Homeless System Gaps Analysis

For Thurston County's Homeless Housing and Services System

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Overview

Even with very effective housing and services programs in place to stabilize people out of homelessness, there are not enough programs in place to meet the need. During the 2013 point-in-time count, there were 237 people who were not only homeless but were living unsheltered on streets, alley-ways, and in tents in wooded areas. Rural homelessness in Thurston County takes on a slightly different form than does urban homelessness. The Tenino Food Bank reports an increase in the household sizes that are accessing food. It is not uncommon for a family to report 12 individuals living in the same home. This typifies the character of rural homelessness.

The nature and extent of homelessness in Thurston County at the beginning of 2013 is dire, more so than it has been in many years. Increasing numbers of single men, women, youth and sometimes families are relying on the streets of downtown Olympia, the county's urban center. Three homicides took place in late 2012 in which the victim, the perpetrator, or both were people who were living on the streets or in encampments. The impacts on the city of Olympia led to the adoption of an Ordinance banning overnight camping on city property, including the most frequented spot, the steps of City Hall. The Ordinance forced the community to question: where can homeless people sleep safely in the short term and what are the long-term solutions that lead to stable housing?

Answers to those questions came in two parts:

1. **Short-term solutions** to address the immediate homeless needs in downtown Olympia were formulated into a coordinated sheltering plan that included partners such as the Salvation Army, Interfaith Works, EGYHOP and planners. In January, a coordinated sheltering plan failed and a Low-barrier Shelter Task Force was formed.
2. **Long-term solutions** to the overall Homeless Needs in Thurston County came from the culmination of a year-long project managed by the Homeless System Coordinator.

Methodology

The Homeless Coordinator spent months in the spring and summer of 2012 making visits to providers, meeting with direct service providers, program managers and executive directors to understand what is working well in the current system and what needs improvement.

Several general meetings were held on Fridays in the late summer, early fall of 2012 where group discussions took place on what people envisioned a well-functioning, effective homeless system would look like.

In November, weekly meetings were held with focus groups concentrating on gaps specific to families, youth and young adults, those needing to leave a domestic violence or sexual assault situations, homeless single adults, couples without children and people who are chronically homeless.
The homeless coordinator also worked with data from the 2012 Point-in-Time Homeless Count as well as data from the Homeless Management Information System to run an analysis based on a formula recommended by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

All of the results were tested at several public meetings and provider in-person meetings. Clarifying questions were asked via email and phone calls to make sure the final results were an accurate depiction of current gaps.

Gaps Analysis Narratives

Homeless Families with Children

With the recent development of the Smith Building Project to meet the shelter, day center and permanent supportive housing needs for families with children, many gaps were plugged in the system for this population. **Gaps** still remain, however, in **homeless prevention, rapid rehousing and coordinated entry** to meet the needs of a growing Thurston County population. Adding to the affordable housing stock is also needed, including housing made affordable by building smaller homes in denser, well-designed communities.

Homeless Youth

The numbers of children experiencing homelessness in Thurston County have nearly doubled since 2006 according to the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Schools are mandated to count and offer transportation to public school students who are homeless. Youth homelessness most commonly involves couch surfing, spending as much time with a friend or family member as they can before moving to the next temporary accommodation. Today, more youth are surviving without the convenience and comfort of even couch surfing to keep them indoors. Youth and young adults are sleeping in downtown Olympia and camping just outside of town.

Gaps needing to be filled for youth are **overnight shelter** and perhaps a new, **hybrid of shelter/transitional housing bridge program** that provides an entry into housing that lets young people progress from street reliance to affordable permanent housing at their own pace. Young people under the age of 24 have developmental, education and employment needs that differ from that of older adults who are homeless and from families that are homeless. If a young person has become street-dependent in their teenage years, they likely have a long curve to mature developmentally, to complete their education and to become employable. A bridge program will allow young people to be sheltered and kept safe, then allow for a young person to mature, complete their education and to become employable at a pace that is customized to the individual.

Chronically Homeless Adults

Chronically homeless adults are defined as those with one or more disabling conditions who have been homeless for a year or more, or have had 4 or more episodes of homelessness out of the last 3 years. During the 2013 Point-in-Time Count of homeless people, there were **209 people** who were chronically homeless in Thurston County. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, "chronic homelessness is long-term or repeated homelessness of a person or family headed by a person with a disability. Many chronically homeless people have a serious mental illness like schizophrenia and/or alcohol or drug addiction." The 2013 Thurston County Point-in-Time Count found **two families** that met the chronic homeless definition.

<u>In the short-term</u>, **a low-barrier shelter program needs to be developed that can also meet the need for a day center**. This solution would also address the need for a **public restroom** that is accessible to people during the night. This resource will also fill an outreach and engagement gap in the system for those who are chronically homeless.

<u>In the mid-long-term</u>, **creating permanent supportive housing units** for this population is what is needed. The caution here is that this is expensive housing to create and operate. The reality is that the

cost to not create these units costs our community more. For planners, finding funding partners in the healthcare and mental health communities is advised.

Single Adults and Couples

For many, homelessness is, as they say, a paycheck away. For the non-chronically homeless adults, homelessness is mainly an economic problem. Housing is expensive and according to HUD CHAS data from 2005-2009, 24.1% of Thurston County households live cost-burdened. This means 26,039 households have incomes under 80% of the county median and pay more than the recommended 30% for housing costs. **Developing a Coordinated Entry for the homeless system** is key to people knowing where they need to go for help with a housing issue. Supporting that Coordinated Entry with **prevention and rapid rehousing tools** will ensure that people experiencing first-time homelessness, can rapidly be returned to stable housing.

Top 5 Gaps in Thurston County's Homeless System (in no order of priority)

- Youth Shelter*
- Youth Bridge Program
- Low Barrier Shelter Program for Adults*
- Rapid Rehousing for Families
- Permanent Supportive Housing for Adults

**immediately needed to plug short-term gaps*

For an in-depth look at what gaps exist in Thurston County's Homeless System by population type, the charts on pages 5, 6 and 7 of this document detail the current system, what is under development and what gaps exist. There are three charts: Families with Children/Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault, Single Adults and Couples without Children, Youth ages 16-24.

Considerations

Key considerations when developing strategies to addressing these gaps in the homeless system are:

- **Right-sizing interventions** - ensuring that interventions are developed on a scale and in a character that is suited to Thurston County's size, geography and demographics.
- **Location** – locating shelter and permanent supportive housing where it is accessible to services and transportation but is also not an impediment to a thriving business or social environment.
- **Leveraging** –County and city homeless system resources do not have to be the sole source for programs and projects to address gaps in the homeless system. It will be important to leverage other funds in an unprecedented way. It will be key to the success of the system as a whole for each program, proposal, project and provider to seek to leverage local funds with state and federal resources, charitable resources, donation of goods, volunteer support and other resources.
- **The "how" needs to have broad support** – the public, homeless housing and services providers, homeless people, the business community and other stakeholders need to be part of the process to develop strategies to meet gaps in the homeless system.

County-wide System Delivery Gaps

In addition to analyzing the gaps in the system by population type, it is important to look at how the system works as a whole. This section describes some of the needs to improve the ability of the homeless system *to deliver seamlessly and effectively*.

There is a lack of a **coordinated entry** by which people that are homeless access information, housing and services.

There is a lack of **outreach and engagement services** for those who routinely fall through the cracks of the existing system, i.e. chronically homeless adults often with mental illness, addictions and with multiple barriers to stable housing.

Capacity building is needed as a few programs serving homeless people are relatively new and/or have taken on big projects and need to get their feet under them before they can reach their full potential or before more can be asked of them.

A need exists to connect people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in the **rural areas** to services and housing assistance. Homeless housing and services providers in the rural areas either need to expand operations or make connections to providers in urban areas so clients can be served. Another option is to bring urban providers to rural areas in some way.

Future Planning Work

Thurston County has committed to continue the Homeless Coordinator Project for a second year. The scope of work will include:

- Fully Develop Coordinated Entry
- Maximize Current System Capacity, Efficiency and Effectiveness
- Improve HMIS Data Quality
- Update Ten Year Plan to include:
    - Gaps, Goals and Strategies
    - Performance Measures and Timeline
    - Funding plan
- Develop Low-barrier Sheltering capacity
- Develop Permanent Supportive Housing
- Develop Youth Housing Solutions
- Provide Adequate Rapid Rehousing
- Monitor and Report on System Improvement
    - Establish an ongoing implementation, feedback and improvement loop
- Share Vision and Successes
    - Seek to leverage other support

GAPS ANALYSIS: Families with Children and DV/SA					
System Toolbox	**Specifics**	**Current Inventory (in households/individuals)**	**Under Dev.**	**Gap**	**Priority Level**
Coordinated Entry	Family Support Center	48 households	✔	FSC needs capacity to handle intakes and referrals for this population	2
Outreach and Survival Services	Homeless Resource Advocacy at FSC	Small day capacity	-	-	-
	Daycenter at FSC	6 households	Smith Building adds day use		
Shelter	Family Support Ctr	7/24	Smith Building adds day use	Beds in dev at Smith Bldg not quite fully funded	1
	Housing Authority	4/16			
	Out of the Woods	3/12			
	SafePlace	10/28			
	Yelm Community Services	1/6	Rehab grant?	-	-
Rapid Rehousing	Family Support Ctr	4	-	50 Rapid Rehousing slots of various lengths of stay -cover TBRA* -Cover rural -Cover DV	1
	SafePlace				
Transitional	Housing Authority HATS	30			
	Housing Authority WFF	10			
	CAC - Rural TBRA	6			
	FSC - TBRA	20-30*			
Permanent Supportive Housing	Family Support Center	-	7	Units in dev at Smith Bldg not quite fully funded	1
Other	System Training and Education	Housing Task Force offers some		Improve employment outcomes for homeless families	1

GAPS ANALYSIS: Singles and Couples					
System Toolbox	**Specifics**	**Current Inventory**	**Under Dev.**	**Gap**	**Priority Level**
Coordinated Entry	SideWalk established with the intent to fill this role			- buy-in from Salvation Army -capacity at SideWalk to handle need	1
Outreach and Survival Services	Homeless Outreach for Mental Health Services Capital Recovery Center	2 FTE		No	-
	EGYHOP Outreach Dt Olympia				-
	Downtown Ambassador Prog.	8 x .4FTE		No	-
	Bathrooms – 24/7 public bathroom	0		Yes	1
	Encampment/unsheltered Outreach	0		Capacity for regular check-ins	2
	Day Center - access to phone, housing info, services and benefits info, hygiene supplies	0		Some access/capacity needed	1
	Camp Quixote	30	-30	See PSH below	
Shelter ***seasonal***	The Salvation Army	42		40 beds of year round, low-barrier shelter, harm reduction model	1
	Drexel House	16			
	St Michael/St Vincent de Paul*	12			
	Interfaith Women's	18			
	Cold Weather Overflow*	31			
Rapid Rehousing/ Transitional	CAC HEN Program	209		40 Rapid Rehousing or Transitional Housing slots	2
	CAC – ESG - prev	26			
	Drexel House - ESG	3			
	SideWalk – RR - 2163	67			
	SideWalk – RR - ESG	18			
	SideWalk – RR – CHG Incentive		25?		
	Bread & Roses	12			
	CAC - TBRA – Capital Rec. Ctr	18			
	CAC - TBRA - BHR	8			
	Arbor Manor	5			
	Drexel House	25			
Permanent Supportive Housing	Fleetwood Apts	42		-25 units of PSH targeted to most chronically homeless -Quixote Village has funding gap	1
	The Gardens	34			
	Drexel House	10	25		
	Quixote Village	0	30		
Other	System Training and Education	Housing Task Force offers some		Needed: Harm Reduction Trauma Informed Care Housing First Model/Philosophy	1

GAPS ANALYSIS: Youth Includes Transition-Aged Youth Ages 16-24					
System Toolbox	**Specifics**	**Current Inventory**	**Under Dev.**	**Gap**	**Priority Level**
Coordinated Entry	CYS	✔		To achieve full HMIS capturing of unsheltered, need capacity at CYS to handle volume	2
Outreach and Survival Services	Homeless Outreach for Youth at CYS	.2 FTE		Need 2 FTE to cover schools and communities	3
	Rosie's Place - access to housing info, services and public benefits resources, phone, hygiene supplies, food, etc			In a climate of decreasing revenues, stabilization of this resource is a priority	1
Shelter	Haven House	4		Year round capacity for youth 18-24	
	Rosies at Night	10			
Shelter-transitional Bridge	New program combining shelter/drop-in center/outreach/transitional housing services could provide wrap around support customized for youth dynamics and needs	-	10 slots 4-6 Bridge units	10 -12 slots (under dev is brand new idea, gap if this plan fails to move forward)	1
Rapid Rehousing/Transitional	TLP (5 TBRA)	17		48-60 Rapid Rehousing or Transitional Housing slots	1
	RISE (3 TBRA/2 ESG)	14			
	IYHP (3 ESG)	14			
	ECHO (I TBRA/1 ESG)	8			
Other	System Training and Education	Housing Task Force offers some CYS has some in-house		Needed: Harm Reduction Trauma Informed Care Housing First Model/Philosophy	1