
PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

A summit on integrating employment and housing strategies to prevent and end homelessness

Community Profile

COMMUNITY: GREATER RICHMOND, VA

DESCRIPTION

The Greater Richmond Continuum of Care works in 8 localities with over 35 non-profit and public sector partners to understand and address the needs of people experiencing homelessness. Over the course of a year, more than 3000 individuals experience homelessness; the majority of these individuals are served through an emergency shelter program and connected to community-based resources. Our community starts with data from people experiencing homelessness and works collaboratively to identify the community stakeholders needed to overcome the barriers identified by our neighbors. We collect information on employment and income at intake for services and work to connect individuals to employment and training opportunities at multiple points in our continuum of services and through community-based partnerships. Several partner agencies work directly with workforce resources to assist households experiencing homelessness in navigating existing resources. CARITAS, our largest emergency shelter has an employment and life skills program targeted to men overcoming addiction and homelessness. St. Joseph's Villa, our largest rapid re-housing provider, has incorporated employment services into their nationally-certified rapid re-housing provider. Virginia Supportive Housing, our largest permanent supportive housing provider, has developed some supportive employment models to better serve their clients. Other non-profit partners have created programs to address the needs of other subpopulations. We have begun to work with our DOL-funded workforce system to develop protocols that facilitate cross-system referrals for all subpopulations experiencing homelessness.

COLLABORATION

The Greater Richmond Continuum of Care is made up of more than 35 non-profit and public sector partners. The collaboration between the workforce and homeless services systems has grown organically primarily through interagency staff collaborations working to meet the needs of individual clients. An informal task force initiated by a small family foundation in the region has been meeting to understand the issues facing people experiencing homelessness as they work to increase their employment and economic security. The Vice Chair of our regional Continuum of Care board serves on the board of Resource, our WIA agency.

The Resource Partnership Team is a collaborative effort to develop a seamless system that provides business services, employment, and training opportunities to the unemployed and underemployed. We aim to create a network of services that will streamline processes and facilitate sustainable employment that enhances the economic development of the region by developing career pathways to success for individuals and talent pipelines for our business community. The Partnership Team includes a number of homeless service providers as well as workforce development agencies and is focused around task force groups, which develop and implement projects related to the improvement of our workforce system. These task forces are designed to

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provide practical solutions to challenges. Currently, we have created a task force around these five areas:

- ✓ Partnership Events
- ✓ Service Integration/Process Improvement
- ✓ Communication/Outreach
- ✓ Servicing Clients with Barriers to Employment (i.e. Criminal backgrounds, mature workers, etc.)
- ✓ Digital Divide (Issues around access to and the ability to use technology in both careers and job search)

As a result of this summit, we will integrate the ad hoc homeless services task force into the partnership task force structure. While we have begun to partner and have a strong intent to collaborate even more fully, we are still working to determine how our systems can work hand-in-hand to help individuals experiencing homelessness transition from crisis stabilization resources to employment and training.

INNOVATION

Our region has focused primarily on developing programs that address the needs of specific subpopulations creatively. Two examples of this include a five-week skills-based course for men exiting homelessness through a peer-based substance abuse recovery program and a rapid re-housing program for families with children which pairs clients up with an employment specialist soon as intake for housing resources is completed. Our biggest innovation has been to work to translate the workforce and homeless services systems and to identify potential areas for partnership. We are working closely with Resource, our WIA program to overcome the “ability to benefit” principle of workforce programs so that housing status is not a significant barrier to accessing employment and workforce training.

FUNDING FOR INITIATIVE/PROJECTS

To date, funding for our collaborative projects have come from private funders who are interested in increasing access to mainstream workforce systems for people experiencing homelessness. We anticipate that the implementation of the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act will enable Resource to better coordinate services and integrate funding and to offer more intensive educational and training services.

CONNECTION TO EMPLOYERS

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How are employers being engaged? What role do they play in the initiative beyond providing employment? Please identify what types of employers, including whether they are private, public, or nonprofit sector employers.

Employers are engaged through outreach and education from Resource and as volunteers and supporters of homeless service providers in the Continuum of Care. Homeward works with Snagajob, an online resource for employers hiring hourly workers, to develop and implement an employment resource at our Project Homeless Connect event.

CARITAS Works engages employers as volunteers to conduct mock interviews for their five-week employment and life skills programs. Many of these volunteers have committed to hiring graduates of the program.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Community Population	#1.2 million
2014 PIT (overall homeless)	#846
2013 CoC award	\$4.2 million
2013 WIA formula grant allocation	\$ 4,644,454
Current unemployment rate	% 6.7%

DATA AND RESULTS

We have not yet begun to cross-reference data from the workforce and homeless services systems, but each system currently collects data on people experiencing homelessness. Resource reports that 4% of the clients served in the last fiscal year identified as homeless.

The Continuum of Care uses HMIS and twice yearly point-in-time counts to monitor the needs, unmet needs, and trends of people experiencing homelessness. Resource collects data using the HUD definition of homelessness as well. In our January 2014 point-in-time count of people experiencing homelessness, 19.6% of the adults surveyed indicated that they are employed. Of those who are employed, 37.4% work full-time, 40.2% work part-time, and 22.4% do day labor or temp work.

SUGGESTIONS FOR REPLICATION

One suggestion for replication is to incorporate employment assistance and connections to mainstream workforce services into rapid re-housing programs. This kind of partnership will allow homeless service providers to serve more households who fall into homelessness primarily

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because of job loss and other economic crises. As continuums of care work to reduce lengths of homelessness experienced by households, waiting for a household to stabilize in employment is not always practical. Helping a household to obtain stable housing through a rapid re-housing program while connecting them to workforce resources makes sense.

DRAFT: not for distribution