

PUBLIC HEARING

RE: Texas Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness

Thursday, November 17, 2011, 2:00-4:00 pm

TEXAS INTERAGENCY COUNCIL FOR THE HOMELESS

General

- Seek opportunities to involve service providers in conversation about state planning.
- Often, local providers hear about the results of state-level planning too late and did not have an opportunity to give input.

Re-Housing

- Regarding strategy 2.1.8 (“Publish a guide that allows state agencies to direct homeless individuals receiving services to affordable and supportive housing resources”), this would be very helpful. A statewide database listing the availability of all housing units would be ideal.
- City of Corpus Christi needs incentives to release abandoned buildings for revamp or recuperation so that they could be used for permanent housing. There are a lot of blighted and abandoned buildings in Corpus. Code enforcement or incentives could encourage the city to release property for conversion to permanent housing. Use the state stabilization program to help with turning property over.
- The best setting for supplying permanent housing for individuals is a group setting, it tends to be too expensive and difficult to supply wraparound services in scatter site housing.
- There needs to be more housing options for families. A family shelter in Corpus is being closed down due to lack of funding.
- Service providers in Corpus know the homeless community extremely well. They are well aware of individuals’ needs. Awareness exists, what is really needed is money and resources. They need shelter, transitional housing, and affordable housing.
- Corpus has transitional homes for helping persons with substance abuse disorders. Mental health needs are especially strong in Corpus Christi.
- Limitations placed on who may stay in transitional housing makes it difficult for shelters to move clients to transitional units. Some housing has age limits for youth with their families, making families split up to enter shelter or transitional housing. Some shelters have had to refer people out of the city or state to find suitable transitional housing. Other barriers include the needed documents or papers. Domestic violence victims flee abusers without having gathered appropriate papers and not having documents presents red tape for entry to shelter.

Prevention

- People released from jail or prison should have access to necessary institutions for a transitional period. Now, when people are released from institutions, they leave without having adequate information on what resources are available to them. A provider has worked with one person who exited prison after being incarcerated for twenty years. The individual was discharged from a state hospital with no place to go. A shelter does not help an individual like this. But there are not enough beds in state hospitals and the duration of hospital stay is limited. Individuals need to be able to stay in state hospitals for a longer period. Educating administrators on the needs of individuals at risk of homelessness or who have histories of homelessness will maybe help state hospitals recognize the need to extend the duration of bed time for people who need it.
- Sometimes, families are not notified when a family member is released from an institution. The individual is released without being connected with his or her family. Family should be contacted upon an individual's discharge.
- There is a disconnect between state agencies and the non-profit system. Funding from different sources is hard to coordinate or pool together.
- A strong model for homelessness prevention has involved keeping in contact with clients with substance abuse disorders or mental health issues and continuing to work with them for six months after release from an institution, educating individuals about available resources and checking with agencies to connect individuals with individuals.
- For persons with substance abuse disorders or mental health issues, access to jobs is limited, which makes serving these populations difficult. Children are also difficult because once youths turn seventeen, they cannot stay with the mother in shelters. Criminal histories also make service delivery difficult.
- For homelessness prevention, it is extremely important to help families increase or establish income because rent assistance is limited. For low-income housing, the wait list is too long and it is difficult to get on the list.

Data

- It would help if grant programs gathered data in a different manner, using more consistent reports among programs. A centralized data source, where all agencies report data, would ease reporting by requiring data entry into a single source.

Infrastructure

- The state should not forget non-profits. Include non-profits in planning.
- Encourage state agencies to participate in local resource fairs – educate agencies and make resources known.

- The plan should have accountability measures to track progress. Corpus had a 10-year plan which got stuck in a drawer and was not used. Annual reporting could help. Nobody had ownership over the city plan. There should be an annual review of the plan's progress and revisions to the plan and strategies. This should be a requirement.
- It is discouraging to hear the same thing reiterated year after year. Everything comes down to money. People get SS checks, but there is a disconnect. People have SS but are not using the income to pay for rent. They are not educated on responsibility requirements to use SSI/SSDI for certain purposes like rent payments.
- There should be a financial literacy requirement for social security.
- Funds should be made more easily accessible.
- Corpus has no youth shelter. There are not enough resources for this population. They are hard to work with because they are minors.
- The Keep Every Youth in School program (KEYS) has spent a large amount of time trying to find homeless or unaccompanied youth, but they are extremely hard to find.
- The Point-in-Time Count is not accurate. Data is needed for traditional grant writing. Local organizations know what the community needs, but the data does not always reflect these needs. Use education data and data from other sources to identify underserved or under-identified populations.