

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Ending Homelessness in the Fairfax-Falls Church Community

### Are there people who are homeless in the Fairfax-Falls Church community?

Yes. At any given time there are close to 2,000 people in the Fairfax-Falls Church community who are literally homeless. In addition, many families in our community are doubling up in housing as they can not afford to have a home of their own. Here are some statistics on the homeless population in our community:

- 60% of individuals who are homeless are people in families.
- 35% of the total population of people who are homeless are children.
- 21% of the total homeless population are singles who have been homeless for a prolonged period of time or have had multiple episodes of homelessness in a relatively short period of time.

### What does being homeless really mean?

People who are homeless are without a permanent, physical place to live that is safe.

### What are some of the reasons why people become homeless?

The main reason why families and individuals become homeless is because they have been trying to get by with an income that does not keep pace with the increasing costs of housing. More than 60% of adults in homeless families are employed. However, even if they work 24 hours per day, seven days a week at minimum wage they still would not be able to afford a rental apartment in the Fairfax-Falls Church community. In fiscal year 2007, the Fairfax County Department of Systems Management for Human Services received more than 8,000 calls requesting housing assistance.

There can also be other factors that cause people to end up living on the streets, in the woods, in their cars or in shelters. For example, some people who become homeless are fleeing domestic violence, are battling disabilities such as mental illness or are wrestling with substance abuse. Some also lack the basic life skills needed to manage their personal, family and financial affairs, and the training needed to obtain and maintain a well-paying job.

### Why do we need to change things? Aren't there lots of organizations and county agencies doing good work to help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness?

The Fairfax-Falls Church community has been doing an excellent job in managing homelessness - that is, taking care of those in our community who are homeless. But the number of people who are homeless has not decreased.

The current system cares for people, but it is not designed to end homelessness. We need to work more effectively and efficiently to maximize resources and help more people before they become homeless. Better coordination of prevention efforts can prevent homelessness. Now is the time to come together to prevent and end homelessness.

### **What do we mean by “ending” homelessness?**

Ending homelessness means that every person who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless can access appropriate permanent housing and the services needed to keep them in their homes.

### **How are we going to do it?**

The goal of ending homelessness will be achieved by adopting a new approach. This approach is called Housing First. What makes this approach different from traditional emergency shelter or housing transitional models is that people who are homeless are placed immediately into permanent housing — with regular support. This approach takes people as they are, in part because housing is a basic right. Put simply, housing comes first, with services.

A central tenet of this Housing First approach is that social services to enhance individual and family well-being can be more effective when people are in their own home.

### **How can we help individuals and families find housing when there is not enough housing?**

Preserving and increasing the supply of affordable, permanent housing resources is necessary to implement a Housing First approach. This may involve working with landlords who are willing to participate in a Housing First program. Developing housing resources might also involve dedicating some housing resources, such as assistance with rent, to individuals who are homeless; developing new housing types, such as small efficiency apartments; and increasing the supply of housing targeted to people with special needs. Changes also will need to be made to land use, zoning and tax incentive policies.

### **How will we make sure that people will stay housed and not end up homeless again?**

Once in housing, people will receive services according to their needs. Receiving these services is voluntary.

Those at risk will receive support from community-based housing opportunity teams to help prevent them from becoming homeless again. These teams will maintain contact with every person who is placed into housing, even if they are not receiving services, to make sure that everything is going smoothly for the resident and the neighborhood.

The community-based teams will build on the current network of public and private organizations and individuals that provide support for those who are homeless. These teams will coordinate and manage community-based prevention, housing placement and supportive services.

Members of these teams will have experience and extensive knowledge of the service system each represents. Each will work with his or her organization and with other team members to coordinate the services people need.

### **How does this new approach affect our neighborhoods?**

Appropriate housing for families and individuals fosters strong and stable communities.

For example, a 2002 evaluation of the Connecticut Supportive Housing Demonstration Program found that property values in the areas surrounding supportive housing projects increased in nearly 90% of the neighborhoods. In the neighborhood with the highest property values, those values remained stable. In addition, the majority of neighbors and nearby business owners reported that their neighborhoods looked better than before the permanent supportive housing developments were built.

### **Is this approach another bureaucracy?**

No. The county government will partner with the community to ensure that services are coordinated, new housing opportunities are created, and that we measure our success and adapt our plan accordingly.

### **Will the county control programs for people who are homeless that are now offered by the faith community and nonprofit organizations?**

No. Fairfax County and other local governments are members of the community partnership on preventing and ending homelessness. They will provide support and resources for the other members of the partnership and will continue to strengthen efforts to help homeless people in our community and move us toward the goal of preventing and ending it.

### **Has this type of approach to ending homelessness worked anywhere else?**

Yes. Hundreds of communities throughout the country have created their own plans to end homelessness. By addressing homelessness through rapid re-housing, targeting resources and an emphasis on prevention, communities around the country have reported success.

For example:

- Seattle, Wash., has reported reductions up to 75% in medical costs and 50% in jail bookings, with an estimated savings of \$3.2 million since implementing the Housing First approach.

- Family homelessness in Westchester County, N. Y., decreased 57%, from 690 families in 2002 to 297 families in 2006.
- Over a three-year period, San Francisco, Calif., reduced overall homelessness by 28%, street homelessness by 40%, and the number of people who died while living on the streets by 40%.
- Family homelessness in Columbus, Ohio, decreased 46%, from 1,297 families in 1997 to 696 families in 2004.
- When they released their plan to end homelessness in December 2004, Portland, Ore., had an estimated 1,600 chronically homeless individuals. During 2005, they housed more than 40% of them.
- Family homelessness in Hennepin County, Minn., decreased 43%, from 1,819 in 2002 to 1,046 families in 2004.
- Since January 2005, Denver, Colo., has reduced overall homelessness by 11.5% in the metro region and chronic homelessness among single individuals by 36%.

### How do we avoid attracting people who are homeless from other jurisdictions?

Homelessness is a regional issue. All of the other jurisdictions in the metropolitan Washington region have developed, or are developing, 10-year plans to end homelessness. Some have already developed additional housing for homeless people and are moving toward a Housing First approach.

Information is shared through regional groups, such as the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, which hosted a conference in 2005 to promote regional collaboration in ending homelessness. By working together, local jurisdictions can coordinate efforts to help realize the goal of ending homelessness throughout the region.

### How can I help?

We need to work together to find solutions to this problem. To reach the goal of ending homelessness will take a communitywide team of individual county residents, nonprofit organizations, businesses, faith communities, health care organizations, schools and local government. Most important, we need help from individuals who are willing to help mentor and support those in need.

- **Become informed and stay informed.**
- **Talk with neighbors and members of your faith group about what you can do together to prevent homelessness.**
- **Express your support for ending homelessness by writing to your elected officials.**
  - Fairfax County Board of Supervisors: [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/government/board](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/government/board)
  - City of Fairfax Mayor and Council: [www.fairfaxva.gov](http://www.fairfaxva.gov)
  - City of Falls Church Mayor and Council: [www.fallschurchva.gov](http://www.fallschurchva.gov)
- **Testify at public hearings on issues that affect homelessness.**