

AUSTIN/TRAVIS COUNTY CORPORATION FOR SUPPORTIVE HOUSING TEXAS RE-ENTRY INITIATIVE

JANUARY, 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Goals:

- Establish/strengthen housing planning partnerships related to re-entry, homelessness, and disabled persons and housing
- Determine scope of the issue related to the need for permanent supportive housing for a re-entry population
- Develop recommendations for permanent supportive housing strategies for persons leaving correctional settings returning to Austin/Travis County, TX

In order to respond to a Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) planning grant to help research and identify strategies for permanent supportive housing for a re-entry population in our community, the Austin/Travis County CSH Texas Re-entry Task Force was created and launched in April 2009. The Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable was identified as the lead agency, three levels of partnerships were identified (Full, Support, and Advisory) which had different roles and responsibilities, a steering committee was formed to guide the project, a consultant was hired to facilitate the process, and three work groups were formed to address the objectives. Throughout the course of the project, 133 individuals participated representing forty-two different organizations.

KEY FINDINGS

Housing Planning:

- Eleven housing planning groups were identified in Travis County that included 110 different organizations but very few, small community based housing providers. None of these planning groups specifically focuses on special populations such as re-entry.
- There is a lack of permanent supportive housing for the homeless in Travis County. The 2009 Continuum of Care identified 392 units of which only 57 are designated for the chronically homeless.

Target Population:

- Research identified a conservative estimate of 1,100 individuals in Travis County who met the definition of homelessness, involved with the criminal justice system, and had a disability in 2008.

A/TC CSH Texas Re-entry Project Support & Advisory Partners:

- AIDS Services of Austin
- A New Entry
- A/TC Mental Health Jail Diversion Committee
- Catholic Diocese
- City of Austin Health and Human Services
- Downtown Austin Community Court
- Crime Prevention Institute
- Front Steps
- Green Doors
- Texas Rio Grande Legal Aide
- The Arc of the Capital Area
- Travis County Adult Probation
- Travis County Health and Human Services & Veteran Services



Target Population, cont:

- 814 of these individuals were in the Travis County jail and the jail costs alone, excluding any mental health care, exceeded \$3 million.
- The 1,100 identified tend to have multiple challenges including: homelessness, mental health issues, substance abuse issues, serious income stability problems (lack of employment for over a year), and few community supports.

Limitations of Data:

- Criminal justice and/or re-entry programs have limited access to housing programs/vouchers.
- Data matching is difficult due to the lack of formal agreements to share data between organizations.
- There are limitations in the identification of mentally ill persons at the Travis County Jail due to the high turnover of offenders.
- Criminal justice programs stated that they do not effectively identify people with physical, intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.
- Not all criminal justice organizations routinely assess housing stability.

Vulnerable Homeless Population:

- There is an additional, vulnerable homeless population that appear not to be frequent criminal justice users. The Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH) identified 101 homeless individuals that spent more than 200 nights in shelter in 2008. More needs to be learned about this population.

Best Practices:

- Supportive housing has been shown to be a cost-effective public investment.
- The type of housing model and service delivery approach used should be determined by individual needs.
- Case management is critical for coordinating services and engaging clients.
- Assessment process and assessment tools should be developed in the planning stages for each initiative.
- Income stability must be addressed; both from employment and public benefits.
- Models use a service intensive approach.
- Collaboration between criminal justice entities, human service agencies, housing and social service providers as well as the community is vital.
- It is important to proactively address NIMBY issues.
- Diverse funding streams are critical.

TARGET POPULATION

Persons:

- a) being released from a correctional setting or currently involved in a criminal justice program,
- b) have a disability (including mental illness, chemical dependency, physical, or intellectual or developmental disability); and
- c) is or will be homeless at release or during program participation; and
- d) are in, or returning, to Travis County.

With a focus on those who have at least one of the following characteristics:

- Co-occurring disorders;
- Functional impairment;
- High rates of psychiatric and medical hospitalization; and
- High need for income stability services.

This population has complex needs and often has not engaged with traditional housing programs so approaches will vary according to individual needs. These strategies will provide the highest cost savings and targets a population at significant risk of recidivism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop 100 Units as demonstration projects targeting frequent users of the correctional/criminal justice systems who are typically high users of other systems.

Develop 100 units as demonstration projects that meet the definition of permanent supportive housing and have the following characteristics:

- Utilize an individualized approach.
- Develop data and evaluation components at the front end.
- Engage in a case management program that is intensive at the beginning and moderated as the client becomes successful.
- Focus on attaining and maintaining income stability.
- Provide leasing options that are varied and flexible.
- Have formal agreements in place for the following services:
 - a. mental health
 - b. substance abuse
 - c. Legal advocacy (for housing appeals, SSI, SSDI benefits, etc).
- Have formal agreements in place with criminal justice entities.

2. Support an array of approaches across the housing continuum with an emphasis on permanent supportive housing.

Low demand housing is recommended for the target population. Low demand housing removes requirements for sobriety, treatment attendance, and other barriers to entrance into supportive housing. Residents are only expected to meet the requirements of their lease (pay rent, don't destroy property, no violence, etc). Service providers consistently attempt to engage service resistant tenants. It is recognized that those on criminal justice supervision will have to meet the conditions of their supervision.

Permanent supportive housing is critical. *Permanent Supportive Housing is housing that is available to, and intended for, a person or family whose head of household is homeless, or at-risk of homelessness, and has multiple barriers to income and housing stability.* In addition:

- Households would ideally pay no more than 30% household income towards rent and utilities;
- There are no limits on length of tenancy, as long as the terms and conditions of the lease or agreement are met;
- Operations are managed through effective partnerships;
- A comprehensive array of supportive services designed to sustain housing stability is offered; and
- Coordinated approaches are used to address potentially destabilizing factors.

Use both scattered and fixed site approaches: Both approaches are needed to address this widely divergent population. A fixed site or congregate approach is most often used with the chronically homeless population.

- Create a housing planning group within ECHO that focuses on housing planning for special populations: chronically homeless, re-entry, mentally ill, substance abusers, chronic health issue, developmental and intellectual disabilities and includes nonprofits and housing developers.

3. Consolidate housing planning for special populations.

- Create a housing planning group within ECHO that focuses on housing planning for special populations (chronically homeless, re-entry, mentally ill, substance abusers, chronic health issue, developmental and intellectual disabilities) and includes nonprofits and housing developers.
- Explore creation of a macro-level structure or process that can identify housing planning intersections and integrate planning, discussion, and implementation across the housing spectrum from emergency shelter to home ownership.
- Identify ways to strengthen the relationships and involvement of small housing providers, including board and care homes, in planning efforts.

4. Gather and share data related to the target population and housing stability that uses common definitions.

- Create an agreed upon definition for housing stability and consistently collect housing stability data across all sections of the criminal justice system to identify the need for supportive housing.
- Create an assessment team that develops and uses one assessment tool and shares the data across systems.
- Develop formal agreements between outside organizations to better share data and educate entities on HIPAA restrictions and opportunities for data sharing.
- At screening, collect data on where the homeless are housed/staying prior to jail. This information can assist in concentrating services outreach to the population.
- Analyze the costs for services to the target population, including mental health and substance abuse services.
- Further explore the numbers, characteristics, and housing needs of frequent juvenile offenders.

5. Build effective partnerships to address housing stability and the target population.

- Create a formal partnership between ECHO and correctional settings to improve data collection and to coordinate re-entry services for the homeless.
- Integrate data and the data managers into the proposed ECHO Housing Planning for Special Populations Committee.
- Encourage the development or strengthening of partnerships with Board and Care Homes that will lead to enhanced housing opportunities for the target population.
- Share best practices for special population housing that are being identified by the Ending Community Homelessness Organization (ECHO), the CSH Texas Re-entry Initiative and Mayor's Mental Health Task Force Monitoring Committee with each other.

6. Maximize existing programs.

- Engage landlords, developers, and the apartment association in discussions about how to house the special populations.
- Explore ways to expand the eligibility for or the scope of Project Recovery.
- Consider strategies to better connect Community Court frequent users to Project Recovery and other recovery programs.
- Target medical and other special needs detainees for re-entry planning in correctional settings.
- Encourage/support additional funding for emergency psychiatric treatment opportunities as well as development of additional alternatives to incarceration for the target population.

7. Support public policy recommendations that will increase supportive housing for the target population.

- Consider strategies to increase housing and support services resources for Travis County mental health dockets.
- Support efforts by the City of Austin and Travis County to have the same CDBG planning cycle and conduct a joint regional housing study that includes special populations.
- Advocate for Medicaid to be used to pay for support services for the target population as is done in Washington state.

8. Further identify and explore the needs of the vulnerable homeless population that are frequent users of multiple systems and identify other possible target populations for permanent supportive housing.

The CSH Texas Re-entry Initiative also recommends subsequent attention to those populations considered highly vulnerable and who are frequent users of multiple systems including homeless shelters, crisis psychiatric services, hospitals as well as the criminal justice systems. For example, ARCH identified 101 frequent users of their shelter (200 or more days in shelter in 2008), who were not matched with the Travis County jail homeless, mentally ill population (814) in this project. It is recommended that a vulnerability tool is adopted that can help identify this population. Other communities have shown significant community value to addressing this population.

NEXT STEPS

1. The Austin/Travis County Re-entry Roundtable will provide staff support and facilitation to assist in development of an implementation plan for the key recommendations related to developing the 100 units of supportive housing for a demonstration project.
2. Discuss with the ECHO Executive Committee the opportunity for creating a special populations housing planning group within ECHO.
3. ECHO will host a forum for the community that will discuss the formalization process that includes the leadership structure that will be in place and the process for decision making and, ECHO, with the support of the CSH Texas Re-entry Initiative Steering Committee, will actively reach out to the criminal justice, HIV, and substance abuse communities to engage them in the housing planning for special populations committee.
4. Incorporate the next phase of the CSH Texas Re-entry Initiative planning as a sub-committee of the ECHO Housing Planning for Special Populations Committee, and expand the CSH Texas Re-entry Steering Committee to help oversee the planning and implementation efforts. Insure that the Steering Committee includes representatives from the Reentry Roundtable, ECHO, and the Mayor's Mental Health Task Force Monitoring Committee and other key agencies/stakeholders.
5. Create a messaging committee to develop communication strategies for the CSH Texas Re-entry Initiative recommendations and to collaborate with the PSH Financial Modeling partners to create integrated messages around the need for permanent supportive housing.
6. Discuss proposal for an overarching housing planning group with the City of Austin Neighborhood Housing & Community Development, Travis County Community Development Block Grant leadership, and local Housing Authorities. Possibly take a proposal to the Community Action Network Board.

7. Identify local champion(s) to take on this cause. Strong leadership and coalition building has proven to be very successful for other communities who have tackled this problem. We believe that local champion(s) should be recruited to take on this cause. **This leadership may be provided by both individuals and coalitions who share the goal of increased housing for this population.**
8. Reconvene a data work group to address the data issues identified around identifying assessment and screening tools to utilize to help identify the target population that could be served by the 100 units demonstration projects.
9. Post all reports to the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable and CAN websites.

For additional information about the Austin/Travis County CSH Texas Re-entry Initiative or to volunteer to work on this project, contact:

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www.atc-re-entryroundtable.org