



Blueprint for Success

Fairfax County's Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness

Synopsis of Strategies

October 16, 2006

What the Planning Committee to End Homelessness is Presenting

- A brief overview of what the Committee learned, with four key conclusions
- A synopsis of four major strategies, with their related objectives, which the Committee believes are key to ending homelessness

The Key Conclusions

- *There must be a change in focus, direction, and service priorities about homelessness in Fairfax County that centers on ending homelessness, not managing it.*
- *Housing is an essential resource for homeless families and individuals. Increasing the supply of affordable housing is essential; preservation alone is not enough.*
- *Directing resources to prevention, rapid re-housing, and “housing first” works.*
- *There must be sustained political will and strong support from all sectors of the community.*

The Major Strategies

- ✓ *Prevent Homelessness*, with five objectives
- ✓ *Preserve and Increase Affordable Housing*, with seven objectives
- ✓ *Deliver Appropriate Support Services*, with ten objectives
- ✓ *Management System for Implementation and Accountability*, with seven objectives

What to Expect Next

- ✓ Completion of the full report, composed of four chapters, in the next month
- ✓ Presentations to the Community Forum on Homelessness, members of the Board of Supervisors, and the broader community in December
- ✓ A process early in 2007 to identify specific actions to implement the change in direction

What You Can Do

If you think the basics of the plan provide a good start:

- ✓ Write to your District Supervisor and the Board Chairman voicing your support
- ✓ Talk with neighbors and members of your faith group about what you can do together
- ✓ Testify at public hearings, if held, on issues covered in the report

How to Comment on the Plan

E-mail: endinghomelessness@fairfaxcounty.gov (the most direct way to comment)

Write to: Planning Committee to End Homelessness
c/o Department of Systems Management for Human Services
12011 Government Center Parkway, Suite 222
Fairfax, VA 22035

For more information visit our Web site at: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless/>

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What We Have Learned

The Planning Committee to End Homelessness has spent more than over a year engaged in hearing presentations and reading reports, debating policy and practice, and analyzing other community plans. The committee participated in a countywide summit on homelessness and a national conference on homelessness, held conversations with scores of service providers, interacted with and listened to members of the community and to those who have experienced, and are experiencing, homelessness. As a result of this intensive research and study, the committee reached four key conclusions to guide its work.

- *There must be a change in focus, direction, and service priorities about homelessness in Fairfax County that centers on ending homelessness, not managing it.*
- *Housing is an essential resource for homeless families and individuals.* The lack of affordable housing in Fairfax County has been studied, researched, and lamented for decades. But the fact remains: Ending homelessness will be impossible without *increasing* the supply of affordable housing of all types; preservation alone is not enough.
- *Directing resources to prevention, rapid re-housing, and “housing first” works;* this approach has proven to be a cost-effective means to ending homelessness in other communities.
- *To successfully implement the ten-year plan, there must be sustained political will and strong support from all sectors of the community.* Local political will must be present to implement policy changes and monitor resource allocation. Service providers must be willing to examine their programs and incorporate the strategies necessary to end homelessness, not just manage it. Funding partners, in collaboration with housing developers, must be willing to provide financial support for new housing initiatives. The corporate community must become a major stakeholder in contributing to the health of our community. The public must believe this plan can improve the quality of life in Fairfax County.

Vision and Values

Vision

By 2016:

Every person in our community will access and maintain decent, safe, affordable housing.

Statement of Values

These values inform and guide us as we move toward achieving our vision.

- We value everyone in our community, recognizing the right of all people to have a safe affordable place in which to live.
- We value diversity, believing that communities are strengthened when people connect across differences.
- We value excellence and are committed to finding creative, bold solutions for both housing needs and support services.
- We value an inclusive process that respects all points of view and a balanced approach to the issues.
- We value education and advocacy and its power to impact public policy in ways that achieve a vision of a community without homelessness.

Highlights of the Chapters

Chapter One: Where We Are Now

Fairfax County is an affluent county with abundant resources, high median income, and expensive housing. The supply of affordable housing to meet the needs of the lowest income families and single adults is sorely inadequate. In January 2006, there were more than 2,000 homeless persons identified in the county; over 700 of these were children, and over 900 were single adults, most of whom live with a disabling condition. While 62 percent of adults in families are employed, nearly 60 percent of these families have earnings below the poverty level, and 75 percent of homeless single adults live in poverty.

The county has three shelters serving families, with additional shelter beds for victims of domestic violence. Five shelters serve single individuals. All of these shelters are service intensive and operate at or near capacity. An array of transitional housing programs is available for both single adults and families, but the lack of adequate affordable housing makes it difficult for people to move on to permanent stable housing. Effective prevention services are provided through partnerships with nonprofit and faith-based organizations, but with limited capacity and a lack of long-term housing solutions, these services are successful in managing homelessness, but not in ending it.

Chapter Two: Where Are We Going

Ending homelessness means a change in direction. The current system provides excellent services to stabilize persons and links them to resources, but it does not provide long-term permanent housing. To end homelessness, housing must become the first priority. Prevention services must provide comprehensive intervention at the neighborhood level, with the involvement of local communities; persons coming out of institutions such as hospitals, foster care, or jail must not become immediately homeless. The role of shelters will become one of triage and assessment, not housing and treatment. Persons who are homeless will be a priority population for the housing, mental health, substance abuse, and health services they need. The supply and types of affordable housing will be increased so that prevention and rapid re-housing can be as effective here as has been demonstrated in other communities across the country. Services will be provided with greater flexibility and by engaging people through trusting relationships rather than imposing program requirements. The service delivery system will be integrated, and coordination of services across disciplines will become the standard.

Chapter Three: How Will We Get There

This chapter contains the four major strategies, a synopsis of which comprises this document.

Chapter Four: What Happens Next

The Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness will set the direction in which the community and county must move to achieve the goal of ending homelessness. The next step will be to begin the change process, to start the transition from old models for programs to developing and implementing new approaches. This will require understanding from people in the community at large and commitment from private and public leaders from all sectors of the community. A process to develop specific action steps and commitments will begin early in 2007. Identifying how programs need to change, educating ourselves and our neighbors, and beginning to collaborate to develop new initiatives are all activities that can start now.

Fairfax County's Ten-Year Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness – *Synopsis of Strategies*

Strategy # 1. Prevent homelessness due to economic crisis and/or disability.

Strategies that prevent homelessness are more cost effective than those that provide emergency shelter for and re-housing of someone who is already homeless. Fairfax County data suggests that single adults become homeless due to disability. Families become homeless due to poverty.

The following represent a change in philosophy from crisis intervention to early, focused, and sufficient intervention to prevent homelessness.

Prevent housing crises by creating Neighborhood Prevention Assistance Teams to work in each community.

Interdisciplinary teams, including community representatives, will build relationships with landlords and work with them to identify those at risk for homelessness. Targeted efforts will provide direct and sufficient assistance early in the process to prevent homelessness. Easy access to budgeting, money management, social skills, and problem solving close to home will trigger earlier intervention and prevent eviction and homelessness.

Coordinate all community resources (faith communities, community-based organizations, nonprofits and the county) to streamline prevention efforts and provide flexible and longer-term financial assistance to keep persons housed.

Coordinate across faith communities, community-based organizations, nonprofits, and the county to streamline prevention efforts. Create new programs and expand successful existing financial assistance programs to prevent loss of housing. Use local rental assistance with varied and flexible financial assistance to prevent utility shut off, eviction, and/or foreclosure.

Build on current Coordinated Services Planning model to provide those at risk of becoming homeless with a single access point via 211 to universal information and referral.

Those at risk of homelessness will call 211, the universal information and referral number, to obtain the latest information on existing resources to help with eviction prevention. A single access point will offer critical information without the frustration of calling many places to learn what services are available.

Change policies on distribution of public and private financial resources for an efficient and effective eviction prevention response.

Policies that require persons to have a “pay or quit” notice (pre-eviction notice to pay rent or vacate the unit) in hand before financial assistance is given to them must be changed to allow for an earlier and possibly longer-term response. Agencies and organizations with policies that only allow financial assistance once a year or once every six months and in small amounts need to consider more effective and efficient methods of fund distribution.

Work to end the practice of discharge or release from institutions to homelessness.

Create a Discharge Planning Subcommittee to examine policy and program changes to end discharge into homelessness. To prevent homelessness, policy changes must address the special housing needs of those with health, mental health, or substance abuse problems, as well the housing needs of persons released from incarceration.

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Strategy #2: Preserve and increase the supply of affordable housing to prevent or remedy homelessness.

Having a sufficient supply of affordable and permanent supportive housing that provides homes for everyone in the community is the essential and mandatory factor for ending homelessness in Fairfax County. As has been stated elsewhere in this report, the lack of affordable and diverse housing options in this community has reached crisis proportions. The result is individuals and families who have entered the homeless services system—a system intended to provide emergency or stopgap assistance—continue to stay in the system with nowhere to go once they have been stabilized and could, except for lack of affordable housing options, return to the mainstream again. Thus, the system itself has become a shadow institution. It provides an alternative form of housing assistance, but an alternative that is inadequate and expensive.

It is axiomatic that every family and individual adult who becomes homeless needs housing. As a community, we must preserve affordable housing, develop new affordable housing options, and work with landlords so that they will rent to persons who are homeless. And among these housing options we must move forward to bring to reality creative solutions such as Residential Studio Units. Accordingly, the following actions are recommended.

Continue to preserve existing affordable rental housing using the allocation of a penny from the real estate tax created for this purpose, and allocate a second penny as a dedicated funding source with use of other incentives to spur development of additional affordable housing units.

The Board of Supervisors successfully launched an effective strategy to preserve affordable housing. A second step is needed to provide a secure funding source to make new development of affordable housing feasible through the designation of a second penny. Nonprofit housing development organizations play a vital role in this process; however, given the rising cost of land, they need substantial financial resources or donated land to be competitive in the market and still produce affordable projects. Use of the “second penny” could also go toward establishing a local rent subsidy program targeted at the lowest income families and single adults who are homeless. More efficient and flexible use of existing housing can be encouraged through greater flexibility in zoning regulations and modification of development requirements to enhance the feasibility of creating units to serve homeless persons and families.

Infuse the housing system with additional affordable units specifically aimed at the most needy, and give this population priority within existing assisted housing programs.

The chronic lack of housing that is affordable to those with very low incomes, the most vulnerable and most likely to experience homelessness in our community, continues to stymie all efforts to eliminate homelessness. Among homeless people who have incomes, 75 percent live below the poverty line. Market rate housing is simply out of reach for them. To remedy homelessness, it is critical to develop additional affordable housing units for those with incomes at or below 30 percent of Area Median Income and give priority to homeless families and single adults in accessing assisted housing and subsidy programs.

Immediately begin development of Residential Studio Units.

There are abundant national examples demonstrating that this form of housing offers remarkable and tangible benefits for chronically homeless individuals. A Fairfax County task force recently completed a two-year study of the Residential Studio Unit concept which documented the benefits of this form of housing and offered practical suggestions for implementation. Creating a

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model project of this kind in our community should be given high priority consideration for the zoning modifications necessary to permit such uses.

Provide incentives so that nonprofit and for-profit housing developers and landlords will set aside units in existing projects for homeless persons.

This action is one part of directing resources to ending homelessness through preventive efforts, changed philosophies, and enhanced incentives. To this end, incentives or a risk mitigation pool could be created that would offer financial safeguards to landlords to encourage participation.

Convert time-limited transitional housing units to permanent housing, as appropriate.

Transitional housing as it is now provided is time-limited, usually not longer than 24 months. Experience has shown that time limits may be helpful only if linked to the specific challenges facing the families or individuals. Transitional housing includes required support services, which is inconsistent with the “housing first” philosophy and, at the end of the allotted time period, the family or single adult still needs to find permanent housing. Transitional housing should become more flexible and be targeted at those populations for whom a time-limited transition is appropriate.

Develop additional permanent supportive housing units for high-risk homeless persons with disabilities, including both individuals and families.

- Many homeless adults living with disabilities, both individuals and in families, need permanent housing with services (permanent supportive housing). Fairfax County must increase its supply of permanent supportive housing to meet this need. This housing should include a range of services to meet individual needs, which may change over time.
- Some single persons who are chronically homeless, resist treatment, and are considered high risk for continued homelessness, exacerbated illness or death, need a specialized safe haven in which to live. The safe haven currently in the county is successful in keeping some of these individuals safe and housed. Additional safe havens are needed to provide stable housing for mentally ill and substance abusing persons who resist traditional services.

Develop a program to create giving circles in the faith community to adopt a family or subsidize creation of a housing unit.

Faith communities have voiced their concern about homelessness and expressed willingness to act in meaningful ways if given guidance as to what they can do. Through improved outreach, coordination, and cooperation with faith communities, new avenues can be opened up. Possible actions by faith communities include: adopting a family and providing mentoring and support, including financial support; purchase or provide the rent subsidy for one or more units of housing in an existing development; work together or donate land to develop a small scale, multi-family housing development, a Residential Studio Unit, or group home.

Strategy #3 Deliver appropriate support services to obtain and maintain stable housing

For some homeless people, accessing housing is a matter of availability and money; others face additional challenges. The current system of homeless services delivery is fragmented and confusing for homeless persons and staff to navigate. This system must change to be more unified in philosophy and goals, be more collaborative, and more innovative. Prioritizing persons who are homeless or near homeless for services, minimizing barriers to eligibility for services, redirecting resources, and training staff and volunteers are good first steps in the change process. An effective system will focus first and foremost on placing homeless persons in housing as quickly as possible. An effective system will offer comprehensive, integrated services at the community level for those who need and want them. Only then can we place and maintain homeless families and single adults in permanent housing and end homelessness.

Change the existing shelter system to implement a “housing first” model of ending homelessness. The current emergency shelters will become assessment and triage centers rather than the intensive service and treatment centers they are today. Shelter staff will focus on early identification and resolution of family or individual "housing barriers" and provide the assistance necessary to facilitate return to permanent housing as quickly as possible. The length of shelter stays will be greatly reduced.

Persons who are homeless or near homeless, and have mental health, substance abuse, or mental retardation disabilities, must be a priority population for delivery of services and connection to supportive housing by the Community Services Board.

The current mental health and substance abuse systems give priority for emergency response, but homeless persons who are not in immediate crisis are seen first come first serve. For persons who are seriously mentally ill and/or chronic substance abusers, there are not enough treatment beds, wait lists are too long, and there is not enough outreach to engage homeless persons in the community. If services are not available when they are needed, this very vulnerable population will decline further and become more at risk of increased hospitalization, illness or death, and of continued homelessness and never returning to housing and a healthy life. The Community Services Board must adapt its priorities to make persons who are homeless a priority population.

Implement an integrated service delivery system that engages clients and builds trust as a basis for service provision rather than demanding stringent requirements.

Providing housing first and then engaging clients in support services over time has been shown to be an effective service delivery strategy. The Fairfax community will implement a system that offers easy access to housing. Clients will not be required to participate in services to get housing. Through effective relationship building, clients will come to accept comprehensive services that build on their strengths and help them to maintain stable housing.

Develop interdisciplinary Neighborhood Service Teams, community-based, and located in accessible neighborhood settings.

A community-based system with co-located services offered in an interdisciplinary manner will break down many barriers. Staff trained in mental health, substance abuse, health, case management, housing, education, employment, and public benefits will be part of the team. Teams will work together and be cross-trained to provide coordinated intake and referral to ensure seamless service delivery. Through this team approach, homeless persons will be re-housed rapidly and efficiently.

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Provide increased outreach to homeless individuals living with serious mental illness and/or chronic substance abuse.

Many individuals who live with serious mental illness and/or chronic substance abuse live on the streets, in the woods, in their cars, or doubled and tripled up with friends and family. Many are high users of the emergency service system. They are often the most visible and challenging homeless persons in our community. They require long-term relationship-based outreach efforts in order to link them to services. Current outreach teams will be expanded to reach individuals on the streets and in the woods and will promote participation in housing and services. Chronically homeless persons will be prioritized for placement into residential programs or permanent housing with supports.

Integrate and coordinate mental health and substance abuse services to better serve these special populations.

Since so many homeless individuals in Fairfax County experience both mental illness and substance abuse, their needs can be better served if these two systems of care are coordinated. Teams trained to work with dually diagnosed individuals will be created to ensure that multiple needs are addressed. This approach will provide quick intervention during times of crisis and reduce episodes of homelessness.

Address the unique service needs in securing and maintaining housing for special homeless populations, such as youth aging out of foster care, veterans, domestic violence survivors, and those with serious medical or psychiatric issues.

The Community Council on Homelessness will work with county and community-based organizations to:

- Explore and develop connections to affordable housing resources for youth exiting from foster care to independent living.
- Examine the need for permanent housing placements for youth with mental health or living skills issues who are leaving foster care and need a supported living environment.
- Follow the recommendations of the medical respite pilot program to meet the special housing needs of homeless medically fragile persons.
- Strengthen and consider expanding the medical outreach teams as experience is gained with this new program.
- Allow victims of domestic violence flexibility to provide better opportunities to become self-sufficient.

Establish a housing assistance fund which will provide resources for housing placement.

A Housing Assistance Fund will be created to facilitate a rapid exit from the shelter system for those who become homeless by providing funds for housing searches, for security deposits, and for short- and long-term rent subsidies.

Provide ongoing training and cross training and opportunities for networking to county staff, nonprofit service provider staff, and volunteers working with families and single adults who are homeless.

There will be training for staff and volunteers in the philosophy of the 10-Year Plan and in best practices to implement the new philosophy. Mediation training will increase ability to negotiate on behalf homeless families and adults. There will be regular networking opportunities for line staff and volunteers to share experiences and strategies for working with families and adults who are homeless.

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Engage volunteers and faith-based organizations in service delivery through mentoring, tutoring, life skills training, etc.

Volunteers and faith-based organizations have skills and commitment which can help individual families or single adults to become and remain stable. Volunteers can mentor a family, a child, or an adult, can offer individual or group life skills classes, can be tutors and job coaches. They can assist with transportation, emergency child care needs, and repairs. In providing these services, they will link homeless men, women, and children to the community at large.

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Strategy #4: Create a management system for plan implementation with the collaboration of the public and private sectors that ensures adequate financial resources and accountability.

Writing the Strategic Plan is only the beginning; the strategies in the plan must be implemented to achieve the goal of ending homelessness. A management system that includes an implementation team, broad-based resources, and recognition that the plan is a living document requiring periodic reassessment is a characteristic of great plans, *i.e.*, those that successfully achieve their goals.¹ A partnership between the community and the political leadership, and solutions that reflect consumer preferences for housing, treatment, and services are also critical to success.

Create a leadership structure to oversee implementation of the plan by building on existing partnerships between the public and private sectors.

The county will create an Office to End Homelessness that reports directly to the Deputy County Executive and participates in the Human Services Leadership Team. This office will work in partnership with community leaders and the Community Council on Homelessness to accomplish actions to implement the Ten-Year Plan. The Community Council on Homelessness will continue to be a focal point for leadership to end homelessness.

Develop additional funding options and refocus existing resources on the priorities in the plan to ensure that the goal of ending homelessness is met.

Fairfax County, the federal government, the state government, and private funds raised by local nonprofit organizations are the primary sources for funding of programs for the homeless population in our community now. Working collaboratively, faith-based, community-based, and county organizations will explore new sources of funding and ways to increase support from existing sources. This exploration will include looking for opportunities to redirect resources from programs that manage homelessness to those that end homelessness. Projects funded through public funds must advance the goals and strategies of the 10-Year Plan to end homelessness and demonstrate high standards and best practices to receive priority for continued funding.

Prepare a long-term action plan with specific actions linked to resources and the responsible organization and annual operating plans based on the action plan.

The Strategic Plan provides a blue print for ending homelessness but it does not include the actions needed to actually make it happen. Shortly after the Strategic Plan is issued, key leadership and stakeholders will begin work on an operational plan that will include specific actions needed to implement the strategies, identification of the organizations that will carry out the actions, and the resources that will be used.

Create opportunities to ensure that the voices of the homeless and people working in the front line of service delivery are heard.

Input from the people who will benefit from the community's work to end homelessness will ensure that the systems, facilities, and housing developed as this plan is implemented will meet their needs as efficiently and effectively as possible.

¹ "Innovations in 10-Year Plans to End Chronic Homelessness in Your Community, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, p. 6.

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Develop outcome measures at both the system (plan) level and at the program level. Measure success in ending homelessness and meeting annual performance targets using the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

Performance measures to track success in meeting the overall goal of ending homelessness will be developed. Performance measures for programs that focus on preventing homelessness, providing housing, and providing services will also be developed. The HMIS system will provide the data needed to monitor performance against the selected measures. All homeless service providers will begin using HMIS to collect data on homelessness in our community.

Issue and widely distribute annual performance reports documenting what actions have been accomplished and whether performance targets have been met.

As the plan is implemented, the annual data for the selected measures will be used to evaluate whether the strategies and actions included in the plan are contributing to the goal of ending homelessness. An annual performance report to the community will be made available as a printed document and on the county Web site at: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless.

Ensure the community and its elected leaders are kept informed about the plan and its implementation.

The goal is to end homelessness in 10 years. This will require that the community and its elected leaders continue to support the strategies and actions needed to meet this goal. Keeping leadership informed about plan implementation and accomplishments is critical to ensuring continued support.