



2016 Board Annual Retreat
County Commissioner's Topic of Interest
Submitted by: Commissioner Scarborough

Topic of Interest: Homelessness Update

1. What progress has been made regarding homelessness services?
2. How many homeless residents are in housing?
3. How many homeless residents have jobs and/or being trained to perform in the new jobs that have come to Mecklenburg County in 2014-15?

Response:

Background

Community Support Services (CSS) is the County's lead department for homeless services and the many agency collaborations needed to understand homelessness in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, and to identify the resources and innovative solutions to end and prevent homelessness.

The following information details specific programs and services provided by the CSS Homeless Services Division, services provided through contract agencies, and community partner-driven initiatives and collaborations around homelessness.

Progress in the Past Year

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing Our Heroes (Community Initiative to End Veteran Homelessness):

The County participates in the leadership of Housing Our Heroes and partners with the City of Charlotte, the Veterans Administration, non-profits, and local business representatives. To date, 342 formerly homeless veterans have been housed since the initiative began in July 2014. Approximately 40 veterans are still in need of housing. The Housing Our Heroes Implementation Team continues to work toward ending veteran homelessness in the community.

Housing First-Charlotte Mecklenburg:

The County participates in the leadership of Housing First-Charlotte Mecklenburg along with the City of Charlotte, non-profits, the shelters, Charlotte Center City Partners, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, and others. The goal is to end Chronic Homelessness by December 31, 2016. To date, 197 chronically homeless individuals have been housed since February 1, 2015. It is estimated that there are over 400 chronically homeless persons still in need of permanent housing.

Coordinated Assessment (CA):

Since May 2014, Charlotte-Mecklenburg has operated a coordinated assessment system, a best practice intervention to target scarce resources for individuals and families impacted by homelessness. Approximately 400 people per month are assessed. Typically, three-fourths are new assessments and one-fourth of assessments are individuals being re-assessed because of changes in their situation. Approximately 350 people are referred to emergency shelter monthly. Documented housing placements hover between 50 and 60 monthly, but this is probably an undercount, because comprehensive information is not yet being received.

CA also seeks to divert new entries to emergency shelter through a diversion program. During a pilot program, the approximate cost of diversion per household totaled \$230, and 99 households were diverted. Very few households returned to shelter after the pilot. Given that the average length of stay at the Salvation Army Center of Hope is 39 days, and the cost of one night of stay is estimated at \$20, the average cost of a shelter stay is estimated at \$780. Diversion appears to be a lower cost alternative.

CA has an effective process for prioritizing chronically homeless individuals and placing them in supportive housing. CA is currently working with Corporation for Supportive Housing to design a parallel system for families requiring rapid rehousing. This process has involved meetings with funders/stakeholders, and results are expected by spring 2016.

Shelter Plus Care:

The County administers the federal Housing and Urban Development Shelter Plus Care grant to provide permanent supportive housing to formerly chronically homeless individuals and families with disabilities. The housing number under SPC is currently 238.

- *Employment data:* Because the population is disabled, few are able to achieve and sustain employment. Currently, 19 clients are employed; 18 clients are in supportive employment with Promise Resource Network, a non-profit partner, and one client is in a paid job training program.

Moore Place:

The County provides the social work staffing for Moore Place, which is operated by the Urban Ministry Center and houses 85 formerly chronically homeless clients. It is expanding to an additional 35 beds in 2016.

- *Employment data:* Two residents of Moore Place are regularly employed. One person is intermittently employed. Five residents have had job training at Goodwill. Two residents have trained for Peer Support Specialists. Two residents are taking college classes to prepare for future employment. Three residents do volunteer work regularly.

MeckFUSE:

Based on a national best practice, the MeckFUSE program offers housing and supportive services to 45 frequent users of the jail and shelter systems. All of the participants also have physical and/or behavioral health needs. Preliminary results show that after one year in MeckFUSE participants have reduced their number of arrests and jail stays as well as their usage of other public systems. For example, the average number of hospital visits per participant was ten in the year before entry into FUSE, and two in the year after entry.

FUSE uses master-leasing, an approach under which the provider of supportive services signs the lease, rather than the tenant, as a means to more rapidly house difficult to house persons. FUSE stands for Frequent Users Systems Engagement. Funded by Mecklenburg County, the program is administered by the County's Community Support Services Department, and is operated by Urban Ministry Center.

- *Employment data:* Many MeckFUSE participants have identified income, employment, and job skills training as primary goals for them upon admission to the program. MeckFUSE staff responded to this request by assisting their efforts and developing ways to help them meet their goals. Prior to Urban Ministry Center HousingWorks hiring a SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery) specialist to assist with social security (SS) benefit applications, MeckFUSE staff assisted participants by working with them to submit a computerized SS benefits application and then connected them with lawyers who specialize in disability benefits if the initial application was denied. This is still a possibility, but most participants have chosen to work with the in-house SOAR specialist.

Participants have been linked to Jacob's Ladder for job training and job placement, and also benefited from a HousingWorks-developed agreement with Goodwill Industries that includes Goodwill staff completing monthly orientations and job training interviews at Moore Place. MeckFUSE staff referred participants to Grace-Mar Services, a local program that assists with job placement for eligible clients. Recently, through building relationships with TCA staffing and Select staffing, work is being done to develop pathways to sustained employment. Those partnerships are pending currently with no job placements at this time, but placement opportunities are anticipated.

- 4 MeckFUSE participants are currently employed. Four additional participants have worked in permanent job roles this year.
- 15 participants are actively seeking part time or full time employment. Some of those seeking work have SS benefits, so they have to work very limited hours.
- 17 participants are receiving SS disability payments.
- 10 participants have pending SS disability payment applications. One has an application that will be submitted by CMC Hospital staff.
- 2 participants are receiving SS retirement benefits.

Scattered Site Housing (reported by Urban Ministry Center)

- *Employment data:*
 - 2 people are employed.
 - 2 people have worked intermittently but not maintained employment.
 - 2 people have earned money selling art at Urban Ministry Center art shows but have not otherwise been employed.
 - 1 person had been involved in job training through Goodwill
 - 1 person had been involved in classes at CPCC with the intention of obtaining future employment.

Housing Stability and Supportive Services Partnership Fund:

CSS has awarded \$2,320,109 in funding to six agencies since the fund was established. Households served through this collaborative partnership total 281, including 33 new households served through the most recent award.

The second year of this collaborative partnership yielded two successful Requests for Proposals through which four agencies received supportive services funding. These funds, joined for the first time with subsidy assistance through the Foundation for the Carolinas and the City of Charlotte Emergency Solution Grants, provide supportive housing to 118 homeless families and individuals.

In addition, CSS contracted with Urban Ministry Center to provide supportive services to homeless individuals who receive housing subsidies through the Charlotte Housing Authority.

Contracts with CSS vendors

- **Salvation Army Center of Hope:**
 - Added 62 Shelter Beds to partially relieve over-crowding
 - An evaluation of the Rapid Rehousing Program, conducted by the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute, found that 58 percent of the participants were employed either part-time or full-time.
 - 75 percent of clients were-re-housed within four months of entering the Shelter
 - A majority of the clients received subsidy for three months or less
 - Ten percent of clients returned to shelter
- **Men's Shelter of Charlotte:** In FY 15
 - 1702 unduplicated individuals were served.
 - 197 clients increased their income through employment and/or benefits.
 - 450 moved to more appropriate housing.

Focus on Data: CSS hired two management analyst positions to improve data quality and guide decision-making. One is the Homeless Management Information System Administrator who is assessing data accuracy, quality and timeliness. The other is the Housing and Homeless Research Analyst who will design a dashboard that will track key indicators requested by the Housing Advisory Board of Charlotte-Mecklenburg and the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The County funded a series of reports on homelessness prepared by the UNC Urban Institute, and as lead department, Community Support Services will continue to fund the series in 2016. The reports, which are initiated by the Housing Advisory Board of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, include the annual Point-In-Time Count, a snapshot of homelessness in Charlotte-Mecklenburg gathered on one day in January, and a Cumulative Estimates of Homelessness Report.

Some data points include:

- In order to afford a two-bedroom apartment at fair market rent in Mecklenburg County, a full-time, (40-hour per week) earner must earn at least \$15.98 per hour. A person making minimum wage must work approximately 88 hours per week to afford a two-bedroom unit (Housing Instability in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, 2015).
- As of January 2015, there are 31,723 household applicants on the Charlotte Housing Authority Housing Choice Voucher Waiting List. Seventy-one percent of these households applying for assistance with housing are extremely low income and the average median household income for all households is \$10,000. Only 200-240 vouchers become available each year for housing assistance. (Characteristics of Charlotte Housing Authority's Housing Choice Voucher Waiting List, 2015).
- Forty-six percent of renter households were cost burdened (paying more than 30 percent of their gross income to housing costs) in Mecklenburg County in 2013. (Housing Instability in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, 2015).

Business Investment Grants and Homelessness

The Economic Development Office is not currently engaged with any job training efforts. The Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners Economic Development (ED) Committee will be developing a workforce development strategy in the first half of 2016. Connecting the homeless to jobs and job readiness may be considered as a part of that strategy with the ED Committee considering resources and funding needed to help support the strategy element.

Conclusion

The County's efforts to end and prevent homelessness in Charlotte-Mecklenburg include several robust programs and services within the Community Support Services Department and among several key community partners. Two major initiatives underway -- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing Our Heroes, work to end veteran homelessness; and Housing First Charlotte-Mecklenburg, the effort to end chronic homelessness -- include the County in significant leadership and staff participation. In addition, CSS is the department liaison for the BOCC and Charlotte City Council appointed Housing Advisory Board of Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

With the County's adoption of the housing first approach, and its leadership and staffing of the community-wide Coordinated Assessment system to better identify available shelter and housing resources for the homeless, the County's role in combatting homelessness is increased. Because housing first as an approach to homelessness works best with supportive services, help with employment opportunities for individuals and families is key. Increased economic stability is an aim of the housing first approach.

In addition, successful contract partnerships and collaborations with community agencies give the County needed support in understanding the needs around homelessness and tackling the solutions and innovative best practices that will most benefit our customers.