

Santa Clara Countywide 5-Year Homelessness Continuum of Care Plan

2004 Status Report

**Office of the County Executive
Office of Affordable Housing
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INTRODUCTION

The Santa Clara County 5-Year Homelessness Continuum of Care Plan (5-Year Plan) was approved by the Board of Supervisors on June 26, 2001. The 5-Year Plan sought to create a comprehensive and coordinated system of affordable housing and support services for the prevention, reduction, and eventual end of homelessness. Five priority areas were identified and specific action steps were described for implementation. The 5-Year Plan was to serve as a common blueprint to guide the County, the cities, service providers, the faith community, the business sector, philanthropy, and the broader community in realizing the vision of a community where everyone's housing and life needs are met.

The 5-Year Plan was developed over a 10-month period by committees of the Santa Clara County Collaborative on Housing and Homeless Issues. The Collaborative consists of representatives from more than 100 organizations including the County's 15 cities and towns, local emergency and transitional housing providers, housing developers, advocacy and community groups, and a comprehensive array of supportive service providers. The 5-Year Plan included:

- Data on the number and characteristics of homeless people in the County
- Causes of homelessness, including the County's high cost of housing
- An overview of data used showing types and levels of need or service gaps

The Plan is divided into five chapters, each of which addresses a key area of need in the effort to reduce or prevent homelessness. Each chapter identifies priorities for that area of need and action steps to guide implementation. Each action step was assigned a specific year as a goal for implementation. Committees of the Collaborative for each chapter have overseen the implementation of the Plan and reported to the entire Collaborative on a regular basis.

2004 STATUS REPORT

This Status Report contains brief descriptions of each priority area, the status of implementation, and ongoing challenges.

Priority I: Make Connections through Outreach, Engagement, and Computer Technology

The Continuum of Care system that addresses issues of homelessness Countywide must be integrated and coordinated so that when homeless people make contact with one agency in the system, they can be linked with the full range of housing and services they need. Outreach services should be expanded, and greater publicity must be generated for the existing systems. Action Steps should focus on improving the existing information and referral system with standardized on-line database, reservation, and assessment systems.

Implementation:

Online databases of homeless services were expanded by 10% in 2003, followed by discussions about linking the databases to the HMIS and, in the future, to the 211 social services phone number. Another website, HousingSCC.org, was created, and a telephone message tape of the site's information is being developed. The existing Shelter Hotline and the Community Voice Mail program have been maintained. A survey of technical capabilities of service providers was done at the start of the HMIS project and will be used to identify which providers need technical assistance. The Collaborative celebrated an enormous achievement when the County Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) went on-line in January of 2004. With the success of the County HMIS, a regional HMIS is under discussion.

Challenges:

The proposal of Silicon Valley corporations providing fax and internet access to homeless service providers is no longer realistic after the downturn in the economy. To make this proposal a reality, alternative sources of funding must be sought.

Priority II: Build Housing Now! For a Balanced Community

Strategies must be adopted that maintain and expand a full continuum of housing options, including emergency shelter, transitional housing, supportive housing, and permanent affordable housing. The existing stock of affordable housing must be maintained, and new affordable housing must be developed. In order to prevent homelessness, the County must focus on supporting and expanding emergency assistance, preventing evictions, and developing a comprehensive discharge plan for those leaving the foster care, mental health, and correctional systems.

Implementation:

Shelters

The current shelter system is being sustained with federal, state, and local funds, in addition to contributions from the private and foundation sectors. A countywide survey of the system is underway. A local shelter bed hotline has been successfully implemented. Expansion of the shelter system is currently being explored, as is the

establishment of specialized services for underserved populations at existing shelters. The County Board of Supervisors established an Affordable Housing Fund to assist in the development of new housing for low income, very low income, extremely low income, and special needs populations. Three new "shelter hybrids" were funded by the County for a total of \$5 million in the 2003-04 fiscal year.

Transitional Housing

The County has attempted to increase the supply of transitional housing for underserved populations. Particular effort has been exerted to increase transitional housing for migrant workers. The County allocated a total of \$10,580,000 from the Affordable Housing Fund in fiscal year 2003-04, which will result in approximately 975 new units or beds.

Permanent Affordable Housing

Funding for permanent affordable housing was, at first, difficult to obtain. However, the County has made great strides with the Affordable Housing Fund, which has contributed more than \$10 million to increasing affordable housing stock in several categories. Efforts have been made to facilitate access to existing housing for extremely low income households and to educate and lobby landlords on behalf of low-income tenants. The affordable housing website, HousingSCC.org, serves as an affordable housing database. Housing assistance services, enforcement of fair housing laws, and the utilization of unused/underused housing are all being enthusiastically carried out by the Collaborative.

The Collaborative continues to advocate for a number of policies that would encourage the development of new housing, such as increased funding for the Affordable Housing Fund and the Housing Trust, increased allocation of property tax revenues to local governments that meet housing demand, greater set-asides for affordable housing, and enhanced physical accessibility of affordable housing. The Collaborative supports increasing densities, and completed a review of industrial use land for possible housing development.

Permanent Supportive Housing

The Collaborative has successfully advocated that Shelter Plus Care renewals not count in each community's renewal burden, which has helped the funding of permanent supportive housing. The Palo Alto Medical Foundation has promised to provide pro-bono health services for homeless men and women who cannot afford insurance. The County joined housing advocates across the nation to persuade the federal government to retain funding levels of the HUD Section 8 Voucher Program.

Prevention

Coordination of prevention services has been helped with the implementation of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The Hospital Council at Valley

Medical Center has made progress in discharge planning, which has also been helped by the Silicon Valley Health Coalition's five-year grant to reduce emergency room visits by homeless persons. The Office of Affordable Housing has convened a Discharge Planning Committee to coordinate and improve discharge planning within County health, foster care, and justice systems. The Collaborative has voted to support a Just Cause Eviction ordinance countywide, but the ordinance has not yet been passed.

Challenges:

Support for the expansion of HUD's Section 8 Voucher Program has been delayed by the threatened cuts to Section 8 funding. Also, as with most housing projects, there is community resistance to affordable housing. The County, the Collaborative, and other housing advocacy groups have helped counter this resistance by developing a public education campaign. Service providers and affordable housing developers have become more involved in helping to gain community acceptance. The Housing Action Coalition and the Manufacturing Group coordinated Housing Week in June, 2004 and conducted bus tours of housing projects to help combat NIMBYism and opposition from elected officials.

Significant obstacles have prevented the committee from achieving its prevention goals. Increases in relocation assistance and funding for poorly maintained affordable housing units have been delayed by the lack of resources. Discharge planning services to inmates have been stalled because HUD does not recognize incarcerated individuals as homeless. However, a Discharge Planning Committee has been established by the County.

Priority III: Create a Successful, Stable Workforce

The County must address the need for employment at living wages, increase the availability of pre-employment services, expand access to job training, and identify and remove barriers to employment. Collaboration with mainstream and homeless employment programs, as well as with the business community, is essential.

Implementation:

The expansion of pre-employment services is underway. Facilitating access to vocational training for homeless people and coordinating to provide access to transitional housing for those in vocational training are top priorities for this Committee. The Committee is establishing connections with De Anza Community College to provide assistance for clients with learning disabilities. The County is also expanding the number of bilingual and bicultural employment case managers.

The creation of a Countywide money management program is in progress by several agencies, as is the provision of comprehensive case management to newly-employed workers who are homeless, formerly homeless, or recent TANF graduates. A network of service providers has been established. The creation of industry-specific training

programs for homeless people is a priority. Furthermore, the designation of homeless liaisons with private, public, and nonprofit sector employers continues to be essential.

Challenges:

Increased visibility of existing and available resources is needed. Outreach to employers to hire homeless persons needs to be increased and better coordinated. Greater participation by homeless individuals in these efforts should occur.

Priority IV: Generate Wellness and Provide Life's Necessities

A key focus is on assisting mainstream agencies to more effectively meet the needs of homeless people. Services should be comprehensive, integrated, flexible, and culturally competent. Addressing educational needs of children and adults is a priority.

Implementation:

The Committee has supported an amended, more understandable food stamp application. The County has supported a bill in Sacramento to allow felons to be eligible for food stamps. The County website, HelpSCC.org, provides coordination and information about food service programs. HelpSCC.org also provides a database of health and dental services. Gardner Mental Health and Valley Medical vans now provide services to underserved parts of the County. Shelters that serve the mentally ill have established peer groups to provide support when all other options are unavailable.

The law now requires each school district to have a homeless liaison, which has eliminated the need for an educational resource database for homeless children. Certain schools offer special services to homeless youth, and the Girls/Boys Clubs and the United Way offer mentoring for homeless youth. Childcare facilities now exist in many shelters and transitional housing programs.

The Shelter Providers' Network provides monthly training for case managers on specific criteria and service protocols. Peer support groups are being developed for homeless persons with mental health and substance abuse afflictions. Clients eligible for SSI are referred to organizations for help with applications. Outreach has been improved through enhanced coordination with local agencies and increases in bilingual staff.

Challenges:

Unfortunately, a lack of resources has prevented transportation resources from meeting the many transportation needs. The County transit pass program was reduced due to budget cuts. Working to improve transportation from the outlying County and within each community is beyond the scope of the Committee. Budget deficits have made the development of alcohol and drug abuse prevention programs, early intervention

programs, and mental health diagnostic programs infeasible. More service is needed in the County's general child care planning.

Priority V: Maintain Vitality of the Continuum of Care Plan: System Administration, Coordination, and Change

The County must maintain involvement in the 5-Year Plan through the Homeless Services Coordinator. The importance of the Collaborative cannot be overstated. Stronger partnerships between non-profit service providers and government and more outreach to faith-based entities are essential.

Implementation:

Listserves that automatically send email to all members on a particular list and a website have been created as communication tools for Collaborative members. The Administration will recommend that the Board of Supervisors establish a Task Force on Homelessness to conduct a valid street count and to develop a 10-Year Plan to end chronic homelessness in the County.

Approved