

Office to Prevent and End Homelessness

LOB #156:

EMERGENCY SHELTER

Purpose

The Emergency Shelter LOB includes emergency shelter and rapid rehousing assistance for those families and individuals who are homeless, as well as homelessness prevention assistance for those families and individuals at risk of homelessness.

Fairfax County's Emergency Shelter line of business provides critical services to people experiencing homelessness in the Fairfax-Falls Church community. Through contracts with five community non-profit partners, OPEH operates six emergency shelters that provide shelter for households with and without children. Shelters provide meals, case management services and a temporary place to stay while appropriate housing is obtained. All emergency shelters are run 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. During FY 2015, a total of 1,903 people were provided a safe, temporary place to stay by utilizing the County's emergency shelter program.

Case managers and housing locators work closely with clients at risk of homelessness and those who are literally homeless. When working with clients, staff utilizes the Housing-First approach. The primary goal of effective services is to resolve the client's housing crisis by:

- Preventing homelessness whenever possible,
- Reducing the length of time spent in emergency shelter, and
- Assisting clients in identifying and securing stable housing.

Description

The emergency shelters, homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing assistance programs are listed as one LOB because they are integrally related. The shelters provide the clients with safe, temporary housing and meals while the staff work with clients to link them to needed services and to resolve their housing crisis.

The County's first emergency shelter opened in 1978. The following table provides a description of the County-funded emergency shelters. The Office to Prevent and End Homelessness oversees contracts with five community non-profits to manage their day to day operations. In addition to staff that provide direct services to clients, the shelters also benefit from many community donations and volunteers. OPEH has staff dedicated to oversight of the shelter and case management programs that serve households both with and without children. They work closely with providers and contract staff to ensure the programs meet the rigorous program and fiscal requirements. They do strategic work with the non-profit partners to foster good outcomes for clients across the system and the program's ability to meet required performance measures. In addition, some client's situations are particularly complex and challenging. OPEH staff convenes meetings with non-profit partners, other County agencies and clients to address and come to resolutions on these complicated cases.

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Human Services Region	Name of Shelter
Region I	<p>Eleanor U. Kennedy Shelter - Provision of emergency shelter services and outreach services for households without children. Typically the shelter has 50 beds serving men and women.</p> <p>Next Steps Family Program - Provision of emergency shelter and outreach services for 18 households with children in County rented apartments.</p>
Region II	<p>Bailey's Crossroads Community Shelter - Provision of emergency shelter for households without children. The shelter has approximately 50 beds serving men and women.</p> <p>Patrick Henry Family Shelter - Provision of emergency and outreach service for households with children. This year round shelter serves 7 large families. Large families are defined as having 5 or more members.</p>
Region III	<p>Embry Rucker Community Shelter - Provision of emergency shelter for households without children and households with children. The shelter has approximately 70 beds. Twenty eight beds are for households without children and there are 10 rooms which accommodate households with children. In collaboration with the Department of Family Services and the Health Department, 5 beds are made available for short-term medical respite care.</p>
Region IV	<p>Katherine K. Hanley Family Shelter - Provision of emergency shelter and outreach services for 20 households with children.</p>

Contracted services are provided by the same non-profit partners. These services are provided in shelters and in the community. Case Managers follow the Housing First model and utilize a strength-based approach that values the importance of fully engaging the resident(s) in the development of a task-based housing and service plan.

Benefits

While it is critical for communities to have emergency shelters so that people facing housing crises are not forced to live unsafely on the streets, shelters are not appropriate long-term housing solutions. Services that quickly and effectively address these housing crises are crucial so that homelessness can be prevented or those that become homeless can be rapidly re-housed.

The Ten Year Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness utilizes the Housing First approach. This approach is based on the idea that when people have the security of knowing they are safely housed, they can then begin to effectively address the issues that caused or contributed to their housing crisis. The stress of homelessness strongly impacts their ability to look for jobs, do well in training programs, overcome substance/alcohol abuse issues, overcome illness, etc. Basic needs must be met before tackling the more complicated issues. This approach strives to minimize the amount of time a person or family is homeless. The stress of prolonged homelessness, whether on the streets or in shelters, is associated with many physical, emotional and cognitive risks.

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Specifically, homelessness and its accompanying stress are correlated to higher rates of communicable diseases, complex medical conditions, (e.g., diabetes, asthma, cardiovascular disease), domestic violence, mental health problems, substance and alcohol abuse. Homelessness can be particularly detrimental to children's health and development. Children living with chronic stress and unpredictability are more likely to have higher levels of health, emotional, and behavior problems. Their school performance and ability to learn under these conditions is often negatively impacted. This is of particular importance to Fairfax County because in the 2015 Point-in-Time count, 36 percent of the total number of people that were homeless were under the age of 18. It is critical that we work to house and stabilize people in housing crises in order to lessen the impact of these issues. By temporarily sheltering people and providing effective case management that houses people quickly, homeless service programs work tirelessly to minimize these risks in the community. The value of this work to the community is demonstrated by the fact that the homeless population has decreased by 34 percent since the Board of Supervisors' endorsement of the plan to end homelessness and the implementation of the Housing First approach.

Mandates

This Line of Business is not mandated.

Trends and Challenges

The greatest challenge facing this LOB is the continued lack of affordable housing in the community, as well as insufficient resources dedicated specifically to house the homeless.

Despite the success of reducing homelessness by 34 percent since 2008, the emergency shelters remain full. Contrary to some prevalent stereotypes, many people experiencing homelessness are employed. In the 2015 Point-in-Time Count, 62 percent of adults in homeless families were employed but did not earn enough to obtain and sustain housing because of the lack of affordable housing options available. Additional trends and challenges for people experiencing homelessness and/or residing in shelters include:

- High housing barriers, including extremely low income, criminal history, and poor credit.
- Reduced federal rental assistance available.
- A disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic minorities in the homeless system. A total of 52 percent of the people identified as experiencing homeless during the 2015 Point-in-Time Count were Black or African American.
- Increased number of refugees and asylees. These individuals need long term resettlement programs. Our housing crisis system does not have the intensive resources and supports appropriate for assisting them; however, they enter our homeless system because that is the only option available to them.
- An increasing number of older adults, who become more medically fragile. The County's homeless system has limited capacity to serve medically fragile people experiencing homelessness.
- Limited employment opportunities for individuals with minimal job skills or education.
- Challenges with earning potential in relation to cost of living in Fairfax County. Many clients have two or three jobs and still cannot afford housing.

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Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #156: Emergency Shelter			
FUNDING			
<u>Expenditures:</u>			
Compensation	\$124,337	\$122,056	\$135,468
Operating Expenses	9,524,048	9,026,268	10,074,003
Capital Equipment	6,305	6,759	0
Total Expenditures	\$9,654,690	\$9,155,083	\$10,209,471
General Fund Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0
Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund	\$9,654,690	\$9,155,083	\$10,209,471
POSITIONS			
<i>Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)</i>			
<u>Positions:</u>			
Regular	1 / 1.3	1 / 1.3	1 / 1.3
Total Positions	1 / 1.3	1 / 1.3	1 / 1.3

Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
Average number of days that people reside in emergency shelter	61	58	63	62	61
Total number of people reported as literally homeless in annual Point in Time count	1,350	1,225	1,204	1,180	1,100
Total number of people reported as literally homeless and unsheltered in annual Point in Time count	104	66	68	67	62
Percentage of people exiting emergency shelter to permanent housing	34%	46%	53%	54%	55%

The trends in efficiency and outcomes for the Emergency Shelter program are generally positive and reflective of the implementation of the Ten-Year Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness.

The number of people reported as literally homeless in the annual Point-in-Time count has been reduced almost 11 percent in the past two fiscal years from 1,350 in FY 2013 to 1,204 in FY 2015. The number of people reported as literally homeless has been reduced a total of 34 percent since the Ten-Year Plan was adopted. Similarly the number of people reported as homeless and unsheltered in the Point-in-Time count has also decreased almost 35 percent in the past two years from 104 in FY 2013 to 68 in FY 2015.

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The percentage of people exiting emergency shelter to permanent housing has increased significantly in the past two fiscal years from only 34 percent in FY 2013 to 53 percent in FY 2015. Meanwhile, the average number of days that people reside in emergency shelter has remained fairly stable for the past two fiscal years at about the 60-day mark. It is worth noting that the average number of days dropped more substantially in prior fiscal years, 2011 and 2012, when at its highest point the average length of time in family shelters was 111 days and in single adult shelters it was 72 days.

It is expected that the number of people reported as homeless and the average number of days that people reside in emergency shelter will continue to decline in the coming fiscal years, although likely at a modest rate. The percentage of people moving from shelters to permanent housing is also expected to show modest improvements. New contracts were awarded to non-profit organizations in FY 2015 that include, for the very first time, targeted outcomes for emergency shelter performance. In FY 2016 the new shelter contractors will work to further improve program efficiency and outcomes. The Office to Prevent and End Homelessness will monitor contractors' performance and work with them to make necessary improvements.

It is the collaboration between local government and its partner nonprofit organizations that has contributed most greatly to the program's positive performance. Cooperative decision making processes, long-term strategic planning and utilizing innovative strategies seen in other communities have resulted in higher efficiency and better outcomes. Collaboration across County agencies has also been positively impactful for shelter clients, such as shared initiatives between OPEH, the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board, the Department of Administration for Human Services, the Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Health Department. Also an important contributing factor, OPEH and the partnership have invested significantly in shared data collection and analysis through the Homeless Management Information System, which has also improved program transparency and accountability to the public.

At the same time, there are serious restricting factors to the shelter program's performance. Homeless families and individuals have a multitude of barriers to stable housing and come to emergency shelters in a state of crisis that affects many facets of their lives. They often have low-income and poor credit due to a lack of stable employment, job skills and education. Many individuals also suffer from mental illness, physical disabilities and chronic health issues. In recent years, the increase of immigrant families, including refugees and asylees, also bring a host of new challenges including legal issues and limited English speaking skills.

Ultimately the lack of housing that is affordable to low-income renters is the primary reason why people are homeless in the Fairfax-Falls Church community and the shelters are full to capacity. Increasingly higher rental prices and consistently low vacancy rates have created a housing market that excludes many households at the lowest income levels.