

Supplement A: Current Approach and Accomplishments

DRAFT: December 17, 2012

1. Housing

Since 2004, community service providers have found 12,500 homes for families and individuals and prevented homelessness for tens of thousands of others. More than 80% of those assisted were still in housing one year later.

Our current approach has included moving people from the streets and shelters into rental housing with rent assistance and connecting them with services (“housing first”), increasing stock of rental housing affordable to people at 0-30% of median income, and increasing the supply of permanent supportive housing for those with disabilities. In general, we solve the housing problem first and then provide services that help keep people in housing. For some, we provide transitional housing first – primarily for people with addictions who want to get sober, those with serious mental health issues, and those escaping domestic violence. And we offer eviction prevention rent assistance and services so that people stay housed. For families, this means that school-aged kids are able to be more successful in school.

Our continuing challenges

Providing access to decent, safe, affordable housing for our lowest-income neighbors remains our biggest challenge. Historic low vacancy rates in the rental market (currently less than 3%) have driven up rents and reduced options for people with less than perfect rental, income, and legal histories. Publicly funded housing development and rental assistance programs have not been able to keep pace. As a result, thousands of people remain on our streets or in shelter each night and more than 63% of extremely low-income households are severely cost burdened (paying more than 50% of their income on rent). Thousands more are doubled-up for economic reasons, often living in unsafe or unstable living conditions. In addition, a growing percentage of extremely low-income people of color are concentrated in areas with less desirable housing stock and few community amenities.

In order to meet the needs of the most vulnerable, we need 3,000 additional units of rental housing with rents affordable to households making \$22,000 or less (30% of area median income). Fully meeting the community’s need would require a total of 19,000 additional units.

2. Income and Benefits

People we house will only remain in housing if they have an income. The City and County have prioritized job readiness and placement and benefits eligibility, resulting in more than 3,000 homeless persons securing employment since XX. Two major successes locally are supported employment and an initiative that aligns job training/placement services with housing and family support services, including child care. Our community has also successfully worked with the State of Oregon and federal agencies to streamline access to disability benefits by individuals who are eligible but not receiving benefits. Over the past XX years, the evidence-based practice of expedited acquisition of benefits and entitlements

programming has helped XXX individuals obtain benefits, bringing in an estimated \$\$ per year in federal cash benefits and \$\$ in Medicaid reimbursements. This represents a XX to 1 return on our public investment.

Our continuing challenges

Many in our community simply don't have the income necessary to pay rent and meet their other basic needs. This region continues to have one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, with significantly higher rates among African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans. More than 130,000 Oregon households are about to exhaust their unemployment benefits, and welfare benefit levels for families with children are well below what is necessary to pay rent, much less any other living expenses. Lack of access to child care and transportation remain among the most significant hurdles for homeless and very low-income families seeking employment. Even those who have jobs must earn more than \$14 an hour to truly afford the fair market rent on a one bedroom apartment in the Portland area. And our homeless neighbors with severe disabilities continue to struggle to receive and maintain the benefits they are entitled to; only 10-15% of those who apply without the help of a specialist are approved. Without these benefits they have neither the money nor the health insurance to get housed and get well.

3. Health

Oregon's Medicaid waiver and expansion under the Affordable Care Act will expand Medicaid coverage to an additional estimated 160,000 individuals in Multnomah County beginning in 2014. Health Share of Oregon and FamilyCare – the Coordinated Care Organization identified to cover Medicaid-covered lives in the Tri-county area – is implementing new service delivery models to increase health outcomes and reduce costs. With the 2014 expansion, nearly every homeless person will qualify for Medicaid coverage.

Our continuing challenges

While there is great promise in Medicaid expansion, lack of treatment for disabling health conditions and the financial burden of uninsured care is a major reason people and families become homeless in Multnomah County. More than 36% of those earning less than 138% of the federal poverty rate are uninsured and rates are higher among communities of color. In our most recent surveys, less than half of homeless people with significant disabilities reported having any kind of insurance. And more than half of the people sleeping on the streets of Multnomah County were found to suffer from potentially life-threatening medical conditions; national surveys have found homeless people three to six times more likely to become sick than housed people. Perhaps most telling of all is that the average life expectancy of a homeless person is between 42 and 52 years, compared with 76 for the general population. The absence of adequate and integrated physical and behavioral health care among our lowest-income neighbors also creates significant challenges for the schools, neighborhoods, police, jails, emergency departments, and businesses.

4. Survival and emergency services

Our community offers a diverse array of safety net programs, including emergency shelter, winter/severe weather shelter, meal programs, and street outreach to unsheltered homeless

individuals and families. Since 2005, our community has improved outreach to people experiencing homelessness by giving outreach workers flexible rent assistance to house people immediately. The faith community plays an essential role in providing emergency shelter, meals, and other survival programs – nearly 40% of shelter beds are funded by faith-based providers. One hundred percent of all shelter beds for families in Multnomah County are provided in partnership with the faith community. Our community's information and referral line, 211info, coordinates access to emergency services. Our community has also supported homeless self-help initiatives, faith-based and other private initiatives.

Our continuing challenges

While our community must be focused on long-term solutions to homelessness, we cannot ignore the immediate needs of the more than 1,700 people each night who have no option but to sleep outside. Their health, safety, and ability to work on ending their homelessness depends on getting a decent night's sleep, meals and finding a bathroom, and having access to basic services like a mailing address, a place to store their belongings while going to appointments, and transportation. There are numerous nonprofit and faith-based organizations that work to help meet these needs, and our community has experimented with some innovative ideas, such as self-governing encampments, overnight sleeping in cars on church property, the Portland Loo, and developing guidelines for overnight sleeping on public property. But more options are needed; we have heard this clearly from people currently sleeping outside, as well as from law enforcement, businesses, and neighborhoods that regularly engage with people sleeping and storing their belongings.

5. Access to services

Individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness now access services in several ways. They (1) seek assistance from community-based service providers with which they already have a relationship, (2) visit one of a number of service access centers that have a “no wrong door” policy, or (3) call our centralized information and referral line, 211info. For those who, for whatever reason, are unable or reluctant to utilize these methods, we have street outreach programs that seek people out and offer them information and services wherever they are.

In 2011, our community opened the ground-breaking Bud Clark Commons, a day access center which includes services and 90 beds of emergency shelter for men. It also includes 130 new units of permanent supportive housing for highly vulnerable homeless people. In its first year of operation, the day center served more than 7,000 unduplicated individuals with basic services. Of these, 630 found permanent housing and 3,600 were connected to social services. Additionally, in 2010, our community opened the Gateway Center for victims and survivors of domestic violence. In the first several months, the center served 562 individuals, providing access to advocacy, criminal, civil legal & housing resources.

Our continuing challenges

Over the past seven years, we have substantially improved the means by which homeless people and people at risk of losing their housing can access services. In many respects, the biggest continuing challenge is that we do not have anywhere near an adequate supply of services for those who seek them; at some agencies, for example, requests for emergency

rental assistance each month exceed the available dollars by a factor of 25 to 1. There are, however, areas where improvements are needed. These include ensuring equitable access for historically underserved communities, including communities of color. Improving data sharing among service providers will improve service coordination. Better community-wide data will also allow us to more clearly define the problem so that we can be more strategic in our solutions.

6. System coordination

Through the *Ten Year Plan*, we've committed to building greater cross-jurisdictional collaboration among the City of Portland, Home Forward, and Multnomah County. Jurisdictional partners have also worked closely with the Steering Committee of the Coordinating Committee to End Homelessness, the community stakeholder group that oversees the progress and goals of the *Ten Year Plan*. Together we've addressed system-wide issues to further align, coordinate, and sustain our services and resources. We also strengthened partnerships among community and faith-based agencies to initiate, support, and replicate approaches that have demonstrated success in permanently ending homelessness for families, adults, and youth in our community. Accomplishments include improved inter-faith coordination and new federal funds for housing/service collaboration.

Our continuing challenges

System coordination is the area that offers the most challenges and also the greatest potential benefit. Rather than create a parallel and necessarily inadequate system of health, employment, education, and other services for people based on their housing status, we must work to ensure that homelessness does not exclude someone from the mainstream systems that provide those supports. Our programs will be most effective if they are able to serve as a link into or an enhancement of mainstream services for homeless people. We have made strides in this direction with health care reform, our benefits access programs, our employment initiatives, and using local funds to leverage better funded federal rent assistance programs, but much more needs to be done.