

Homeless Reduction Task Force Northwest Florida

Mission and Goals

2021-2024

The Homeless Reduction Task Force of NWF will be launched in May and June, 2021 to identify ways in which to maximize Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties' existing infrastructure of homeless resources, improve streamlining of services and expand access to care. The Task Force will operate through seven subcommittees who are responsible for providing recommendations to assist in the development of a three-year strategic plan. This coordinated and unified plan will consist of specific tasks and measurable goals. Outcomes will be published monthly in the Pensacola News Journal in hopes to engage the community in this mission.

SUBCOMMITTEES:

- 1. Housing**
- 2. Healthcare**
- 3. Employment/Workforce Development/Education**
- 4. Mental Health/Addiction/Case Management**
- 5. Legal Services/Criminal Justice/Problem Solving Courts**
- 6. Faith based Organizations, Food Programs, Transportation and Mentoring**
- 7. At Large Advisory Committee**

Each subcommittee is chaired by two community leaders who have a focus and passion for ending homelessness in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties. The subcommittee members were drawn from Continuum of Care (CoC) provider organizations, local governments, individuals, and businesses. The subcommittees will report monthly to the Co-Chairs, Advisory Committee and the general CoC partnership.

THE WORK OF SUBCOMMITTEES WILL INCREASE:

- The community's *understanding* of the causes and multiple solutions for reducing homelessness
- Collaboration and coordination of homeless prevention programs by taking an *inventory* of all current services and gaps in services
- Interagency *communication* and memorandums of understanding that will streamline our current system of referral and care
- Full utilization of services by those experiencing homelessness through an enhanced *coordinated entry*: a two county network with comprehensive case management of every homeless individual

- The use of *Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)* that is accessible to all partner agencies, allowing each to assess and refer efficiently across county and local boundaries and that measure well defined performance based outcomes
- Identification of research on applied science *best practices* to support treatment and intervention programs
- Identification of *funding* from private foundations, local, state and federal agencies for current and future service providers
- Identification of *eligibility criteria* for Social Security, Veterans Benefits and other Public Assistance

SUBCOMMITTEES, CO-CHAIRS AND GOALS:

HOUSING – Meredith Reeves, Division Manager, Neighborhood Enterprise Division, Escambia County and Marcie Whitaker, Director of Housing, City of Pensacola

- Conduct a local inventory of beds/units available for homeless households and identify housing gaps (resources available vs. population need)
- Investigate funding sources to expand housing and housing programs and provide recommendations regarding prioritization of local funding resources for housing, shelter, and prevention services

HEALTHCARE -Chandra Smiley, Chief Executive Officer, Community Health NWF and Jules Kairher, Chief Advocating Officer, Sacred Heart Hospital

- Reduce ER visits by homeless individuals and families by 10%
- Improve access to healthcare and case management by negotiating memorandums of understanding agreements

EMPLOYMENT/WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT/EDUCATION - Marcus McBride, Chief Executive Officer, Career Source Escarosa and Jesse Wolfe, Adult Education Program Coordinator, George Stone Vocational School

- Coordinate an intentional effort to identify appropriate workforce training programs and employment opportunities to establish potential income and/or increase income for individuals exiting homelessness. Connect individuals experiencing homelessness to appropriate resources that include intensive case management to remove existing barriers preventing successful employment outcomes

MENTAL HEALTH/ADDICTION/CASE MANAGEMENT- Laura Gilliam, Chief Executive Officer, United Way of West Florida and Dr. Irv Williams, Director of Specialty Programs, Lakeview.

- Advocate for full use and optimization of the HMIS system by service providers to track the progress of individuals as they move through the Continuum of Care
- Investigate ways to increase funding and available services for Detox, Addictions Treatment and Aftercare services

LEGAL SERVICES/CRIMINAL JUSTICE/PROBLEM SOLVING

COURTS- Allison Patton, Esquire and Ronnie Rivera, Escambia County Sheriff's Office

- Partnering with the court system, local law enforcement and service providers to develop effective case management and aftercare services that will result in better outcomes and reduce recidivism
- Develop a diversion program to direct individuals charged with minor offenses into rehabilitation programs rather than jail

FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS/FOOD

PROGRAMS/TRANSPORTATION/ MENTORING –Ashley Wilkinson-Meyer, Associate Pastor, Cokesbury Church and Jennifer Tompkins, Executive Assistant, Epps Christian Center

- Identify ways in which faith based organizations can provide support and mentorship to help those experiencing homelessness maneuver the systems of care and access services
- Evaluate, coordinate and increase efficient access to food programs
- Develop transportation options to allow those experiencing homelessness to obtain education, employment and other needed wrap-around transformational services

TASKFORCE LEADERSHIP –Connie Bookman, Founder & CEO, Pathways For Change, John Johnson, Executive Director, Opening Doors and the At Large Advisory Committee

- As the liaisons, they will review the inventory of all homeless services, diagnose and communicate gaps, bring like-minded organizations and business together to increase necessary resources and grow our base of services in the two county catchment area

A DEFINITION: *THE PERSON EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS*

Different federal programs utilize varied definitions of homelessness.

A homeless individual is a person who lacks stable housing, and whose primary residence during the night is a supervised public or private facility that provides temporary living accommodations or who is a resident in transitional housing, or who is living in a place not meant for human habitation.

There are generally three categories of homelessness:

- **Temporary (or Transitional) Homelessness:** Individuals that experience homelessness for a brief period. This category generally encompasses individuals who have become homeless due to a crisis, such as job loss, medical issue, or a domestic violence situation.
- **Episodic Homelessness:** Individuals that experience periods in and out of homelessness, usually short in duration, but with frequent episodes. Most individuals have been homeless for less than one year and have experienced fewer than four episodes in the past three years.
- **Chronic Homelessness:** Individuals that are continuously homeless for a year or longer without any periods of housing or have had four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. HUD definitions of chronic homelessness include a homeless individual with a disability.

The Homeless Reduction Task Force seeks to identify barriers for the person experiencing homelessness and improve access to housing, employment, substance abuse and mental health treatment, health care, transportation, legal services and public assistance through a unique relationship with our faith-based organizations. Those who are experiencing homelessness can only move away from a disjointed lifestyle with the help of trusted mentors who will be as engaged as if he or she were our own family. Mentors will be oriented in how to maneuver the current system of care as the task force streamlines and enhances the current patchwork of homeless services. We have hope for a healthy and blessed future in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties.