

THE INITIATIVE TO END HOMELESSNESS IN COLORADO SPRINGS

JANUARY 29, 2014



In Colorado Springs, quality of life is our most important value and our biggest competitive advantage. Yet, rates of homelessness continue to persist at unacceptable levels, specifically among veterans, youth and families with children. The costs of homelessness are significant in both actual dollars and public perceptions about the safety and vitality of our community.

- In 2010, 80.8% of female headed households with children lived below the poverty level.¹
- Over 1,350 families are on the Colorado Springs Housing Authority waiting list for 705 public housing units. Families with a disabled member comprise 33% of the waiting list and families with children comprise 47%. At current turnover rates, it would take more than 10 years to accommodate the current waiting list.
- The estimated cost to serve a single chronically homeless person in Colorado Springs is \$57,760 per year.² That number includes medical treatment, incarceration, police intervention and emergency response. Research suggests that costs drop significantly – by as much as \$30,000 annually according to one study –when a person is placed in permanent supportive housing.³
- Of the 1,171 homeless persons surveyed in the El Paso County point in time survey conducted by the Pikes Peak United Way in January 2013, 33% were families with children, 31% identified as chronic drug abusers, 26% were experiencing severe mental illness, 14% were veterans and 14% were victims of domestic violence.
- The chronically homeless, who impact downtown commerce the most, are disproportionately impacted by substance abuse and mental illness.⁴

ACTION PLAN FRAMEWORK

This plan is designed to bring a fresh focus to the growing and expensive problem of homelessness in Colorado Springs and to clarify and strengthen the City's role in combatting homelessness. Though not a direct service provider, the City of Colorado Springs is committed to engaging with service providers, business leaders, policy-makers and the public to promote community-wide collaboration and champion and invest in strategies that prevent and end homelessness in our community.

The long term intent is to build a 10 year community plan that enhances the significant work already being done, expedites new strategies to prevent and end homelessness, funnels new dollars to those strategies, and fosters a predictable and effective system to manage and deliver services. Over the next two years, the goal is to draw attention to the most pressing needs and invest available dollars immediately to address problems nearing crisis status. Some strategies will be quickly executed, while others may require more time and policy work. As we move forward, the City will remain committed to the challenge and provide leadership and resources to realize the goals in the plan.

We believe this powerful vision and community-wide program to tackle the complex issues of homelessness will ultimately save taxpayers money, but more important, will give our citizens experiencing homelessness both hope and a home.

VISION

All citizens of Colorado Springs will have access to safe shelter and a strong safety net of services to help them avoid and end homelessness.

¹ City of Colorado Springs. (2012). *Analysis of impediments to fair housing choice*.

² Hanson, J., Phd. (2013). *Cost to care for homeless in Colorado Springs*.

³ Larimer, M., Malone, D., Garner, M., Atkins, D., Burlingham, B., Lonczak, H.; & Tanzer, K. (2009). Health care and public service use and costs before and after provision of housing for chronically homeless persons with severe alcohol problems. *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 301 (13) pp. 1349, 1357. doi 10.1001/jama.209.414 Retrieved from www.jama.jamanetwork.com.

⁴ Pikes Peak United Way. Point in time count conducted January 2013.

THE SIX PRIMARY GOALS

1. Increase access to emergency shelter, especially during winter months.

Emergency shelter is part of a safe community and plays a key role in getting people off the street, connecting them to services and providing a pathway to permanent housing.

There is substantial unmet need for shelter in Colorado Springs. At the "Point in Time Count" (PIT) of the homeless conducted by the Pikes Peak United Way in January 2013, there were 364 year round shelter beds available and another 162 that were available for cold weather and overflow emergencies. Of those 526 beds, 473 were occupied. At the same time, 230 people reported being without shelter, leaving a gap of 177 beds. Since the PIT, emergency shelter capacity has decreased by approximately 120 beds due to the closure of programs counted last year. Of those beds, 53 had accommodated households with children.

Since November 2013, shelter programs have routinely operated at or above their maximum capacity, and each night people still remain without a roof over their heads. The impact of the loss of beds has been most acute during cold weather months. Life-threatening cases of hypothermia often occur when the ambient temperature is between 32 and 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Though the City has partnered with Springs Rescue Mission and Lighthouse Mobile Ministries to bring on an additional 37 cold weather beds, more beds are needed to shelter people from the dangerous cold.

To address this significant unmet need, the Initiative seeks to:

- Increase shelter capacity, especially for families with children and special needs populations to include persons with disabilities, elderly persons and persons recovering from illness.
- Increase the number of nightly winter weather shelter beds between November 1 and March 31.
- Simplify access requirements to increase entry into shelters.
- Target investments to move clients out of shelter and into housing quickly, including case management and rental assistance.

The City will release an RFP for shelter services by March 1, 2014 and release an RFP for facility improvements by July 1, 2014.

2. Facilitate development of a day center offering comprehensive services and amenities.

There is currently no single place where homeless individuals may seek shelter from the time shelters close in the morning and re-open at night, much less a safe and engaging place where people can seek resources and support to come out of homelessness. Likewise, public restrooms, showers and laundry facilities for the homeless are in short supply. It is difficult to work and take care of basic health needs without access to hygiene services and public toilets.

The City of Colorado Springs, through the Initiative, will make a significant investment to facilitate development of a community day center to include services such as:

- Showers and laundry facilities
- Case management and family connections
- Physical evaluations and treatment
- Job assistance and life skills services
- Community voice mail
- Lockers and storage bins

The City will release an RFP announcing funding availability for a day center by April 30, 2014.

3. Expand outreach programs to reduce street homelessness.

Street outreach brings crisis response directly to the most vulnerable people in our community – those sleeping on the streets and in camps and cars – and connects them to services and housing. Building a trusting relationship is critical and intensive. It is an accepted “rule of thumb” that it takes 100 interactions to move a chronically homeless person into services.

In Colorado Springs, faith-based organizations provide a significant amount of outreach, mostly using volunteers, however, there are very few professional staff community-wide dedicated to outreach full time. Funding for these positions is often grant dependent and therefore, not stable. The City of Colorado Springs Police Department (CSPD) Homeless Outreach Team provides specialized law enforcement and outreach activities, but must respond to the most urgent needs city-wide and cannot always provide consistent and frequent interaction. The focus of the Initiative is to:

- Increase outreach efforts that are consistent, frequent, and targeted to chronically homeless.
- Improve collaboration between service providers and CSPD Homeless Outreach Team to identify the chronically homeless and move them off the street and into shelter and housing.
- Support programs that combine outreach with behavioral health services.
- Encourage shelter programs to set aside beds to support outreach clients.
- Identify transportation options to aid the homeless in accessing services
- Improve safety where the homeless gather by increasing police patrols, lighting and security.
- Support educational efforts intended to reduce panhandling.

The City will release an RFP for outreach programs by March 1, 2014.

4. Increase access to stable and affordable housing.

For most people, homelessness stems from the gap between income and housing costs. Certainly, those people most vulnerable to homelessness are those with no income and those with very low income - earning less than 30% of the area median income. Rates of poverty tend to be higher amongst populations with specialized housing needs such as residents with disabilities and female-headed households with children, who are also often at risk of housing discrimination.

The current supply of affordable and accessible housing is inadequate to meet community demand. Between 2000 and 2010, Colorado Springs lost 42% of the units renting for less than \$500, while the number of units renting for \$1000 or more grew by 124%. A minimum wage worker must work 85 hours per week to make the fair market rent in a two bedroom apartment affordable. There is also a shortage of larger rental units, with rental units of three or more bedrooms accounting for only 10.5% of the total housing stock.⁵ More illustrative, in 2014 the Colorado Springs Housing Authority reported there were over 2,968 applicants on the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher waiting list. Extremely low income households comprised 83% of the list and over 90% indicated they were in need of a three-bedroom unit or larger.

The Initiative seeks to maximize the City’s ability to tap into available funds to facilitate creation of appropriate, safe and healthy housing opportunities.

- In partnership with El Paso County, conduct a housing needs assessment to better understand the type and quantity of housing needed to effectively respond to homelessness in El Paso County.
- Prioritize investments in affordable rental housing specifically for households with very low incomes and special needs populations.

⁵ City of Colorado Springs. (2012). *Analysis of impediments to fair housing choice*.

- Expand delivery of rental assistance to people experiencing homelessness and those most at risk of becoming homeless.
- Preserve existing affordable housing stock through a program of housing rehabilitation.

The City released an RFP for an Affordable Housing Needs Assessment in December 2013. A consultant will be selected by January 31, 2014. The City will also use an RFP process to solicit affordable rental housing projects.

5. Strengthen the Community's Continuum of Care

The City supports a "Continuum of Care" approach in addressing homelessness in Colorado Springs. A Continuum of Care (CoC) program promotes a community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness by coordinating housing and service providers on a local level. Housing and services providers in El Paso County receive about \$2 million annually in funding through the HUD Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Program. Another \$4 million from other Federal programs is supported and/or coordinated by the local CoC, including Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG), Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSFV), and VASH (Veterans Administration Supportive Housing, a joint program between the VA and HUD).

The HEARTH Act of 2009 codified the continuum of care planning process, and communities must meet the requirements of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development CoC Program interim rule by August 2014 to continue to be eligible for funding. The interim rule addresses CoC membership, board and committee structure, Homeless Management Information System management and staff support to the CoC.

The City has a vested interest in seeing that our community CoC meets HUD requirements and is high performing. In partnership with the Pikes Peak United Way and the current CoC membership, the City will lead a planning process to develop a membership and governance structure to meet HEARTH Act requirements and community needs.

The City received a planning grant from HUD in 2013 for CoC governance activities. A consultant will be selected by February 15, 2014.

6. Develop a 10 Year Plan to end homelessness with strong community buy-in.

The ten year planning process was made a requirement of the HEARTH Act of 2009, and the efficacy of the process is well-tested. As stated in *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* (2010), "Tremendous progress on reducing homelessness has only occurred in those communities that have organized themselves to prevent and end homelessness." In 2000, the National Alliance to End Homelessness released, *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years - bold strategies for addressing homelessness locally, which cumulatively could address the issue nationally.* The City of Denver adopted Denver's Road Home in 2005, and the program has been a successful model for building community support and bringing significant financial resources to the goal of ending homelessness there.

In a recent planning exercise conducted with the local CoC, service providers identified the need for a "road map" and a "definition of success" as priorities in ending homelessness. In Colorado Springs, a 10 year plan was introduced in 2009, prior to the release of the federal plan. The plan does not align with federal strategies.

By September 2014, the City, in partnership with the Pikes Peak United Way and the Continuum of Care, will launch a ten year strategic planning process to meet local needs and address requirements of the HEARTH Act. The process will include a diverse group of stakeholders and public engagement strategies. The plan will identify a single set of strategies with measurable outcomes. Future funding will be aligned to the strategies in the plan.

The City in partnership with the CoC will release an RFP for a 10 year plan by October 1, 2014.

IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION PLAN

Communities effective in addressing homelessness have strong leadership and community buy-in and a program of measuring and reporting on plan outcomes. These communities assess their progress annually and recalibrate their plans to meet local needs.

LEADERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

- Assign a senior staff person to be the point person in implementing the solutions in the plan. This staff person will communicate with the Mayor and City Council, coordinate with the CoC leadership and build support for strategies by cultivating and expanding relationships with homeless advocates, service providers, business and neighborhood concerns, encouraging their participation and action
- Establish a Trustee Committee to execute the planning and implementation process. The council shall include members from diverse segments of the community, including a member who has personally experienced homelessness.

Together, the role of this leadership team will be to:

- Communicate with the public on the scope, causes and costs of homelessness.
- Develop and/or support policies, partnerships, legislation and other actions to prevent homelessness and promote the return to self-sufficiency.
- Cooperate with other jurisdictions and coalitions in conducting regional, goal-oriented planning and coordination that will identify gaps in service, and seek methods to improve existing homeless service systems.
- Identify funding streams and advise on the distribution of dollars.

PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- Distribute funding on a competitive basis using a Request for Proposal format. Factors relating to program performance, program effectiveness, leveraging and cost will be considered in making funding decisions.
- Require use of the Homeless Management Information System. This data can be used to identify the most effective strategies for addressing different homeless populations.
- Provide an annual update to the community on the City's performance in achieving the goals in the plan.

SCHEDULE OF ACTION ITEMS

January 31 2014	Select consultant for Affordable Housing Needs Assessment
February 15, 2014	Select CoC governance consultant
March 1, 2014	Release RFP for shelter services and outreach programs
April 1, 2014	Release first RFP for housing projects
May 1, 2014	Release RFP announcing funding availability for a day center
June 1, 2014	Release RFP announcing funding availability for facility improvements
July 1, 2014	Prepare governance charter for CoC
August 1, 2014	Seat new governing body for CoC
September 1, 2014	Conduct orientation with CoC governing board
October 1, 2014	Release RFP for 10 year strategic plan Release second RFP for housing projects
January 31, 2015	Report back to community on 2014 activities

FUNDING

At least \$5 million can be made available over the next two years from existing resources to fund strategies in the plan. Sources of funds include:

- **Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG).** CDBG supports development of viable urban communities by providing decent housing, a suitable living environment and economic opportunities, principally for persons of low-moderate income levels. CDBG funds can be used for a wide array of activities including but not limited to: housing rehabilitation, construction or rehabilitation of public facilities and infrastructure, removal of architectural barriers and public services.
- **HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME).** HOME supports the development and rehabilitation of affordable rental and ownership housing for low and moderate income households. HOME funds can be used for activities including acquisition, construction, rehabilitation, and tenant-based rental assistance.
- **Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG).** ESG assists individuals and families to quickly regain stability in permanent housing after experiencing a housing crisis or homelessness. ESG funds can be used for street outreach, emergency shelter, homeless prevention and rapid rehousing and HMIS.

In addition, City staff will continue to identify and secure competitive grants. Previously awarded competitive grants include:

- **HUD CoC Program.** Competitively-awarded program created to address the problems of homelessness in a comprehensive manner with other federal agencies. Funds support transitional and permanent housing
- **State ESG.** Competitive allocation of ESG funds received by the State. Funds support shelters and transitional housing. Activities include prevention, rapid re-housing, case management, and relocation/stabilization.

Finally, the Executive Branch will continue to recommend investment of General Fund revenues for activities that prevent and end homelessness and support affordable housing. Funded activities have included the Homeless Outreach Team Officers (4), program grants, transit passes, and emergency shelter security.

CONCLUSION

Resolving the complex issues of homelessness requires strategic thinking and strong community collaboration. We must speak in terms of ending homelessness, not simply ameliorating conditions. We must build a predictable and reliable system of services and provide housing options. And we must reach out to the most vulnerable populations, build trust and bring them in and off the streets.

This plan is just a beginning. It puts a stake in the ground and provides for leadership and resources to address urgent needs while laying the groundwork for long term action. We know that more needs to be done in this community to truly end homelessness for those experiencing it: we must expand mental health services and substance abuse counseling, grow jobs and job training, provide educational opportunities and stability for children, and preserve families. First, we must take a stand and affirm that homelessness benefits no one and together, we will work to end it.

“The issues of homeless in any community are too big for any single organization or group to take on. To solve the problem effectively, you must engage a broad cross section of the city.”

Bennie L. Milliner, Executive Director, Denver’s Road Home

