

Final Report of the Task Force on Homelessness to the Fort Worth City Council

Discussion Draft for July 8, 2014

Background

On April 15, 2014, the Fort Worth City Council created an ad hoc Task Force on Homelessness and requested that it perform the following tasks:

- (a) Review the roles and responsibilities of all major organizations that fund and/or deliver services to homeless persons in Fort Worth;
- (b) Analyze the flow of financial resources associated with these services;
- (c) Assess the general efficiency and effectiveness of this service delivery system;
- (d) Identify opportunities to improve communication, coordination, and collaboration among public and non-profit agencies serving the homeless; and
- (e) Advise the City Council on opportunities to streamline the funding and delivery of services to the homeless.¹

Per the request of the City Council, the Task Force delivered an interim report of findings on June 10, 2014. The Task Force held an Open House and Public Forum to receive public comment from interested citizens in late June and concluded deliberations on this Final Report in early July.

Task Force Activities

At its conclusion the Task Force will have conducted six public meetings, two Council briefings (one each on the Interim and Final Reports), and one Open House and Public Forum. Meetings included briefings from City staff, subject area experts, and presentations by the leadership of Fort Worth agencies that serve people who are homeless. The Task Force also toured portions of the Day Resource Center, Presbyterian Night Shelter, Samaritan House, The Salvation Army, and Union Gospel Mission.

The source material for this report is drawn from Task Force deliberations, background materials and handouts, and presentations from public meetings convened by the Task Force. Meeting agendas, background materials and handouts, and presentations are available to the public on the internet: <http://fortworthtexas.gov/boards/homelessness/taskforce/>.

¹ [City Council Resolution #4312-04-2014](#)

FINDINGS

(a) Review the roles and responsibilities of all major organizations that fund and/or deliver services to homeless persons in Fort Worth

1. The homeless services system reflects the diversity and complexity of the needs of people who are homeless.

Around 5,200 people will experience homelessness in our community this year, around 2,400 at any point in time. The primary reasons people become homeless include: 1) ability to afford rent; 2) domestic violence (women); and, 3) unemployment (men).²

Those at greatest risk of becoming homeless are the very poor:

- Poverty rate in Tarrant County is 1 in 6³
- Poverty rate in Fort Worth is getting worse relative to the state
- Child poverty rate is 1 in 4; growing faster than state average
- In the Fort Worth Independent School District, there are 2,007 students classified as homeless by the U.S. Department of Education
- Texas – Top 10% in affordable homes; bottom 10% in home ownership
- A family must earn a “housing wage” of \$18.04 per hour to afford a 2-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent in Fort Worth—the equivalent of 2.5 full-time jobs at minimum wage⁴
- 35% of households in Fort Worth have incomes below the housing wage⁵

A large and multifaceted network of homeless services has evolved in our community to respond to the diversity of needs of people who are homeless. The array of evidence-based services, techniques, and systems organization strategies is indicative of the complex and layered needs of the people for whom they are provided.

Services⁶

Permanent Supportive Housing
 Housing-focused Street Outreach
 Rapid Re-housing
 Income and Benefit Assistance
 Medical and Behavioral Health Care
 Prevention

² [Directions Home Fact Sheet](#), pg. 1

³ Poverty, student, and homeownership statistics are from the Fort Worth Independent [School District report](#).

⁴ [Out of Reach 2014, National Low Income Housing Coalition](#)

⁵ [Directions Home Fact Sheet](#), pg. 1; the figure is calculated by comparing housing wage data and census bureau income figures

⁶ [Directions Home Fact Sheet](#), pg. 3

Techniques

Housing First

Trauma Informed Care

Client-centered, Strengths-based, Solution-focused Service Delivery

Systems Organization

Housing Prioritization

Coordinated Assessment

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

Services that are provided specifically for people who are homeless are delivered alongside and coordinated with other community, health, and human services such as those provided by Adult Protective Services, Community Action Partners, Fort Worth Police Department (FWPD), Fort Worth Fire Department (FWFD), foster care, Goodwill Industries, MedStar Mobile Healthcare, MHMR of Tarrant County, Recovery Resource Council, Tarrant Area Food Bank, Travelers Aid, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Workforce Solutions, and numerous community- and faith-based food pantries and clothes closets.

2. The Continuum of Care (CoC) serves as the central planning and coordinating body for Tarrant and Parker counties.

With the adoption of the Federal plan to end homelessness, *Opening Doors*, and the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act, the Continuum of Care (CoC) has emerged as the central planning and coordinating body for our area.⁷ The Fort Worth/Arlington/Tarrant County CoC was chartered in November of 2013⁸ and since then has developed an ambitious Strategic Plan for the coming year.⁹

The Continuum of Care (CoC) Board of Directors has selected the Tarrant County Homeless Coalition (TCHC) to be the “Lead Agency” for CoC operations, accountability, resources, and planning. In this capacity, TCHC ensures statutory compliance and competitive eligibility for Federal funds.¹⁰

The CoC Board has also designated TCHC to serve as the lead agency for the implementation of the community’s shared Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS). Performance measurement at the project level is accomplished largely—though not exclusively—through the shared HMIS system which computes 36 core measures in four program types.¹¹ Examples of project level data measures include: program capacity/ occupancy; comparisons of health, income, and benefits at

⁷ [Presentation: Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act and the Continuum of Care.](#)

Two members of the Task Force serve on the CoC Board of Directors: Councilmember Kelly Allen Gray and Mr. Ted Blevins.

⁸ [CoC Board Charter](#)

⁹ [CoC Strategic Plan](#)

¹⁰ The [CoC Board Charter](#) describes the duties of the CoC.

¹¹ [Measuring the Performance of Tarrant County’s Service Delivery System](#)

program entry and exit; and, the type of housing (permanent housing, nursing home, return to shelter, etc.) into which a person moves after leaving the program.

Similarly, aggregate HMIS data is used along with other data to evaluate the performance of the overall homelessness system. Examples of systems level measures include: point in time count; bed utilization; percentage of beds dedicated/ occupied by the chronically homeless; and, employment income at program exit.

At the local level, the CoC determines which applications are included in the application to HUD which, in turn, competes for funding with communities around the nation.¹² For the coming year, the local Continuum of Care program application is competing for \$12,147,115 from HUD; if awarded, these funds will be matched by approximately \$2,800,000 in local sources for a total funding level of \$14,924,192.¹³ These dollars will fund 33 different projects administered by 11 different organizations.

(b) Analyze the flow of financial resources associated with these services

3. Housing and services are funded by a complex array of public and private sources, each with a varied set of goals, eligibility requirements, and regulatory constraints.

Funding for mainstream and homeless-specific services is complex, technical, layered, multi-sourced, and frequently siloed. Dollars that are spent on emergency response health care for a person who is homeless cannot be spent on a rent subsidy that otherwise could have prevented the emergency room admission in the first place.

Resourceful agency leaders solicit funds from a wide variety of private and public sources:

- Federal: 17 agencies operating 94 programs
- State: 11 agencies operating 22 programs
- Local: city- and county-funded services
- Private: foundations, philanthropists, events, individuals, corporations, and program income

The service array of a particular agency is influenced by client needs, funding availability, politics, and the mission or philosophical orientation of the organization. Factors that influence utilization of services by people who are homeless include fit, availability, eligibility, suitability, and choice.

Public funding is provided through mainstream services and instrumentalities (i.e., Medicaid, VA Hospitals) and through competitive grant programs, the largest of which is the Continuum of Care (CoC)

¹² A [draft scorecard](#) for the local competition was shared with the Task Force as well as a [funding process map](#): Overview of Funding Sources and Delivery of Services to Homeless Persons in Fort Worth, p 7.

¹³ Funding levels are here: [Briefing on HEARTH Act and Continuum of Care Strategic Plan](#), p 6; and, a list of applicant organizations and funding levels are here: [CoC Program Projects](#).

program operated by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The transparency and standardization of publically-funded housing and services does not apply to private dollars; thus, program outcomes and overall funding levels are difficult to evaluate.

4. City funding plays a key role in the community-wide effort to end homelessness.

Fort Worth citizens have a significant financial interest in decreasing homelessness—especially chronic homelessness. Costs incurred by the community are in terms of cash, lost opportunity, quality of life, and human lives.

A TCU-led study found that charges for taxpayer-funded services at the JPS Hospital, MHMR, and MedStar were reduced by 36% after the individual was moved off the streets or out of a shelter and into housing. While cash outlays were necessary to provide rental assistance and supportive services in the program, the costs to ongoing essential services were lower. Moreover, by moving people out of homelessness, the return on the investment in supportive housing improved neighborhood conditions as well as the health and self-sufficiency of individuals.

Local studies have also demonstrated the opportunity costs that homelessness has on economic development efforts and property values. Quality of life for residents, business owners, tourists, and, of course, for people who are homeless, improves when people return to housing. A 2008 citizen survey reveals that 90% of Fort Worth citizens feel that dealing with homelessness is important, very important, or extremely important.¹⁴

City resources and services were cited by agency leaders who met with the Task Force as “critical” to their efforts to maintain public safety and to help people escape homelessness. Current year (FY 2014) allocations total \$2,501,661.

Dept.	Program	FY '10	FY '12	FY '14	'14 APs
Housing & Eco. Dev.	Contracted Svcs., Admin.	2,556,042	2,556,042	2,349,163	2
Code Compliance	Homeless Court – Community Services	71,652	-	-	-
Law	Homeless Court – Prosecutors	195,435	-	-	1
Municipal Court	Homeless Court – Social Services	75,424	62,379	55,161	-
Police	Narcotics Section	253,222	-	-	-
Police	Liaison Officer	-	84,758	97,337	1
TOTAL		\$3,151,775	\$2,703,179	\$2,501,661	4

¹⁴ [Directions Home Plan](#), Pg. 4

The Fort Worth Advisory Commission on Homelessness recommends a system-wide increase of \$6,000,000 per year and has advised the Council to establish a Task Force to identify possible resources from the public and private sectors to meet this need.

(c) Assess the general efficiency and effectiveness of this service delivery system

5. Most often cited inefficiency is a shortage of safe, affordable housing.

As Councilmember Kelly Allen Gray noted, “Every provider concurred that despite all that is being done to assist and provide services to the men, women, and children living on East Lancaster, housing is the most needed resource.” Indeed, every presenter and tour guide underscored the need for additional units of dispersed, mixed-income, affordable and supportive housing.

Task Force discussions and questions related to this issue have centered on what the most appropriate and viable methods for funding additional affordable housing and what agency/entity should take the lead locally in accomplishing this goal.

(d) Identify opportunities to improve communication, coordination, and collaboration among public and non-profit agencies serving the homeless

6. Fort Worth area agencies work together to achieve a great deal with scarce resources.

The resources currently being spent to provide housing and services for the homeless are accomplishing a great deal, providing emergency shelter for 1,200 people county-wide as well as rental assistance and supportive services for more than 2,800 people in transitional and permanent supportive housing programs who live in apartments. Despite challenging circumstances, organizations and local government in the Near East Side Neighborhood provide meals, shelter, housing placement, social services, and public safety around the clock.

The Task Force heard numerous examples of interagency collaboration and the extraordinary lengths to which organizations go to provide assistance. Unfortunately, demand continues to outpace the capacity of the system to provide the breadth and depth of services that are needed to more efficiently help people return to permanent housing.

7. CoC-wide continuous improvement efforts are underway to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery and coordination.

The Continuum of Care (CoC) Strategic Plan for the coming year details numerous efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the housing and services delivery system for people who are homeless. Consistent with Federal expectations and best practices, the CoC is rolling out a Coordinated Assessment

System (CAS) along with policies to better prioritize and further align the provision of services that are funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) through the CoC program.

Service providers are free to operate, endow, fund, and support programs of their choosing no less than foundations, philanthropists, or individual donors. While this arrangement allows for a great deal of freedom, the Task Force observed that it does add complexity and reduces the number of levers available to make system-wide adjustments.

Systems Change Strategy	Pro	Con
Strategic Funding	Funder can achieve quick, specific results	It is very difficult to achieve change at a sufficient scale across more than one service sector due to expenses
Regulatory Action	Government can achieve quick, specific results	Also difficult to take to scale within regulatory authority and retain buy-in of partners
Collective Impact¹⁵	Best practices for developing large scale, long-term change	Slow, must balance Short-Term Wins with Long-Term Planning

(e) Advise the City Council on opportunities to streamline the funding and delivery of services to the homeless

- 1) **The City of Fort Worth should remain proactively engaged in planning, partnerships, and funding for programs and services that prevent and end homelessness.**
 - a) *Planning.* To reflect the many changes that have taken place since 2008 (in best practices, housing availability, demand for and supply of services, federal legislation and regulations, etc.), the City Council should authorize staff to work with the Advisory Commission on Ending Homelessness, various stakeholders, and the general public to update the *Directions Home* plan. This update of the plan should draw upon best practices as well as our experience to date, and should clarify the City’s role with respect to the Continuum of Care. The target for publishing a revised plan should be not later than June 2015.
 - b) *Partnerships.* To support Continuum of Care-led efforts to promote efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of homeless services, the City of Fort Worth should continue to participate in the activities and governance of the Continuum of Care. The City should support efforts underway by the CoC to provide the public with a periodic dashboard of the progress being made towards the achievement of agreed upon goals, and consult with the CoC in allocating funds, developing performance standards, evaluating outcomes, and administering and operating HMIS.

¹⁵ [CoC Strategic Plan](#)

- c) *Funding*. To build on the success of City-funded programs that provide housing placement, rental assistance, and housing retention services, the City Council should provide \$3 million in the City's fiscal year 2015 General Fund budget for homelessness-specific services and programs. Additional funding should target efforts that directly increase the number of people moving out of shelters and off the streets into permanent housing.

Dept.	Program	FY '10	FY '12	FY '14	FY '15
Housing & Econ Development (HED)	Contracted Services & Admin	2,556,042	2,556,042	2,349,163	2,846,008
Code Compliance	Homeless Court – Community Svcs.	71,652	-	-	-
Law	Homeless Court – Prosecutors	195,435	-	-	-
Municipal Court	Homeless Court – Social Svcs.	75,424	62,379	55,161	55,161
Police	Narcotics Section	253,222	-	-	-
Police	Liaison Officer	-	84,758	98,831	98,831
TOTAL		\$3,151,775	\$2,703,179	\$2,503,155	\$3,000,000

In the last five years, **City funds have directly helped 1,545 households return to housing** from City streets and emergency shelters. Two of the key initiatives in this effort include:

- **Housing Placement Services** (HPS). Community- and faith-based organizations are contracted to provide services specifically focused on linking homeless individuals and families with safe, affordable, permanent housing. In FY 2014 the HPS initiative will, at minimum, assist 250 households for an average cost \$2,280 each. Households successfully served in FY2013 included a mix of both chronic (25%) and non-chronic homeless (75%).
- **Directions Home Voucher Program** (DHVP). This permanent supportive housing program includes three initiatives: rental assistance, housing retention services, and tenant supportive services—behavioral health supports for people with mental illness and/ or substance abuse concerns. In FY 2014, City funds will be used to support 250 households in permanent supportive housing; the DHVP program costs \$9,965 per household. This initiative is targeted to the chronically homeless with 2+ years of homelessness—a group with complex and multiple needs.

An increase in the FY 2015 General Fund budget for Contracted Services in the Housing & Economic Development Department could provide resources to expand each of these important initiatives. For example,

	FY14	FY15	Δ
Total <i>Directions Home</i> Funds (HED)	2,349,163	2,846,008	496,845
Housing Placement	570,000	818,423	248,423
Cost Per Household	2,280	2,280	2,280
Households Served	250	359	109
Supportive Housing Voucher Program	2,491,240	2,739,663	248,423
Cost Per Household	9,965	9,965	9,965
Households Served	250	275	25
Total Households Returning to Housing	500	634	134

2) To end chronic homelessness among Veterans, families, and adults, the City Council should promote and support the creation of 600 additional units of permanent supportive housing in neighborhoods throughout Fort Worth by 2018.

- a) To accomplish this goal, the City Council should appoint an ad hoc task force on the development of permanent supportive housing to work with pertinent City departments, business organizations, and neighborhood groups in proactively identifying potential projects and appropriate funding sources.
- b) To demonstrate the City Council's commitment toward meeting the 600-unit objective, the task force on the development of permanent supportive housing should include Council members as well as representatives from the Advisory Commission on Ending Homelessness, the Real Estate Council of Greater Fort Worth, the Apartment Association of Tarrant County, and pertinent neighborhood groups.

3) To maximize efficiency and effectiveness, the City Council should encourage collaboration among funders and service providers to coordinate and streamline funding for housing and services for people who are homeless.

- a) *Funders Council.* As recommended by the Directions Home plan, the City Council should collaborate on the establishment of a Funders Council to promote collaboration among foundations, local governments, and other philanthropic supporters of local initiatives to end homelessness.
- b) *Service Provider Alliance.* To assist homeless service providers in working together to prepare joint applications for private funding, the City Council should promote the creation of an alliance of service providers.