Monarch Housing Associates NJCounts 2016
Best Practices for Ending Homelessness

Across New Jersey, government and the homeless services system are implementing the following best practices to end homelessness. Advocates have urged the New Jersey Working Group to Working Group formed by Governor Christies on April 24, 2015 to prioritize these best practices as it explores ways in which to reduce and prevent homelessness in New Jersey. The state needs increased federal to ensure that New Jersey continues to make progress in ending homelessness.

Housing First

Housing First is an evidence based best practice designed to end homelessness and support recovery by housing individuals as quickly as possible and then wrapping services around them as needed. This housing model has proven effective in housing a wide variety of homeless population subsets including chronically homeless households and families and the general homeless population. Within this model, housing is not contingent upon participation in services and services provided are designed to promote housing stability.

In Bergen County, the Housing, Health and Human Services Center reports that over the past six years,

- Its Housing First collaborative has housed 902 people including 257 chronically homeless individuals;
- 297 people of those housed used vouchers and 102 people living in supportive housing; and
- Veteran and the chronically homeless populations are prioritized through Housing First.

Rapid Re-Housing

Rapid Re-Housing is a strategy that has proven successful in helping communities cost effectively reduce homelessness. Homeless households entering the emergency shelter and transitional housing system are immediately provided with services to connect them with permanent housing. Once housing has been located, households are provided with temporary rental assistance and short term, intensive case management to help them stabilize and maintain their housing.

New Jersey is in a unique position to utilize Emergency Assistance (EA) funds to provide intensive case management to households placed in permanent housing through Temporary Rental Assistance (TRA) and create a statewide opportunity to implement rapid re-housing.

In Bergen County, the Housing, Health and Human Services Center reports that over the past six years, it has rapidly re-housed:

- 185 households using the federal Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Program; and
- Veteran and the chronically homeless populations are prioritized through Rapid Re-Housing.

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Centralized and/or Coordinated Assessment Systems

Centralized and/or Coordinated Assessment, also known as coordinated entry or coordinated intake, paves the way for more efficient homeless assistance systems by:

- Helping people move through the system faster (by reducing the amount of time people spend moving from program to program before finding the right match);
- Reducing new entries into homelessness (by consistently offering prevention and diversion resources upfront, reducing the number of people entering the system unnecessarily); and
- Improving data collection and quality and providing accurate information on what kind of assistance consumers need.

Coordinated assessment is ideally a system-wide process and can serve any and all populations. Systems may accomplish coordinated assessment through the use of a centralized phone hotline (e.g. a 2-1-1), a single physical point of assessment (through an emergency shelter or a dedicated assessment center, for example) or a decentralized coordinated system (with multiple assessment points all employing the same assessment and referral process).

The Hudson County Alliance to End Homelessness has designed and implemented a coordinated assessment system to ensure individuals and families experiencing homelessness are assessed and connected to the most appropriate housing and/or services available as quickly as possible. Garden State Episcopal Community Development Corporation (GSECDC) serves as the coordinated assessment agency. Individuals and families experiencing homelessness are assessed by GSECDC staff and case managers provide assistance in locating appropriate housing.

Since its inception, over 1,000 individuals in Hudson County have received services from coordinated assessment. To date, 275 individuals have been discharged and 78% of those (218) moved into permanent housing. Full implementation of coordinated assessment began in July 2015. At that point, every Continuum of Care (CoC) funded program eliminated waiting lists and began only taking referrals through community assessment.

Prioritizing Homelessness by Public Housing Authorities

Setting PHA priority for homelessness directs rental assistance voucher to households with the greatest housing need and savings money by keeping households out of the shelter system.

In a priority system, referrals for homeless households would come from pre-approved organizations. The referring organization accepts responsibility to verify homeless eligibility and keep referral information current. The referring organization can be required to follow up with and provide services to the household for one year. To be fair to those already on a waiting list, a cap of 20% for homeless households can be set.

The Housing Authority of Bergen County sets aside 20% of its vouchers for homeless households. The Housing Authority has also enhanced its recertification process to help keep households from losing their certification and entering homelessness.

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