

10 Year Plan to End Homelessness

in Dickinson and Iron Counties
2006



Homeless Housing Work Group
A Joint Effort of the
Dickinson and Iron County Community Collaboratives

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the following persons who participated in the development of this plan and are working to implement the strategies outlined within.

Dickinson and Iron County Community Collaboratives

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
General	2
Homelessness in Dickinson-Iron Counties	2
Scope of the Problem	2
Impact on Person Who Become Homeless	2
Contributing Factors	3
Resources Consumed	4
Historical Response and Future Plan	4
Vision	4
Strategic Response	5
Goals	6

Executive Summary

Homelessness is a reality for many people living in Dickinson and Iron Counties. A January, 2006 Point-in-Time survey determined that there were 56 homeless persons in our community at the time of the survey. The Dickinson-Iron Community Collaboratives and the Homeless Housing Work Group believe that within the next ten years, we can end homelessness in our community.

The Dickinson-Iron Community Collaboratives and the Homeless Housing Work Group have been addressing the issue of homelessness for the past ten years. With the assistance of local service agencies and organizations, the community has made it possible for homeless individuals, families and children to access emergency shelter and develop permanent housing solutions. Capitalizing on the momentum gain in the past ten years, the Homeless Housing Work Group intends to continue its efforts to more effectively shelter and house homeless persons, but it also plans to increase prevention activities in order to eliminate homelessness all together. The Work Group has identified six goals with short and long term strategies to respond to key issues of homelessness and homelessness prevention. The execution of these goals and strategies has been assigned to three different work groups – the Housing First/Sub-Populations Work Group, the Resource Allocation Work Group and the Discharge Planning Work Group. The activities of these three groups will generate critical information which will assist in the implementation of the 10 Year Plan.

Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

- Margaret Mead

General

The Homeless Housing Work Group used the following information to assist in the development of goals to end homelessness in Dickinson and Iron Counties. The information was gathered from a variety of sources and provides a broad overview of the problem.

Dickinson-Iron Homeless

Scope of the problem

In a summary prepared by the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH), rural homelessness is described as less visible than its urban equivalent – but no less significant. It is dominated by overcrowded and substandard living conditions instead of “literal homelessness” or living on the street. It is caused by poverty and a lack of affordable housing. Due to its hidden nature, services and funding to address rural issues are often scarce and emergency shelters are rare. The face of rural homelessness is most often families, women and children. “Studies comparing urban and rural homeless populations have shown that homeless people in rural areas are more likely to be white, female, married, currently working, homeless for the first time, and homeless for a shorter period of time. Other research indicates that families, single mothers, and children make up the largest group of people who are homeless in rural areas.” (NCH Fact Sheet #11, June 2006)

The homeless population in Dickinson and Iron Counties share many of the characteristics listed above except for the existence of homelessness resources. A January, 2006 Point-in-Time survey conducted by the Homeless Housing Work Group identified 19 homeless individuals and 37 persons in homeless families at the time of the survey. Of those 56 homeless, 30 persons were identified as either victims of Domestic Violence and/or youth under the age of 18. This information supports the NCH’s statement that women, children and families dominate the homeless population in rural areas. The Point-in-Time survey also indicated that 29 of the 56 homeless were in shelter, 10 were in transitional housing and 17 were unsheltered. Unlike the NCH’s findings, Dickinson and Iron Counties have worked hard to establish two shelters (domestic violence and emergency) and one transitional housing unit. Unfortunately, even with these services there were still persons who were unsheltered at the time of the survey. At this time, it is difficult to draw further conclusions about the Dickinson-Iron homeless population due to the limited information collected regarding homelessness (although there is significant speculation and anecdotal evidence which may also be accurate). One of the key components of the 10 Year Plan will be to collect more detailed information about people experiencing homelessness to be used to help the Homeless Housing Work Group create the most effective plan possible.

Impact on persons who become homeless

Homelessness creates overwhelming and sometimes debilitating issues for those experiencing it. It complicates everyday life events such as caring for children or preparing for work and school. Due to these complications, it often leads to the loss of employment or absence from school. These outcomes then perpetuate the homeless problem by limiting individual and family resources and making it very difficult to generate enough money for security deposits or rent. There are endless issues regarding health and safety

of homeless individuals and families, especially when the average January temperatures for Dickinson and Iron Counties range between 2 and 23 degrees Fahrenheit.

Contributing factors

In Dickinson and Iron Counties there are a myriad of economic, physical and cultural circumstances that contribute to homelessness. The communities within these two counties were established during the mining boom in the 1880s. The mines closed in the 1930s leaving the Kingsford Ford Motor Plant as the most significant area employer. It sustained the area until it closed in the 1950s and left thousands of people looking for work. The Quinnesec Paper Mill was built in the 1980s and it brought new employment into the area and is currently the largest area employer. Today, mining and manufacturing represent only 30 percent of the areas industry while over 50 percent of employment is located in retail and service industries. Although the local economy is growing, inadequate wages and the absence of steady income contribute to the area's homeless issues.

The condition of the housing stock is also a contributing factor in Dickinson-Iron homelessness. As mentioned above, the area developed in the 1880s with the discovery of several local mines. Much of the current housing stock was built as temporary housing for miners in the 1880s and is generally of poor quality. A supportive housing assessment conducted by the Department of Mental Health 10 years ago concluded that the most of the local rental units are in less than satisfactory condition. Recognizing the poor quality and safety issues related to the rental housing stock, several communities within Dickinson-Iron are attempting to establish or have recently established rental housing codes. Rental housing codes ensure that minimum standards for health and safety are met for each rental property.

Poor rental stock is not the only rental challenge faced by the area. Rental prices were inflated with the large influx of temporary labor used to construct the Quinnesec paper facility twenty years ago. Temporary labor left the area, but rental prices remained high. Another rental challenge is the lack of support for resolving landlord-tenant issues. County residents have access to mediation services; however, these services do not specify an ability to address landlord-tenant issues and are not well advertised.

In addition to physical and economic factors which contribute to area homelessness, there are two key cultural factors which have an impact. According to The Caring House, the domestic violence shelter for Dickinson and Iron Counties, there were 157 reported incidents of domestic violence in 2005. Victims of domestic violence who choose to leave their abusers are often forced to also leave their homes. In 2005, approximately 102 women, children and families utilized the domestic violence shelter and were at least temporarily homeless. Substance abuse is another significant cultural factor which impacts homelessness. Besides contributing to the development of homelessness, substance abuse is also responsible for early departure from shelters when abusers are unable to maintain shelter sobriety requirements.

As is true of many communities, transportation issues also contribute to the homeless problem. The rural nature of the area and the lack of a public transportation system only makes the problem more pronounced.

Resources consumed by these issues

Another important step which the Homeless Housing Work Group intends to take is the collection of resource allocation data from the entire community. The Work Group is very familiar with most of the local resources; however, there are some organizations, such as churches, which provide assistance but have not been asked to share information about homeless resource expenditures with any other specific community agency. An accurate accounting of all community homeless services and resources will help the Work Group to identify areas of service which may need more attention and funding.

Discuss what the response has historically been and what it is you hope to do

During the past ten years, the issue of homelessness has received increased attention in Dickinson and Iron Counties and the communities are now well posed to reach the goal of ending homelessness within the next 10 years. Approximately 10 years ago, the activities related to sheltering homeless persons began to increase. The community raised funds to expand the domestic violence shelter, The Caring House, and its services. Six years ago the Salvation Army established an emergency shelter and approximately three years ago, it added a two unit transitional apartment program. Northpointe, the agency responsible for community mental health services, established and maintains the *Shelter Plus Care Program*. The *Shelter Plus Care Program* provides housing vouchers and services for area homeless person who have a major mental illness. Two years ago Dickinson-Iron Counties were one of five Michigan communities to receive funding for the *Rural Supportive Housing Project*. The *Rural Supportive Housing Project* provides prevention and support services to homeless and the program has just been renewed for a third year. Most of these achievements have been made possible through the efforts of the Homeless Housing Work Group, a work group of the Dickinson-Iron Community Collaboratives.

The Homeless Housing Work Group believes that the community is poised to take the next step in its efforts to end homelessness. The Group values regular review of best practices and plans to continue searching for the most effective methods to address the issue in our community. At this time, the Group intends to focus on 1) developing and implementing the 10 year plan; 2) capitalizing and expanding on service/planning partnerships; 3) implementing the Housing First philosophy; 4) reviewing service provider discharge policies and developing a community wide policy to address homelessness; and 5) advocating for policy changes at the state level which will allow for more flexibility with regard to the definition of homelessness.

Clearly describe the new Vision

Dickinson and Iron Counties affirm that homelessness is an unacceptable and shared responsibility. It must be addressed collaboratively by local government, agencies, businesses, churches, and members of our community. We believe that decent, affordable, and sustainable housing is a first priority when providing assistance to at risk or homeless persons. In an effort to act on that priority, we have begun implementing the Housing First model in an effort to end homelessness in our communities.

Define your strategic response

In 1996 the Dickinson-Iron communities recognized the value in coordinating area agency services and established an advisory group to provide direction for those activities. The Dickinson and Iron County Community Collaboratives were established ten years ago to promote interagency/community planning and delivery of services. The Homeless Housing Work Group is one of the first work groups established within the Collaboratives. It assumed responsibility for the development and execution of the 10 Year Plan. With the introduction of the 10 Year Planning process, the Homeless Housing Work Group extended invitations to additional partners they wished to see at the table such as the work force development organization, Michigan Works!, the county commissions and the hospital – all of whom provided representatives. The Work Group is still seeking representation from local governments, law enforcement and Michigan Rehabilitation Services. Throughout the history of the Homeless Housing Work Group consumers have been included in a variety of ways. Most importantly, a consumer has sat on the Work Group since its inception. In addition, the Work Group solicits consumer input during the annual Housing Summit, VA CHALLENGE, community forums and daily interactions at the time of service.

In order to effectively pursue the goals listed in the next section, the Homeless Housing Work Group established three new work groups. The Housing First/Sub-Populations Work Group will be lead by Patricia Christie. It will facilitate the community-wide implementation of the Housing First philosophy and focus on obtaining more specific information about the homeless sub-populations. The Resource Allocation Work Group will be lead by Jerry McIntyre and will collect and organize information about all homeless services and costs. Lastly, the Discharge Planning Work Group will be responsible for reviewing current discharge policies and developing a community-wide discharge process using information gathered from best practices. This Work Group will be lead by Bill Reid.

10 Year Plan Goals and Strategies

The Homeless Housing Work Group (HHWG), a work group of the Dickinson-Iron Community Collaboratives, has functioned as a “local collaboration of groups, organizations and agencies involved in the planning and delivery” of homeless services since 1996. The HHWG meets monthly to discuss issues, review best practices and now to guide the implementation of the *10 Year Plan*. The following goals and strategies were developed by the HHWG/Continuum of Care Committee using the *Livingston County Homeless Continuum of Care Plan* as a model for goal and strategy development.

It is the expectation of the HHWG/Continuum of Care Committee that the *Dickinson-Iron County 10 Year Plan* will function as a living document. The *10 Year Plan* will serve as a guide to ending homelessness, but the HHWG/Continuum of Care Committee will continue to review best practices and incorporate appropriate new concepts into the *10 Year Plan* on a regular basis. The *10 Year Plan* will be formally reviewed at least once a year by the HHWG/Continuum of Care Committee.

The HHWG/Continuum of Care Committee is actively seeking new key members such as government and law enforcement representatives to participate in the HHWG/Continuum of Care monthly meetings.

1. Keep people housed through prevention of eviction and foreclosure.

Short Term Strategies (1-3 years)

- Continue to streamline the process and forms for accessing emergency and prevention assistance, drawing in new partners/organizations as necessary/appropriate
- Review funding for the entire homelessness spectrum of services (emergency to homeownership) such as rental subsidies, emergency assistance, etc.
- Expand tenant educational classes to teach upkeep of units, cost saving measures, etc.
- Develop additional outreach activities to obtain an accurate count of homeless and homeless subgroups

Long Term Strategies (4-10 years)

- Formalize and distribute the process for accessing emergency and prevention assistance – including comprehensive assessment of housing needs that all agencies use
- Formalize support management/case management activities to assist in maintaining housing

2. Increase the capacity to develop a continuum of housing including emergency, transitional, permanent supportive, and affordable housing.

Short Term Strategies (1-2 years)

- Maintain current Shelter Plus Care program and increase the number of subsidies as needed
- Advocate and support rental rehab and substandard housing ordinances in all communities
- Improve method for communicating current available units and people looking for housing – possibly use HMIS for this
- Work with landlord community to secure units and work out issues with tenants
- Explore interest/viability of tenant associations in each county
- Continue to improve understanding of funding availability throughout the community for homeless population

Long Term Strategies (4-10 years)

- Continue working with generic housing developers, builders, associations and realtors with regard to new developments and the allocation of additional units for supportive housing

3. Develop a coordinated discharge assessment and planning process.

Short Term Strategies (1-3 years)

- Review best practices in discharge planning
- Using the information gathered from the review of best practices in discharge planning, develop a community wide discharge planning process to be reviewed by the Housing Work Group and distributed to all organizations who provide homelessness services
- Develop standard process/protocol for discharge planning/services across systems including suggested timeline and common understanding that discharge planning starts at the beginning of stay
- Educate community/staff about how they can partner/assist with homelessness issues
- Review best practices in discharge planning

Long Term Strategies (4-10 years)

- Develop referral process for life skills and job training

4. Ensure supportive services are available to keep people housed.

Short Term Strategies (1-3 years)

- Review public transportation options/reliability
- Communicate with faith based community to determine extent of homelessness resources
- Assist in the development of case management services (for emergency situations); accessible, affordable child care; and a coordinated food assistance program (utilizing current community food assistance resources)

Long Term Strategies (4-10 years)

- Promote availability of mental health/substance abuse/healthcare services to prevent homelessness
- Develop a website to more effectively communicate available community services (to be used by staff as a resource for providing better services for consumers)

5. Ensure quality and improve outcomes through need assessment, and data collection, analysis, and evaluation.

Short Term Strategies (1-3 years)

- Fully implement HMIS system and create best practices for sharing information
- Continue annual Housing Summit and VA CHALLENG to obtain consumer input
- Develop a process for formally mapping area services and determine need for future services
- Provide information to community and consumers about 211 services
- Enhance data collection and distribution in order to obtain better information regarding local sub-groups

Long Term Strategies (4-10 years)

- Ensure that all agencies and groups that receive inquiries for assistance are in HMIS
- Develop common intake form to track same data
- Develop plan/system for managing data outside of HMIS

6. Increase community involvement in addressing the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

Short Term Strategies (1-3 years)

- Continue (Housing Work Group) to provide public education regarding homelessness initiatives

- Educate public officials (i.e. Councils, Townships, etc.) about local issues and needs
- Sponsor master plan meetings to educate on housing needs
- Continue Homeless Awareness Week activities

Long Term Strategies (4-10 years)

- Adopt and market perpetual education campaign
- Continue to look for additional partners