

Out-Wayne County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness

Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition Chair: Jennifer Lepard

Introduction

The Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition (“The Coalition”) serves as the area’s Continuum of Care and has been working collaboratively for over ten years to provide seamless services to homeless or near homeless individuals and families. This system of service delivery has a high level of efficiency and the Coalition continually seeks new opportunities to improve services to homeless and at-risk individuals and families. The Coalition strives to ensure that all Out-Wayne County residents have access to stable living environments and supportive services that encourage housing stability.

The Coalition has cultivated numerous achievements including:

- ✓ Creating the first supportive housing units in Out-Wayne County through the Shelter+Care program.
- ✓ Receiving funding from the Social Security Administration for Project Hope, an outreach program for homeless persons who may be eligible for disability benefits.
- ✓ Being selected by the Corporation for Supportive Housing as one of four pilot sites for the development of 100 units of permanent supportive housing for low-income persons.
- ✓ Effectively implementing a data collection system through the Homeless Management Information System to compile community-wide homeless demographic information.
- ✓ Receiving funding from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development that to date exceeds \$15 million to support case management, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, employment and training, aftercare, and transportation services.

The Coalition recognizes the importance of taking local action to end homelessness. As a result, The Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition has developed the framework for a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness based on the unique needs homeless and near homeless persons and families in the 43 communities that comprise Out-Wayne County. The entire membership of the Coalition is engaged in this process and the Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition assumes responsibility for ensuring that objectives are met. The plan framework and summary are outlined in this document. The strategies contained in this plan are consistent with the County of Wayne’s consolidated plan.

Advisory Committee

The advisory committee to the Out-Wayne County 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness includes the Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition represented by chair, Jennifer Lepard; Wayne County Department of Human Services; Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Agency represented by Assistant Director Veda Sharp; Wayne County Human Services Collaborative Body represented by Bernell Wiggins; and the County of Wayne, Michigan.

Summary

Homeless and potentially homeless persons in Out Wayne County experience a wide range of risks and challenges, including loss of employment, social alienation, domestic violence, low educational attainment, mental health and substance abuse problems, and lack of the skills needed to enable them to acquire gainful employment.

Before these challenges can properly be addressed, it is essential that people be established in a safe and stable living environment. Without this Housing First philosophy, virtually all efforts to overcome the many issues contributing to homelessness will be temporary if not thwarted altogether. The Out-Wayne County Homelessness Coalition is committed to this philosophy in its efforts to end homelessness in ten years.

Vision

The vision of the Out-Wayne County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness is that all Out-Wayne County residents will be in stable living environments and adequately supported in maintaining their housing by the year 2016.

This vision was articulated because it is:

- Based on a Housing First strategy.
- An opportunity to maximize mainstream resources and encourage community integration.
- Aligned with information received from both consumers and an interdisciplinary team of service providers with extensive experience who maintain a client-centered, culturally competent on-demand service delivery philosophy.
- Focused on a solution of permanent supportive housing.
- Focused on ending homelessness.

Process

Our approach to develop the ten year plan was to convene two strategic planning sessions that elicited open dialogue from service providers, consumers, and community stakeholders. Many of these key players were invited because they possess the working knowledge of the needs of homeless and near homeless individuals and families of Out-Wayne County. The additional participants were invited to participate because of the role they play in helping meet the goals of the ten year plan. All participants, including members of the Continuum of Care

who participated in the planning process contributed to the content contained herein.

Scope of Problem

National data

The National Alliance to End Homelessness reported in August 2006 that nearly 3.5 million individuals experience homelessness each year. Homelessness is experienced in every ethnic group and age group. The overwhelming majority of homeless individuals cite housing problems as their primary cause of homelessness. Lack of affordable housing is the root of this problem.

State Data

Recent efforts in the state of Michigan have included a comprehensive and committed approach to securing accurate and timely data about the state's homeless individuals and families. The *Baseline Data Report* published by the Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness presents an up-to-date picture of the state of homelessness in Michigan. The report lists 50,692 as the projected number of persons and families who experienced homelessness during the six month period between January and June 2006. This figure was calculated with data collected from the Homeless Management Information System used by Continuums of Care across the state.

The report further states that housing issues including eviction; foreclosure; lack of affordable housing; substandard housing; and utility shut-off account for 50% of stated reasons for homelessness among families. Homeless individuals present a different view of the factors contributing to their homelessness with 63% indicating a disability or health concern as the primary reason for their homelessness.

Local data

In Out-Wayne County, the number of homeless families exceeds the number of homeless individuals. In 2005, service providers in Out-Wayne County collected data about the persons they served and reported serving 407 families with children and 336 single individuals.

Historical Approach to Homeless Services

Prior to the emergence of the "Housing First" philosophy, homeless and near homeless families and individuals were typically receiving services through a system of emergency and shelter or transitional housing. This system saw a high level of recidivism and did not effectively address the underlying barriers of these families and individuals including poverty and the lack of affordable housing. Further, the system did not foster the hope and encouragement that permanent housing can incite.

"Housing First" offers an alternative that is founded on the belief that homeless and near homeless families and individuals will be more responsive to

interventions and social services support after they are in their own permanent housing. Permanent housing provides the opportunity for individuals and families to become part of a neighborhood and community while fostering self-confidence. Permanent housing combined with supportive case management helps homeless individuals and families to address barriers, maintain their housing, and ultimately break the cycle of homelessness.

The vision of this Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness is aligned with the “Housing First” philosophy and seeks to ensure that all Out-Wayne County residents are in stable living environments and adequately supported in maintaining their housing. The vision includes a strategy of service provision that consists of: Crisis Intervention & Short-Term Stabilization; Screening, Intake and Needs Assessment; Provision of Housing Resources; and Provision of Case Management.

Profile of Persons who are Homeless or at-risk in Out-Wayne County

Through open-ended dialogue during the strategic planning sessions, participants were asked to describe persons who are homeless or at-risk of experiencing homelessness in Out-Wayne County. The following list describes some of the specific populations who are affected and the scenarios and factors contributing to homelessness in this region.

- Unaccompanied youth: There are many homeless teenagers who are legally on their own, with no family and nowhere to turn for stability or assistance. Many live for a while on the couch of a friend or friend’s family. Among these youth are those who have aged out of foster care and special education students have graduated and are unprepared to maintain a job that would allow them to live on their own. There is also a subset of this population that have been forced from their parents’ or relatives’ homes due to their sexual identity (i.e. gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered youth).
- Unidentified families: Like unaccompanied youth, there are families that move from place to place and are not counted as homeless as they manage a series of temporary places to stay. Many are headed by a single mom who is extremely emotionally stressed and unable to gain employment. Many are also terrified of the idea of going into a shelter for fear they will lose their children.
- Individuals with mental health concerns: For many single adults who are homeless, substance abuse, mental health, or a combination of both is a major barrier to achieving stability and independence. A team approach to serving these adults is needed. Shelters that require a clean urine test are also a problem, since substance abuse is a major reason they are homeless. There are also a number of families whose head of household

has a mental condition, and therefore need much more intensive help than they are likely to get at a shelter.

- Victims of domestic violence and sexual assault: Many women experience homelessness when they leave or are forced to leave a tumultuous home environment that includes incidents of domestic violence and or sexual assault.
- Veterans: Veterans, particularly those aged 40 to 70, also make up a significant number of people who are homeless or at risk. For many, their age is a barrier to employment. Substance abuse is also a problem for many.
- Working families sometimes referred to as “The Working Poor”: A new population in need of prevention services appears to be emerging, one that is not likely to get a “poster”: working families with children who want very much *not* to be counted, because they want to stay off the “homeless” radar screen. Some are on the cusp of homelessness, facing eviction and possible job layoffs.

Challenges

The strategic planning sessions elicited the responses below regarding gaps in service and needs of homeless or at-risk individuals and families.

- Assistance programs such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are very complex, making it difficult for people to access even when they are eligible. There is a need to loosen some of the rules attached to this funding, to enable people who are on the verge of becoming homeless to access support that might prevent it. We need to be able to spend the available dollars more flexibly, in response to individual need.
- The needs of two groups of homeless and near homeless persons are not currently being met in Out-Wayne County. These are youth coming out of foster care and ex-offenders. A multitude of resources are needed to support these diverse groups.
- Perhaps we need a “Rapid Employment” strategy similar to the “Housing First” strategy. We understand that it is impossible to work on many of the underlying issues contributing to homelessness unless one is in a stable living environment—but neither can we do so unless people are able to work and earn.
- Many persons face additional barriers that require adequate resources. For example, a large number of homeless or near homeless persons find

themselves in need of child care, transportation, or a driver's license before they can meet goals such as employment.

- We need places for people to live. It is difficult to acquire properties due to zoning issues. Many municipalities in Out-Wayne County explicitly do not want shelters, or even rental properties. This will only change if people with the power to change policy are brought around to a "Fair Share" housing approach. What are needed are incentives or penalties attached to the receipt of funding for housing; for example, a requirement that any community that receives HUD dollars would lose funds if it failed to provide adequate affordable housing.
- We need to track the progress of those who succeed, and to identify where people's progress breaks down. In addition to funding for this endeavor, we need accurate tracking of progress.
- We need service providers that respond to the needs of homeless and near homeless families and individuals with a holistic and individualized approach.
- We need resources that address the profound trauma experienced by each person facing homelessness. It may look different for each person, but this trauma is the thing that we must break through in order to help that person become stable.

The Strategic Response

The planning process for the Out-Wayne County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness consisted of two meetings. On September 11, 2006, approximately sixty Out -Wayne County residents and service providers participated in a facilitated dialogue focusing on the question, "*Considering all of the factors that contribute to homelessness, what needs to be in place to ensure that all Out Wayne County residents are in stable living environments and adequately supported in maintaining themselves?*" A follow-up meeting was held on October 3, 2006 where participants refined ideas that resulted in the recommendations contained within this plan.

Development of the Plan

The Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness in Out-Wayne County was developed as a result of two strategic planning meetings held in September and October 2006. This approach consisted of eliciting responses from a large number of persons with a focus on service providers and community stakeholders who possess extensive working knowledge of the needs of Out-Wayne County homeless individuals and families.

Participants

Participants in the planning sessions were representatives of faith-based and community-based organizations, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, Michigan Department of Human Services, school districts, universities, and the homeless population. A representative from Senator Carl Levin's office participated in the strategic sessions as well as a local newspaper reporter. This *News Herald* reporter facilitated a front page feature about the ten year plan strategic planning process in Out-Wayne County. Nearly all members of the Continuum of Care participated in both meetings as well as additional organizations who expressed an interest in working together to develop the plan.

Individual service providers represented during the strategic planning include but are not limited to:

- Lutheran Social Services, operators of the Wayne County Family Center Shelter which is the only homeless shelter for families;
- First Step, a domestic violence service provider and shelter;
- Veteran's Haven;
- Downriver Community Conference, a local Workforce Development agency of the Michigan Works! system;
- Wayne-Metropolitan Community Action Agency, human services agency providing comprehensive services to low-income persons and families to foster self-sufficiency;
- Gift of Life;
- Blessed Hope;
- Gift of Mercy World Ministries;
- Community Care Services, a community mental health agency that facilitates the Assertive Community Treatment Team (ACT);
- Development Centers, a community mental health agency;
- City of Lincoln Park School District;
- City of Flat Rock School District; and
- City of Dearborn Economic Development.

Several consumers and former consumers attended and participated in the two planning sessions. This helped provide the planning team with a comprehensive perspective.

Key Strategies of the Plan

The following categories emerged as a result of during the strategic planning sessions. These categories represent things that need to change in order to end homelessness in Out-Wayne County. The list is not in an order of priority.

- Policy Change
- Community Will
- Political Support
- Affordable Safe Housing
- Employment

- Community-wide network
- Education and Life Skills
- Adequate Flexible Funding
- Comprehensive, Client-centered Services
- Overcoming Barriers to Service
- Mental Health
- Youth

Goals

Goal 1: Reverse policies that perpetuate homelessness, and enact policies that create incentives for businesses, agencies, and local governments to work together to sustain all residents in stable housing.

What needs to change:

- Zoning ordinances that prohibit housing alternatives for the homeless and people with low incomes.
- “Fair Share” housing policies with incentives and penalties for individual cities according to their commitment to creating low-income housing.
- Incentives to landlords and businesses, i.e. landlords who are willing to rent for less than the fair market value, and businesses willing to employ people who would otherwise find it difficult to gain employment.

Key players: Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition; landlords; community stakeholders; business leaders; policy makers.

Objectives:

- Increase the income cap applied to DHS benefits
- Decrease DHS caseloads, which are currently so high that it is impossible to expect caseworkers to be able to provide adequate assistance.
- Provide longer follow-up services
- Make long-term supports available
- Offer counseling support after initial assistance
- Demand accountability for domestic violence/sexual assault offenders
- Initiate a national health plan.

Goal 2: Create awareness of homelessness as an issue that affects everyone in the community, and which everyone in the community has a stake in resolving.

What needs to change:

- The public view of homelessness as a problem of individuals and problematic behaviors—something to be dispensed with or treated, rather than something that is symptomatic of deeper, connected problems affecting the whole community.

Key players: Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition; general public; and elected officials.

Objectives:

The Coalition will facilitate the development of a public awareness plan that addresses the following:

- Communicating the reality of homelessness to the general public in a way that will foster a proactive community interest in working to end homelessness.
- Educating the public on the true nature of homelessness, i.e. that it affects women and children, families and youth, and many who do not fit the stereotypical profile of the “homeless.” It is also increasingly affecting working families facing layoffs, foreclosures, and eviction despite their best efforts to stay afloat.
- Creating awareness of what is being done to resolve homelessness, and the many contradictions and policy barriers that impede those efforts; in addition, make people aware of strategies such as “fair share” housing, to create affordable safe living environments for all.
- Involving a broad range of community stakeholders in the development of strategies and actions to advance the ten-year plan.
- Fostering acceptance of new local policies and strategies that would facilitate the creation of safe affordable housing.

- Information will be communicated to the public through presentations, websites, the Annual Coalition Homeless Retreat event, Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition newsletter, and media outlets.

Goal 3: Increase funding for housing and services by engaging political leaders in a deeper understanding of the economic consequences to our communities of not addressing the needs of the homeless comprehensively.

What needs to change:

- Local communities’ perception that they are better off restricting access to housing for people who are homeless or on low incomes.
- Funding allocations for permanent housing, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, and adequate services to sustain those with special needs in a safe living environment.

Key players: Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition; community partners; political leaders; developers; and landlords.

Objectives:

- Gather data regarding the economic cost to society at large when we fail to move people into stable living conditions—for such things as healthcare, law enforcement, human services, shelters, etc.
- Help elected officials and other policy makers understand that we cannot run away from the issue of homelessness without causing even greater harm to our communities, including financial burdens.

- Urge political leaders to create incentives for communities to embrace the needs of those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including incentives for employers, developers, and landlords who participate in strategies to end homelessness.
- Urge political leaders to take steps to repeal tax laws and ordinances that obstruct the creation of affordable housing.

Goal 4: Strategically engage new partners in applying a “Fair Share” housing philosophy in Out Wayne County communities.

What needs to change:

- Zoning ordinances and tax laws that prevent mixed-income housing in certain areas and limit the availability of permanent housing, permanent supportive housing, and transitional housing in the Out-Wayne County area.

Key players: Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition; landlords, developers, and other housing stakeholders.

Objectives:

- Support a “Fair Share” housing philosophy—one that rewards communities for doing their fair share to ensure safe affordable housing for all, and encourages a shift in policy for those whose zoning ordinances restrict access to safe affordable housing.
- Create affordable safe housing that is integrated into communities through a scattered-site approach.
- Monitor and evaluate the efficacy of the scattered-site approach on communities.

Goal 5: Work with the business community and governmental leaders to create job opportunities that will both increase the wage-earning power of those at risk of homelessness and bolster local economies.

What needs to change:

- Approaches to job training and supports that do not result in persons earning a living wage.

Key players: Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition; business community representatives; workforce development agencies; government leaders

Objectives:

- *Develop the supports necessary to help homeless or near homeless persons acquire the skills necessary for obtaining employment that provides a living wage.*
- Involve the business community in an advisory capacity to ensure job training and placement services match employer needs.
- Foster the creation of the following:

- a) Tax credits and other incentives to employers who sponsor and support entry level (and other) workers in their effort to become self-sufficient; and the modification of existing tax credits to make them more user-friendly.
- b) Funding for programs that train and provide ongoing support to new workers.
- c) Policy changes and programming that would “level the playing field” for ex-offenders, who currently face unreasonable obstacles in their efforts to gain employment after returning to the community from prison.
- d) Elimination of contradictory rules governing existing job programs, which often create disincentives for participation in training and education, and serve more to perpetuate dependence for many.
- e) User-friendly assistance to people to assure that they understand and have access to all the benefits they are eligible to receive.

Goal 6: Expand participation in the Out Wayne County Homeless Coalition as a networking body to coordinate all of the community’s resources toward the common goal of ending homelessness.

What needs to change:

Methods for engaging government officials, people in the housing community and other sectors of the community who are generally underrepresented in the membership of the Out-Wayne County Homeless Coalition.

Key players: Out-Wayne County Homeless Coalition; government officials; representatives from the housing community; business community, developers, realtors, landlords, job training and employment services, neighborhood groups, and educational institutions.

Objectives:

- Develop a plan to move the Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition to the next level of collaboration by identifying new ways to network with sectors of the community that have historically been more difficult to engage.

Goal 7: Increase access to the basic education and life skills training people need in order to maintain a job and safe living environment.

What needs to change:

- Many of the people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness lack even the basic reading and math skills they need to obtain a job and a home.
- These persons are often in need of practical life skills training in such things as managing a checkbook, cooking, etc.

- Some homeless or near homeless persons have difficulty envisioning a path toward independence and a safe, stable living environment because of a generational cycle of poverty.

Key players: Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition; Providers of adult basic education; experienced case managers and life skills service providers.

Objectives:

- Work toward “open entrance” education programs so that people do not have to face long waiting periods before they are helped.
- Focus especially on parents, as a means of helping them become better equipped to maintain their families.
- Create new programming as needed to address the need for people to overcome internalized ideas about their potential for independence and personal growth.

Goal 8: Provide services through a wraparound, “total solution” approach, linking all of the resources needed to help resolve homelessness.

What needs to change:

- Homeless and near homeless persons need readily available, comprehensive services in order to address their multitude of needs.

Key players: Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition; other community service providers not working as part of the Continuum; and governmental agencies.

Objectives:

- Explore possibilities for further streamlining service delivery to homeless or at-risk persons and families. These solutions may include:
 - a) Co-location of services in one venue, preferably one where the individual feels they are treated with respect and trust.
 - b) Establishment of wraparound teams, who work together to develop and implement individual service plans for people who are homeless or at-risk.
 - c) Creating greater flexibility in how resources are applied across systems, i.e. eliminating “silos” of service.

Goal 9: Eliminate rules, policies, and access barriers that obstruct rather than support people’s efforts to become independent and secure.

What needs to change:

- Homeless or at-risk individuals and families face numerous barriers to services and resources.

Key players: Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition; policy makers; and workforce development agencies.

Objectives:

- Articulate the specific problems in current policies regarding financial assistance, job training, employment, and housing that contradict the purpose of moving people toward sustainable living arrangements.
- Work with policy makers to create greater flexibility in the application of these resources, and eliminate explicit barriers to access to resources such as health care, transportation, legal assistance, and financial assistance.
- Ensure that all services to the homeless, including shelters, adopt a user-friendly approach, one that is inviting and helpful in accessing the full range of needed resources.

Goal 10: *Improve access to mental health and substance abuse services.*

What needs to change:

Accessibility by homeless or near homeless persons to mental health services.

Key players: Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition; Community Mental Health service providers; the mental health provider community; Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Agency.

Objectives:

- Advocate for improved access to appropriate mental health care, behavioral counseling, and the application of community resources to address the mental health needs of the homeless and at-risk population.

Goal 11: *Work toward establishing an ongoing source of flexible funding that can be applied to meet the unique, identified needs of the Out Wayne County area.*

What needs to change:

The lack of permanent funding for a comprehensive network of housing and service resources to prevent and end homelessness in Out-Wayne County.

Key players: Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition; community stakeholders; and private and public funders.

Objectives:

- Develop a plan for securing funding that will end homelessness in response to the unique needs of Out-Wayne County communities as identified by all stakeholders working collaboratively.

Goal 12: *Create a workable plan to address the needs of homeless youth comprehensively.*

What needs to change:

- Services for homeless or near homeless youth do not meet the current demand for services in Out-Wayne County.

Key players: Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition; school districts; and community stakeholders.

Objectives:

- Establish a taskforce to focus exclusively on addressing the needs of homeless youth.
- Initiate programming and/or streamline existing services to meet the diverse needs of unaccompanied youth.

Implementation Plan

The implementation of the ten year plan will include a process of encouraging the Coalition and community stakeholders to “own” the Plan and commit to implementation. This process includes aligning government agencies to support plan goals and objectives and engaging consumers as part of an Implementation Team.

The Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition meets monthly and will begin outlining the tasks associated with each plan goal and objective. Further, goals and objectives need baseline data, timelines, benchmarks, and measurable outcomes. Best practices from across the nation will be evaluated as they relate to the framework for the Out-Wayne County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness.