

“10 Years is too long...”

The Eaton County Plan to
End Homelessness
Today



Table of Contents

Story-

Eaton County is home to over 100,000 hard working and prideful individuals. Residents of Eaton County take care and look out for one another. Generations of families have called the county their home exclusively for many years.

The pride that people have regarding Eaton County ensures that we face problems head on. This was no more evident when a diverse group convened on July 31, 2006 to tackle homelessness in Eaton County.

To use the cliché “Everyone was at the table,” is an understatement. No group was left out of the Community Dialogue that night. From concerned citizens to elected officials—the high turnout turned some heads.



“What do we need to do to create, in ten years, an Eaton County where all residents are in stable living environments and adequately supported in maintaining themselves?”

Page 3 The Plan

Page 4 Historical Perspective

Catalytic Recommendations

Page 5 Community Awareness

Page 6 Community Will

Page 7 Mechanism for Collaboration

Page 8 Philosophy

Areas of Interest and Targeted Responses

Page 9 Policy

Page 10 Prevention and Empowerment

Page 11 Incentives

Page 12 Centralized Information and Referral

Page 13 Transportation

Page 14 Conclusion

Page 15 From/To Chart

The Plan

A plan can never be perfect. It can, however; be the very best guess a person, group, or organization can make to solve a problem or initiate action. Plans are made and plans are amended. The best plans are changed, refined, redefined, and overhauled all the time. The following document is a result of months of planning. Months of labor, tense moments, and honest discussion have been translated on

the pages ahead. This document, this plan, will serve as the road map that will drive homelessness out of Eaton County. From lurking in the shadows to being thrust in the spotlight, homelessness in Eaton County is now and will be in the front of our minds. We are mindful of the youth in Eaton County. We are mindful of the elderly and our aging population. We are mindful of the too many residents whom live at the brink of being homeless right now. We pledge to not only be

mindful, but also act. This plan will serve as our guide. We pledge to execute the plan with fierce determination and resolve yet we remain open to its changes. We do this in the pursuit of perfection and for the future of Eaton County.



**“Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.”
-Henry Ford**

The People

Participants in the July 31st Dialogue

Mike Blau - Legal Services of South Central Michigan
Jeanne Pearl Wright - Eaton County Commissioner
Keith Behm - Michigan Dept. of Human Services
Joni Risner - Director, Eaton County United Way
Anne Barna - Barry Eaton District Health Department
Claudine Hannold - Director, Eaton County Community Development
Jonathan Greene - Coordinator, Eaton County Community Development
Linda Keefe - Eaton County Commissioner
Kay Randolph Back - Citizen
Kathryn Conrad - Citizen
Lori Poyer - Peckham Industries
Jolene Talbott - Capital Area Community Services
Sharon Letson - Charlotte Assembly of God
Jeannie Pool - Citizen
Amy Baibak - Eaton Substance Abuse Program
Scott Struck - Eaton County Counseling Center
Russ Laverty - Supervisor, Vermontville Township
Deb Shaughnessy - Mayor, City of Charlotte
Mary Wright - Eaton County United Way Board Member
Ken Lane - Assistant Manager, Delta Township
Penny Snowden - Citizen
Mary Thomas - Citizen
Tom Jones - Pastor
Mike Chappell - President, Village of Dimondale
Alexis Millisor - Don's Truck Stop
Al Widner - Superintendent, Eaton Intermediate School District
Joe Bullen - Supervisor, Benton Township
Rosalind Bullen - Heart and Hands
Linda Cobb - Adult Handicap Program
Kathryn Conrad - Citizen
Richard Currier - Loaves and Fishes
Bill DeFrance - Superintendent, Eaton Rapids Schools
Denise Dunn - Director, Housing Services for Eaton County
Tom Fullerton - Citizen
Sandy Guild - Citizen
Bill Kennedy - Eaton County Family Court
Bryan Myrkle - Economic Development Director, City of Charlotte
Nancy Oliver - Director, Siren/Eaton Shelter
Marina Poroshin - Capital Area Community Services
Julie Reincke - Judge, Eaton County District Court
Ronda Rucker - Early Childhood Connection & Strong Families Safe Children
Marilyn Rutter - Eaton County Planning Commission
Tim Sadowski - Manager, City of Potterville
Pat Simmons - Michigan Dept. of Human Services

Historical Perspective



A major factor contributing to homelessness seems to be the lack of a regular source of adequate income, whether through social security benefits, other public assistance, or wages from low-paying jobs. Many people who are able and willing to work cannot find a 40-hour/week job because these jobs are simply not available.

Many of the homeless are constrained from getting jobs because of their lack of education or their criminal history. The average educational attainment for people who become homeless is 10th Grade, and 10% of those have a felony conviction on their record, which restricts them from eligibility for many jobs.

The wide range of ways in which a person can become homeless is striking. Take

for example a person earning \$7 per hour serving coffee in the morning. They too, may be part of the group this plan addresses.

There is a shortage of affordable housing for people earning low incomes in Eaton County.

The lack of affordable housing is an invisible problem to the affluent. As a community, what we need is direction and coordination, but this cannot happen without recognition of the problem.

There is only one homeless youth shelter serving the area—Crossroads, which has only 8 slots available at any one time. This means that almost any homeless youth who seeks assistance is looking at a waiting list. If this is a priority need for our community, we need to develop a funding stream to support services to homeless youth.

A year ago, after Hurricane Katrina, there was an increase in interest and willingness to help the homeless from New Orleans. Apartment buildings opened up, landlords were willing part-

ners, and the whole community rallied to help people. State employees were put on alert that they might volunteer their homes to house victims of the hurricane. Doesn't this mean that there must be underutilized housing that could be applied to homeless people in our own community?

Snapshot

From 12/1/2004 to 11/30/2005 over 19,000 meals from the Siren/Eaton Shelter were served.

Siren/Eaton Shelter provided roughly 8000 emergency homeless nights in the same period.

Eaton County has 3 communities in which 51% or more of the population are considered low income to moderate income. That is to say that over half the people in those communities earn 80% of the county median income.

Community Awareness

Current

In order to change policy and increase funding to end homelessness, it will be necessary to honestly portray the nature of homelessness in Eaton County to the general public. This is a difficult message to convey. It involves dispelling myths about the “typical” homeless per-



son by revealing that many are women and children, that many are working in low-income jobs, etc.. But it also involves acknowledging that there are indeed some homeless people who are “more difficult to love.” We need to be forthright in showing all of the unreasonable barriers that face people who want to become self-reliant—low wages, employment and housing policies, etc.—while maintaining reasonable standards of accountability for all.

At risk in Eaton County

Terra is a single mother with two young children. She is employed at a local retailer and makes \$7.00 per hour. She works 40 per week. Annually, Terra earns \$14,560. She can barely make ends meet.

Her monthly budget is below.

Income

Gross Earnings - \$1,213

Net Earnings - \$1,003

Benefits/Assistance

Child care - Covered by DHS

Food Stamps - \$218

*Health care - Medicaid
(Children only)*

Expenses

Rent - \$575

Utilities - \$140

Trash - \$20

Gas - \$135

Car Insurance - \$65

Personal items - \$25

Total - \$960

Balance - \$43 left for car repairs, clothing, and other incidentals

If Terra misses just one day of work unpaid her risk for becoming homeless greatly increases.

Goal

Educate to raise awareness of the problem in Eaton County. Make sure that elected officials fully acknowledge homelessness as a persistent issue that requires cooperation, collaboration, and solutions.

Strategies

The initiative should consider organizing a professional public awareness campaign that communicates this story sensitively and authentically. Its primary goal should be to deepen community understanding of homelessness and generate the community will to support collaborative efforts to end homelessness.

Action

Organize data and narratives that portray the true nature of homelessness: its causes, who it affects, how it impacts the entire community.

Schedule presentations to various community groups and potential partner entities.

Organize a professional public awareness campaign to deepen the understanding of homelessness by the community at large.

Community Will

Change is needed -

A single woman, named Chris, came into Housing Services for Eaton County (HSEC) for assistance with housing. She had been kicked out of her boyfriend's house and had no place to go. HSEC had to explain to her that they were not a shelter and discussed the possibility of her going into the shelters in Lansing. She had a job in Charlotte, and she did not have transportation to get back and forth to work from Lansing and would lose her job. Chris decided to ask a friend if she could sleep on their couch for a couple nights.

HSEC provided her with a housing list of affordable properties. She was able to use the phone at HSEC, but she had no permanent phone number to leave on the messages. A week later she went back to HSEC and stated she had found housing and had gone down to DHS to apply for assistance with the security deposit but was denied because she was not considered homeless. She was not considered homeless because she was sleeping on a friend's couch and not in a shelter.

Chris was very frustrated as she had tried to get into the shelter but was turned away. She was also worried that the landlord would not hold the apartment any longer since it had been several days waiting for the decision from DHS. HSEC advised her to go stay in a Lansing shelter and reapply for the SER. Two days later, Chris called to say that she did stay in the shelter but the landlord gave away the apartment to someone else since so much time had passed. Chris also stated that she could no longer stay on the friend's couch and was back in the same situation as when she first came to HSEC.

Current

There is a demonstrated need for more affordable housing for people earning low incomes, and people who become temporarily homeless due to a life crisis such as job loss, divorce, or poor health. An early step in Eaton County's ten-year plan should be to determine the extent and nature of the housing needed, and then generate local support to finance the creation of the required housing resources. Staffing and support

services for those who will need assistance in maintaining themselves in housing should also be estimated, and incorporated into the plan.

Goal

Generate local support to fund and manage affordable housing for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Strategies

Once this groundwork has been laid, participants in this initiative should carefully educate the community on the economic costs of not serving the needs of homeless people in Eaton County.

Action

Conduct a study to assess the need for more affordable housing units in Eaton County to generate local support to finance the creation of the required housing resources.

Create broad community support for the plan to end homelessness, by demonstrating the economic costs of not serving the needs of homeless people in Eaton County, and the return on investment that would result from providing adequate housing and services for children, families, seniors, veterans, and others likely to find themselves in need of housing assistance.

Develop a proposal for a new local income stream to fund the necessary resources, such as a millage or new motel or rental tax, that could leverage state or federal dollars to build safe, affordable homes, and maintain adequate staffing.

Mechanism for Collaboration

Current

There are already many people and institutions in Eaton County with the desire to work together to end homelessness; however, many of them are not adequately linked to a coordinated effort. Churches, business owners, human service agencies, landlords, law enforcement, the court, and government all have resources to apply and roles to play in this effort, however; they cannot do so without some new mechanism that enables them to share knowledge and insights and thereby change current practices that reinforce the cycle of homelessness for many people.

Goal

Create a mechanism for organizing and applying the community's assets and resources toward ending homelessness in Eaton County.

Linking agencies with churches, government, law enforcement, landlords, and business owners is a strong priority. The linking could be in the form of a "foundation" that could also act as a fiduciary for the interested parties.

Strategies

The nature of the new

mechanism for collaboration needs to be determined. It could take the form of a "foundation" that manages collective financial resources. It could also be linked to a central information and referral mechanism like the developing 211 system. What is essential have buy-in over a broad range of collaborators, including those not traditionally involved in services to the homeless; that it is dedicated to a unifying community strategy for addressing the many forms of homelessness pro-actively (e.g. "housing first"); and that it holds all participating partners accountable for changing current practice in a way that supports the community strategy.

Action

Identify all of the entities to be linked through the collaborative mechanism. Describe the potential resources that might be contributed to the effort by each entity. Consider all of the following as *resources*: formal programs and services, volunteer opportunities, leaders with an interest in changing current policy and practice with regard to homeless and potentially homeless people,

communications expertise (to assist in improving public awareness), and sources of funding for housing and services.

Use the current Continuum of Care model to engage people and organizations with an interest in creating a new collaborative mechanism.

Facilitate the design of a new collaborative mechanism, building on the Continuum of Care and implement the new collaborative mechanism.

Mike's Story

Mike came into Housing Services for Eaton County (HSEC) for assistance with housing. Mike had been sleeping in his car since he was evicted from his apartment. He had obtained a part-time job and needed to find a place that he could afford.

HSEC gave him a housing list of apartments that were available for rent. Mike came back into the office three days later and stated that he had found housing. Mike filled out an SER application at DHS for assistance with his first month's rent and deposit.

See the rest of Mike's Story on the following page.

Philosophy

Current

Homelessness results from many social conditions and situations: loss of employment, low-income employment, physical or mental illness, divorce, domestic abuse (of both women and children), substance abuse, and inadequate supports for senior citizens. In many if not all of these cases it is almost impossible to work on the underlying barriers to self-reliance when the person is without a stable living environment, i.e. on the street, moving serially from shelter to shelter, or “couch-surfing” among friends and relatives.

Goal

Adopt as an organizing principle for the Eaton County initiative that we must first get people into stable living environments so that we can then deal with the individualized needs that will enable them to become self-reliant.

Strategies

Gain the confidence of the elected officials regarding the Housing First method and use their significant influence to spread the philosophy countywide.

We Believe

A Housing First approach rests on the belief that helping people access and sustain permanent, affordable housing should be the central goal of work with people experiencing homelessness. A central tenet of the 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.

We Promise

To provide housing assistance, case management and supportive services responsive to individual or family needs (time-limited or long-term) after an individual or family is housed. Also we promise to significantly reduce the time people experience homelessness and prevent further episodes of homelessness

Mike's Story continued

HSEC left a message for the DHS caseworker that Mike was sleeping in his car and could they please fast track his application since the apartment was ready to move into right away. Within 24 hours, Mike received the decision notice from DHS that they would help with most of the move in amount. Since HSEC could help with the remaining portion, the landlords allowed him to move in that same day. Mike was ecstatic that he would not have to spend another night in his car.

Action

Articulate the rationale and policy implications of the “Housing First” philosophy for a general audience.



Create materials to advance “Housing First” as a recognizable “brand” for Eaton County’s plan to end homelessness.

Plan and implement an annual “empowerment celebration,” the purpose of which is to illuminate success, build awareness of the “Housing First” philosophy, share resources, attract media coverage, and engage new partners.

Insist the Eaton County Continuum of Care and the Human Services Collaborative Council adopt, through resolution, the Housing First Model as its prevailing strategy to address homelessness in Eaton County. This will involve a shift in the existing emergency shelter and transitional housing system

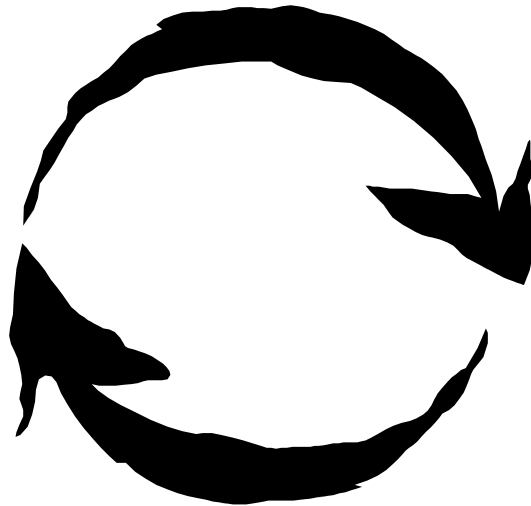
Further Recommendations

The public dialogue on July 31st 2006 and the subsequent follow up session on August 15th 2006 determined that the Eaton County 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness should be founded on four points. Community Awareness, Community Will, Mechanism for Collaboration, and Philosophy have become the cornerstones on which this effort will be built. In addition to the four foundation points of the plan, the group has identified five more recommendations that are interwoven in the fabric of the broad foundation.



The upcoming five recommendations are not intended to be a subset of any of the four points that make the foundation of this plan. These five recommendations or systems are no less important, in fact, working to address them will actually accelerate the process. As we strive to implement the four pronged approach we will be addressing these next five recommendations prudently and efficiently.

- County Government
- 16 Townships
- 6 Cities
- 5 Villages
- 13 School Districts
- 20+ Agencies
- 105,000 People



United. Working
Together for one
cause.



Policy

Resources must be used to create affordable housing for those who need it. But a comprehensive solution to homelessness will not be possible without changing policies that keep

“A new strategy is needed.”

low-income workers in poverty and leave them vulnerable to economic and medical catastrophe. The Eaton County initiative should become a voice for homeless and at-risk people and families, enabling policy-makers to see how current policies and practices contribute to the cycle of homelessness. Some examples would be how women and children are not adequately protected in domestic violence situations; how people with mental illness are deprived of medications that would enable them to maintain stable lives; the unreasonable barriers that face ex-offenders who want to turn their lives

around when they return to the community; the inadequacy of many people’s capacity to generate income without additional vocational/educational training; and the plight of seniors who do not have adequate benefit/pension plans in place. It should be made clear that our current approach to homelessness is largely to “pass the problem along” from one system to the next, with little effort to give people the individual resources they need in order to establish and maintain



a stable existence. A new strategy is needed—one that comprehensively addresses the many facets of homelessness and establishes a flexible system of support to meet individual needs.

Prevention and Empowerment

Preventing homelessness will require a combination of practical assistance and personal empowerment. We know some people on the brink of homelessness today are not yet able to become independent and self-reliant due to economic, health, or relationship challenges. For these, practical assistance such as direct utility payments can be important prevention tools.

For others, including children and adults whose families have been trapped in poverty for generations, early and intensive efforts to develop life skills such as budgeting, nutrition, and man-

aging relationships are equally important. Prevention services for these community members must build both their personal capacity and their personal sense of worth, while consistently demonstrating they are valued and respected as members of the community. The resources of the faith community should be especially engaged to assist in this aspect of prevention.

Above all, prevention services must strive to strengthen and stabilize individuals and families, and help them achieve the greatest degree of self-reliance of which they are capable.

Incentives



Participants in the Eaton County initiative should creatively brainstorm, select, and implement strategies to make assisting the homeless attractive to employers, real estate managers, developers, and educational institutions. There will be targeted efforts to raise the awareness of these potential partners of existing incentives as well. Incentives might include support for job training and work assistance for partici-

pating employers, or agreements with landlords to provide personal assistance to tenants to whom they might otherwise be reluctant to rent.

Establish a work group to explore and organize incentives to various key partners in employment, housing, and education. Research existing incentives to each group, and existing knowledge base, through such organizations as the Chamber of Commerce, developer and landlord associations, and educational institutions such as LCC, MSU, Davenport College, etc. Brainstorm possible incentives to each group. Select and implement incentive development strategies.

Transportation

Lack of transportation is an important obstacle for many in Eaton County's especially in more rural areas. The initiative should develop relationships with potential transportation partners such as Eatran, CATA, Clinton Area Transit, and Indian Trails to try to establish a workable transportation system that would enable program participants to have reliable transportation to and from work and appointments. This effort could be conducted on a tri-



county scale, in collaboration with homeless initiatives in Clinton and Ingham County.

Identify potential partners in improving access to transportation resources. Convene stakeholders; identify barriers and opportunities to improving transportation access. Create a more detailed transportation improvement plan for serving those in need in Eaton County.

Centralized Information and Referral

It is clear that a wide array of services and supports will be needed to end homelessness in Eaton County. One key resource that will also be needed is an efficient means of accessing these services by everyone in the community. The Capital Area 211 system that is currently in development may become this resource. The Eaton County initiative should stay attuned to the development of this system, and consider other viable means for helping the general public know what services and supports are available to someone who is homeless or at risk. A resource guide that is regularly updated is an example of this. Ideally, the developing Homeless Management Information System should also be linked to the centralized information and referral system.

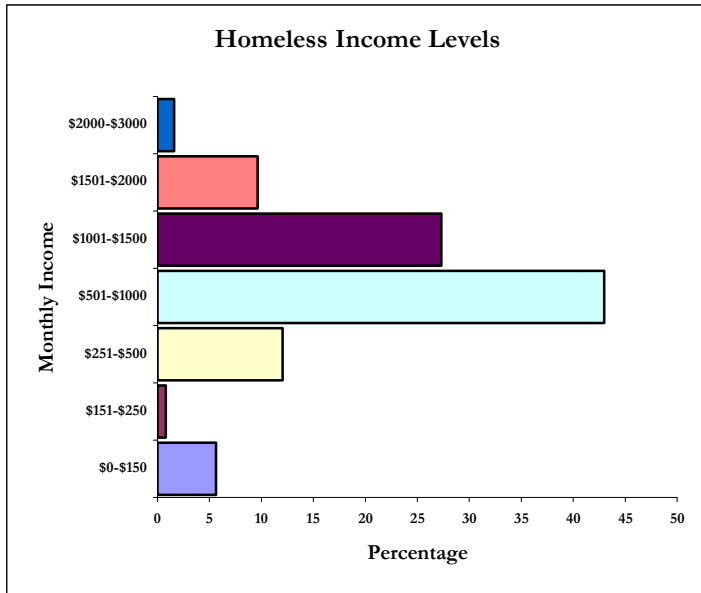
Identify liaisons to the developing 211 System,

“It is clear that a wide array of services and supports will be needed to end homelessness in Eaton County.”

to serve as a conduit for information to the larger groups of stakeholders organizing to end homelessness. Provide regular updates on the development of the 211 system. Explore the need and practicality of alternative means of making information and referral more efficient, such as a regularly updated resources guide.

Eaton County Homeless Data

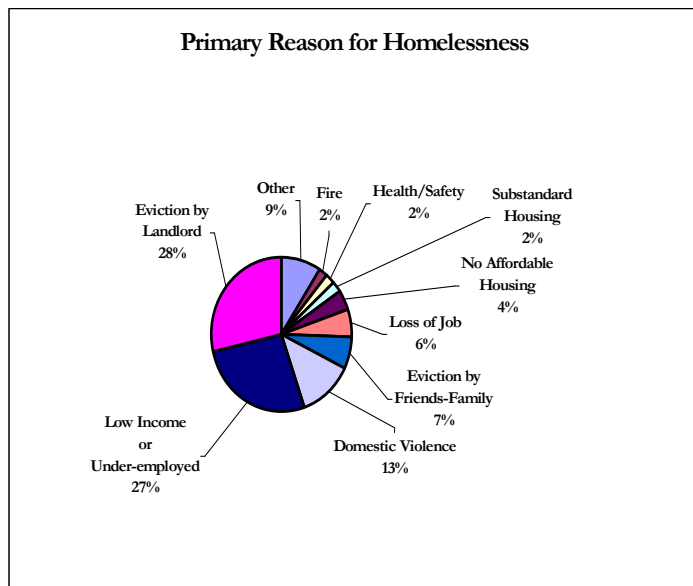
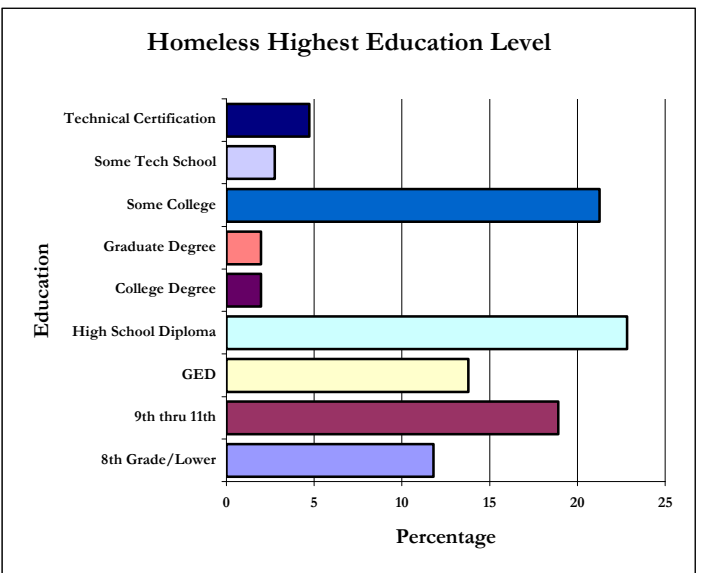
2005-2006



According to the 2005 U.S. Census American Fact Finder Survey, nearly 6000 individuals in Eaton County live below the poverty level. Increases to the minimum wage help, but they do not compete with rising costs

Household Breakdown	Homeless
Single Male	41
Single Female	53
Single Male Parent	13
Single Female Parent	85
Married no Child	8
Married Parents	42
Total	242

No segment of the population is completely free of the perils of homelessness. Education attainment has little to do with being homeless or at risk for becoming homeless. People with at least some college represent the second highest percentage of homeless in Eaton County. The charts presented on this page help to visually debunk myths surrounding homelessness.



\$952 is the median monthly mortgage expense in Eaton County. Not surprisingly, 80% of the homeless in Eaton County do not earn that much money in a month.

Conclusion

There are very few opportunities in life when one knows, for sure, they have made a difference. This is one of those times. The Eaton County 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness will change family trees. It will, unequivocally, be the single most important initiative this county has ever seen. Schools are important, jails are important, police, fire, planning, administration, business, service, religion, etc, are all important. But, nothing, however, is more the foundation of human beings as shelter. A roof overhead. And, we take it for granted. Until now. From this point forward, homelessness will cease to be a dirty word. Never to be ignored again, the preceding plan marks the beginning of the end.

The plan will change and the course will vary, but the goal of ending homelessness can never wane.

It will take patience and persistence mixed with collaboration and commitment but Eaton County will be free of homelessness in 10 years. Agencies will band together, people will support the cause, local leaders will champion the effort, and philosophies will shift. The Plan calls for it and the response thus far indicates the plan is working.

For those reading this for the first time or those who are just now hearing about this plan, consider where you would be without a home and consider becoming a part of something truly special. There will be times when the plan calls for volunteers and there will be other times when simply attending a meeting will have tremendous impact. Consider lending a hand to those lurking in the shadows. Become an advocate for change and a person of action.



Paradigm Shift

Several modes of thinking, rational, or simple myths operate in Eaton County. Change needs to be embraced. Change needs to be made a part of how we think about and tackle homelessness in Eaton County. If we are to be successful, we need to recognize that our current paradigm needs to be altered. Could homelessness be ended in 10 Years with the current rationale?

From	To
Culture that believes homelessness will always exist	▶ Culture that assumes permanent housing is a right for every person
A community that does not recognize homelessness as a problem, nor a growing problem	▶ A community that rises to the challenge of ending Homelessness in 10 Years and recognizes its impact on the community
Only a perceived need for more affordable housing	▶ Concrete evidence via a housing study that shows the need for permanent affordable housing
No local funding stream to address resource gaps like affordable housing, staffing, and state and federal limitations	▶ A funding source that would smooth the disjointed funding programs of the state and federal levels
Loose association of agencies in the Continuum of Care	▶ Strong connections between agencies that go beyond monthly meetings and into day to day communication and cross agency response teams
Services and benefits that are available only after homelessness occurs	▶ Resources and tools in place that focus on prevention
No comprehensive plan which is embraced by all	▶ The Housing First Methodology is accepted and is the guiding supposition in Eaton County
Intermittent access to permanent housing	▶ Permanent housing as the major tenet for addressing homelessness

Special Thanks

Several key people played integral roles in developing, writing, and editing the Eaton County 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness and attending the many meetings held over the past few months.

Thank you.

Doak Bloss

Mike Blau

Anne Barna

Joni Risner

Claudine Hannold

Jonathan Greene

Keith Behm

Jeanne Pearl - Wright

Colleen's Cuisine

UPS Store

Eaton County