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#NJCounts 2015 Finds 13.9% Decrease in Homelessness

Increased Voucher and Homeless Assistance Funding Critical to End Homelessness

June 16, 2015- #NJCounts 2015 found 10,211 homeless men, women and children across the state of New Jersey. This showed a decrease of 1,645 persons (13.9%) from 2014. While the decrease shows progress, the count still shows the critical need for voucher and homeless assistance funding.

Monarch Housing Associates coordinated this year's statewide count conducted at the local level county-by-county.

Other key findings as compared to NJCounts 2014 include:

- Of the 7,441 total homeless households, 1,346 were families showing a 21% decrease (a family is defined as a household with at least one child under the age of 18 and one adult);
- 1,425 persons identified as chronically homeless, showing a slight decrease of 74 persons (4.9%);
- 974 persons living unsheltered showing a slight increase of 43 persons (4.6%); and
- 1,074 (10.5%) of the homeless adults in 2015 were young adults between the ages of 18 and 24.

NJCounts was originally scheduled to take place on January 27, 2015 but a blizzard predicted for the night of the count led to about half of the counties in the state postponing the Count activities until February 3, 2015. The count reflects a snapshot of homelessness in New Jersey on those two evenings.

The full report is available here - <http://goo.gl/xotjxb>

An executive summary is available here - <http://goo.gl/VR6uK1>

County by county reports for 2015 are available here - <http://goo.gl/qf9G20>

The 2014 Reports for comparison are available here - <http://goo.gl/kIsC9i>

Local county contacts are available here - <http://goo.gl/pFRvjL>

New Jersey voucher success stories are available here - <http://goo.gl/1DCcpQ>

“This year’s count shows a significant decrease of individuals experiencing homelessness in New Jersey, which is a great step forward in ending homelessness,” said Taiisa Kelly, Senior Associate at Monarch Housing who directed NJ Counts 2015. “This reinforces that the best practices and interventions such as affordable and supportive housing, Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing work. We hope the information gathered from NJ Counts 2015 and contained in the summary reports will help communities better understand the population and their needs and create new housing opportunities that will continue the progress towards ending homelessness.”

Rental assistance through vouchers provides an important stepping stone that helps working families, people with disabilities, seniors, and veterans to keep a roof over their heads and make ends meet. Vouchers are key to helping the Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing best practices and supportive housing - permanent, affordable and independent rental housing with available support services - end homelessness.

At the state level, the NJCounts 2015 results and their implications are timely given the 2015 announcement that acts on the recommendations from the State’s Interagency Council on Homelessness. Governor Christie has formed a Working Group to further explore ways in which to reduce and prevent homelessness in New Jersey.

“The results of NJCounts 2015 are important to understanding and a critical step towards ending homelessness in New Jersey. Governor Christie has appointed a Working Group to consider the implementation of the proposals put forth by the Interagency Council, including Housing First policies, Rapid Re-Housing, and improved coordination among state agencies and social service providers that deliver key services to homeless individuals and families and those at risk of homelessness,” Anthony L. Marchetta, Executive Director, New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJ HMFA) and Working Group Member. NJ HMFA has funded the annual statewide Point In Time Count since 2007.

Monarch Housing believes that the solutions to shortening and eliminating episodes of homelessness in New Jersey include the:

- Provision of an adequate supply of vouchers and funding for McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance program to create affordable rental housing and supportive housing,
- Relief and support systems for low-wage households threatened by foreclosure and eviction,
- Creation of jobs that pay a living wage in New Jersey’s high-priced real estate environment, and
- Increased funding for proven interventions that rapidly re-house and support homeless households.

Across the country, homelessness is decreasing. But at the federal level, proposed cuts to vouchers and homeless assistance in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD’s) Fiscal Year 2016 budget threaten to halt this progress.

“Unfortunately, proposed cuts in funding from Congress come at a time when it is more expensive than ever for New Jersey families to afford housing. According to the National

Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), in order to afford a two-bedroom apartment at fair market rent in New Jersey in 2014, a family needed to earn \$25.17/hour”, said Taiisa Kelly. “\$18.3 billion in funding is needed to renew all Housing Choice Vouchers in use at the end of 2015 and an additional \$512 million is necessary to restore the 67,000 vouchers lost to sequestration. Vouchers should be targeted to the homeless and other vulnerable populations.”

An increased federal investment in both Housing Choice Vouchers and the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance programs is critical in helping President Obama meet his goal of ending chronic homelessness by the end of 2016.

NJ Counts 2015 was designed to understand the nature and needs of New Jersey’s homeless population. Volunteers sought out homeless residents in shelters and other locations where they are forced to live because there is insufficient affordable or supportive housing and/or other suitable living arrangements for them.

The solution to homelessness includes using Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing and creating the necessary supply of supportive housing -. It is critical that we know how many individuals and families are in need of housing, what counties they are from, and what their service needs and circumstances are. Timely data is necessary to implement and expand on strategies that have proven to be effective in ending homelessness.

Looking towards NJCounts 2016, Monarch Housing Associates hopes to get an even more accurate picture of the young adult homeless population. “An undercount of homeless young adults presents a lack of opportunity. Homeless youth often “couch surf” and stay with friends and family but in order to push lawmakers to increase funding for vouchers, employment training and educational opportunities, a more accurate count is key,” says Marcel Quinones, Outreach Manger for Covenant House New Jersey.

For more information about Monarch Housing Associates’ work to ensure that every person will have quality affordable, permanent supportive housing that fosters freedom, independence and community integration, visit www.monarchhousing.org.

Twitter post: #NJ Counts 2015 Finds 13.9% Decrease 10K still #homeless #VouchersforNJ #HousingFirst Key to #EndingHomelessness in NJ <http://wp.me/peqFK-7if>