites continued to benefit from the food donations made by volunteers from the community.

Staff and volunteers at the shelters worked dutifully to keep the county-wide programs up and running and are applauded for their continuing dedication to this effort. This proves that **our community truly will go above and beyond the call of duty to carry out the missions of our organizations that serve those most in need.**

290 REAL PEOPLE ~ REAL RESULTS in 54 Days

In the first 54 business days, the HOST system has prevented 290 people – 104 unique households – from becoming homeless. These are few of their stories.

From Shelter to Permanent Housing

While living in hypothermia shelters, a county resident was determined to attain an associate's degree and become a certified electrician. Working with staff, he was able to manage his posttraumatic stress syndrome and complete his degree. **He was able to move out of homelessness and now lives in a supportive housing unit.**

Condolences Accepted Little More Easily

A county resident lost his wife who had been suffering from cancer last fall leaving him and their four children on the verge of homelessness. He was referred to the HPRP program with the hopes of receiving financial assistance to keep them in their home. The resident was accepted into the program and **with the assistance of HPRP funds, he is able to keep himself and his children in a stable environment and work on increasing his income in order to keep their current residence.**

Single Mom on Road to Independence

A single mother was one month behind on her rent payment. Fortunately **she received HPRP funding to assist her during a time of financial hardship.** Her hours at work soon increased and she also is now receiving child support, thus moving towards a path of total independence.

HOST HIGHLIGHTS

Housing Opportunities Support Teams (HOST) provide flexible and adaptive services needed to help individuals and families obtain or maintain housing. The primary function of HOST is to coordinate and manage prevention, housing placement, and supportive services for those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Members of the HOST team will serve as a liaison to his or her organization/system and will work closely with other HOST members to create a cohesive and seamless system of service delivery.

Regional Updates

- **Northern Region** – In the past two weeks, Region 3 has **provided \$25,900 in prevention and rapid re-housing funds to the community.** Reston Interfaith and Our Daily Bread also are collaborating on providing financial literacy classes to the clients they serve. Classes could start as early as mid-March.
- **Central Region** – Region 2 is pleased to announce the hiring of a full-time community case manager and a part-time housing locator at the **Baileys Crossroads Community Shelter, Volunteers of America Chesapeake.** Please welcome **Felicia Mukasa-Kintu** (community case manager) and **Phaimy Bassette** (housing locator), who started on Feb. 16. Both come with excellent experience and enthusiasm towards joining the HOST partnership.

FACETS recently hired two community case managers to provide services to families who have received a Family Unification Program (FUP) voucher and are no longer in need of ongoing assistance from Fairfax County Department of Family Services. In addition, they will work on providing rapid re-housing services to families and individuals currently residing in area shelters and hypothermia programs. There will be a specific focus on working with the families on the unified family shelter waitlist to assist them with finding permanent housing without entering the shelter. **Please welcome Samantha Gallo and Logan Alley,** both started at FACETS on Feb. 17. Samantha has previous experience working with homeless youth at Alternative House and Logan has previous experience working with homeless singles and families at New Hope Housing.

- **Southern Region** – Region 1 is continuing to improve their coordination in order to provide the best services in the most efficient manner possible. They are focusing more energy on rapid re-housing and anticipate this effort will have a positive impact on shelter stays for some families. The **Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board has been providing mental health services as a part of the HOST model on an as-needed basis** and the staff continues to work together to quickly and creatively find permanent housing options for the men, women and families in crisis in our community.

Housing Locator Program

Joanne Casal from Housing and Community Services of Northern Virginia (HCSNV) has joined the network of housing locators; please welcome Joanne to the team.

The Housing Locator Program, run by Good Shepherd Housing and Family Services, is very much in the "infrastructure building" phase. There are a multitude of efforts in the works, including training providers and schedules, marketing materials and more being developed. **The Housing Locator Program is moving forward with building a multi-purpose Housing Locator Web site.** Among the many purposes, the Web site will host an array of housing locator resources, information for partner landlords and clients needing assistance. Additionally, the program will soon be able to utilize the tools in HMIS to report activities and manage client services.

An online forum and listserv for housing locators across Fairfax County is now active. An open invitation to join and commence collaboration is extended to any human services staff that is providing housing search assistance to families or individuals facing homelessness. Interested staff may e-mail Sarah Bridger at Sarah@goodhousing.org.

The Housing Locator Program staff help facilitate the Feb. 1 countywide training session for shelter and transitional housing case managers and shared ways the case managers can partner with their local housing locators to facilitate rapid re-housing.

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) Update

Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) – The Feb. 11 meeting on "data quality review" for HPRP was cancelled due to inclement weather. **This time has been designated to review and correct your HPRP data in a manner that optimizes the experience of other providers in a setting that minimizes interruptions.** Preferably each person who has entered HPRP data into HMIS should attend; however, at least one representative from each agency is asked to be present. **Please stay tuned for the new meeting date that will be announced soon; seating is limited.**

Veterans Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) – We are gearing up for our first AHAR on Veterans report on March 1, 2010. Providers will be receiving a report for their review.

Training & Communication

Tier Training

In order to increase activity and efficiency in the Training and Change Management group, the group has been split into three tiers that each focus on training and communication at different levels. Tier 1 addresses community forums, Tier 2 addresses Regional Training and Communication and Tier 3 addresses direct service training and communication. The coordination of training and communication at each tier will be led by a designated Training and Change Management Leader.

Tier 1 – The next Community Forum on Homelessness will be held in May 2010. The Community Forum Planning Committee is meeting on Feb. 23 to debrief about the January Community Forum. The workgroup will also begin planning for the Forum that will be held in May at this meeting. If you have

thoughts or information that may inform this process, please contact Michelle Gregory at michelle.gregory@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Tier 2 – In order to increase communication and collaboration between all of the service providers in the community, it is important that agencies participate actively in the regional meetings in their areas. These meetings have been a long-standing source of idea sharing and coordination facilitated by the Department of Systems Management for Human Services (DSMHS). This is your opportunity to help identify and shape the needs of your area in coordination with other professionals with a similar commitment to assisting those who are most in need in our community. Please refer to the information below to attend a meeting in your region.

- **Region 1**, *Last meeting cancelled due to inclement weather, new meeting date To Be Determined.*
- **Region 2**, *March 8, 10 a.m. to noon, 6245 Leesburg Pike, Suite 300, Falls Church.*
- **Region 3**, *March 22, 10 a.m. to noon, 11484 Washington Plaza West, Suite 140, Reston.*
- **Region 4**, *Feb. 26, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., Fairfax City Hall, 10455 Armstrong Street Fairfax.*

Tier 3 – Shelter and Transitional Housing case managers and their supervisors gathered on Feb. 1 at the City of Fairfax Chamber's office to train on rapid re-housing and how to access HPRP funds. There has been a major emphasis on prevention for the use of HPRP funds thus far. The impact on preventing people from entering homelessness has been significant. **The focus for the rapid re-housing implementation will be to move appropriate families and individuals back into permanent housing after experiencing homelessness as quickly as possible with the help of the HPRP resources.** Transitional and shelter case managers are now able to utilize these funds and provide the community case management as needed.

HMIS Training

All trainings are held at 12000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 364 Fairfax, VA 22035. **Training registration is on a first-come, first served basis, with 12 seats available at each session.** Register via e-mail at monica.foote@fairfaxcounty.gov. Refresher training topics are being solicited; please e-mail your suggestions to monica.foote@fairfaxcounty.gov.

- **Feb. 19** – 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., HPRP Training for New HMIS Users.
- **April 14** – 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., New HMIS User Training.
- **April 15** – 8:30 a.m. to noon, HMIS Refresher.

SIDEBAR

Point-in-Time Count Update

The annual Point-in-Time Count of homeless persons in the community was conducted on Jan. 27 and the participating programs are reviewing and submitting reports for compilation and analysis. The results are expected sometime in mid-to-late March 2010.

Homeless Youth Initiative Program

The Homeless Youth Initiative is a special project serving homeless young people who are attending high school and living without a parent or guardian. This single-year pilot project is now about halfway through and achieving positive and promising results.

The project offers different forms of housing assistance to these young individuals so as to best meet the needs of each student. Most receive a housing assistance subsidy, and by ensuring housing stability, the students can better focus on completing high school.

To date, the program has housed 14 formerly homeless students and is working to arrange housing placements and assistance for others. The students also receive case management

and other counseling services as needed and the program represents a service delivery partnership between Alternative House and the Fairfax County Public Schools' Homeless Liaison's Office. Funding is provided by federal stimulus funds that are by the Fairfax County Department of Family Services.

For more information about the program or to refer a homeless youth, call Patty Holley at 703-403-8565 or patriciaholley@gmail.com.

February 19, 2010 - Prepared by the [Fairfax County Office to Prevent and End Homelessness](#) and the [Fairfax County Office of Public Affairs](#). To request this information in an alternate format, call 703-324-9492, TTY 711. A Fairfax County, Va., publication.