



MORE THAN SHELTER!

Charlotte-Mecklenburg's
Ten-Year Implementation Plan to
End and Prevent Homelessness---One Person /One Family at a Time

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

October 2006

MORE THAN SHELTER! Executive Summary

We Need to Shift Our Community's Response to Homelessness---Now!

As Charlotte-Mecklenburg's population grows each year and our relative supply of affordable housing decreases, we continue to see the number of homeless families and individuals swell in our community. Over 5,000 people are homeless in Mecklenburg County on any given night as are tens of thousands annually. We are currently spending millions of dollars to address our growing and tragic homelessness crisis, but at best, are only able to manage the problem with little capacity to address root causes.

While many effective programs are in place to support homeless individuals and families, they, collectively, have not been sufficient in the face of the growing problem to effectively reduce or end homelessness in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. **The evidence is compelling that the scope of our crisis has become too large and the causes too complex to continue working from an institutionalized, agency-driven system that relies heavily on emergency shelters and crisis management.**

If we truly want to see significant reductions in our homeless population, we need to begin shifting away from the traditional shelter-based model that often results in people shuffling from shelter to shelter and program to program, to a housing-based model that focuses on getting homeless individuals and families off the streets, out of shelters and into appropriate and safe permanent housing that is linked to services. **Supportive and service-enriched housing**, which provide varying levels of on and off-site services and support, must be developed as part of this shift. Supportive housing lends itself to chronically homeless men and women who may need a higher level of ongoing services and support, while service-enriched housing is best suited for families and individuals who are transitionally or episodically homeless as a result of economic setbacks or other non-disabling conditions. Services and support for those in service-enriched housing will eventually taper off as residents stabilize and build their capacity to live independent of support.

Communities where this housing-based model has been embraced are seeing positive outcomes with formerly homeless families and individuals staying housed and not returning to the streets and shelters. And according to evidence-based research being conducted across the country, **shifting to this "rapid housing/re-housing" model is cost-effective due to reduced reliance on shelters and less dependence on publicly funded systems such as emergency medical care, judicial and correctional institutions, chemical dependency treatment and foster care.** Bottom line, this housing-based approach is working and making a noticeable difference in other communities.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg's shift to a housing-based model will be a gradual process and will require new sources of funding to create affordable housing options. Until sufficient housing is available to support this new model, parallel systems must operate. People who are homeless are at immediate, personal risk and have a basic right to safe shelter and survival support. But as more housing options come on-line over time, many of the homeless support agencies and services will need to "re-tool" their service delivery protocols and processes to better align with the housing-based model.

MORE THAN SHELTER! represents a movement to the third phase of our community's body of work to address the growing homelessness crisis in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. It builds on Living in the Shadows, An Assessment of Homelessness completed in 2000 and Out of the Shadows, a broad strategic plan developed by a community task force in 2002 with input from well over 125 participants. MORE THAN SHELTER! includes ten-year implementation strategies driven by the Out of the Shadows vision and goals as well as a discreet number of specific and immediate priority actions to take in FY07-08.

A Way Home was engaged by the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County to facilitate the process for developing this implementation plan. Planning Consultant Carol Morris worked with A Way Home and three diverse stakeholder committees charged with identifying priorities for action. Additional input was provided by service providers within the Homeless Services Network, consumers and others.

The plan and priorities for action will be updated annually through an inclusive priority setting process.

Making the Big Shift...What We Must Do

More Than Shelter! provides ten-year strategies and immediate actions Charlotte-Mecklenburg can and must take to begin shifting our community response to homelessness. The focus is on three main implementation goals:

MORE THAN SHELTER! IMPLEMENTATION GOALS

- GOAL 1: HOUSING:** Get homeless families and individuals into appropriate and safe permanent housing as soon as possible;
- GOAL 2: OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT:** Link chronic homeless to housing, treatment and services through intensive outreach and engagement; and
- GOAL 3: PREVENTION:** Promote housing stability for those families and individuals most at-risk of becoming homeless.

Goal 1: Get Homeless Families and Individuals into Appropriate and Safe Permanent Housing

The first and most critical step toward getting families and individuals appropriately housed is to expand our supply and access to affordable housing, in particular supportive and service-enriched housing. **This implementation plan calls for creating 2,500 supportive and service-enriched housing units over the next ten years**—500 supportive units for chronically homeless men and women and 2,000 service-enriched units for families and individuals. Creating new units doesn't necessarily mean building new units. We have an estimated 7,000 vacant rental units existing in our community, most of which are not affordable for low income households. A portion of our housing need could be met through rental subsidies and rehabilitation of some of these surplus units. A Way Home, in partnership with others and based on national models, has developed a model for creating 200 service-enriched units within our existing housing stock, reflecting a cost of between \$30,000 and \$35,000 per unit. As part of this model, service agencies have identified ways in which they could coordinate existing resources to provide services to residents living in the units.

The immediate action is to pilot this model for 200 service-enriched units for families in FY07-08 and to continue looking for opportunities to replicate it in future years. Developing a similar model for supportive housing is also recommended as an immediate action to take in FY07-08, with the intention of creating 50 units in FY09. If we can position the community to create an average of 250 units of supportive and service-enriched housing each year, we will reach our ten-year goal. Other strategies we will pursue to advance the goal of getting people into appropriate and safe permanent housing as soon as possible include:

- **Developing new sources of short and long-term housing subsidies** to enable people to move into and retain housing;
- **Expanding community-based case management services** that embody a coordinated “wrap-around” service approach that helps residents of service-enriched housing reach their goals for self-directed living;
- **Developing systems integration strategies** to ensure that mainstream services such as public assistance programs, employment training and placement, health care and mental health and substance abuse treatment are streamlined to provide access to residents living in supportive or service-enriched housing; and
- **Incorporating housing assistance centers and rapid re-housing strategies and processes into the overall homeless support system** to quickly assess housing and services needs of those experiencing homelessness and provide links to permanent housing.

Goal 2: Link Chronically Homeless to Housing and Services through Outreach and Engagement

Approximately 15% of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's homeless population is considered chronically homeless. The challenges and obstacles facing this population can be significant. They are more likely to suffer chronic physical health conditions and/or mental illness and substance abuse addiction, as well as use public services (e.g. hospital emergency rooms, mental health facilities, jails) significantly more frequently than other homeless individuals. They also experience significantly higher rates of violence and victimization.

Because of these challenges, it is more difficult to engage the chronically homeless and link them to housing and services. But, the economic case can easily be made for helping chronically homeless men, women and families leave the streets, stop cycling in and out of shelters and get into appropriate permanent housing when considering the disproportionate costs often associated with this population--- reliance on shelters, emergency medical care, judicial and correctional services, chemical dependency treatment, foster care services and other publicly funded programs.

To get people who are chronically homeless into appropriate, safe housing, we must step up our outreach and engagement efforts. Outreach and engagement are critical for building trust and opening doors to help those living on the street or cycling in and out of emergency shelters. The Urban Ministry Center is doing an exemplary job of reaching out to homeless men and women who come to their facility on North Tryon Street. Service providers and volunteers working at the Men's Winter Shelter also attempt to reach out to and connect with men who live on the streets but come to the shelter during the winter months. The only street outreach, however, is done by two social workers from the ACCESS program who attempt to connect with dually diagnosed (mental illness and addiction) men and women living on the streets. Homeless Support Services social workers also reach out to people living on the streets, camps and other outdoor locations; however their street outreach is limited.

To step up outreach and engagement in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, **this implementation plan calls for creating additional low-demand shelter options for chronically homeless men and women as a means of engaging people and ultimately linking them to housing, treatment and services.** (Low demand implies that as long as a person meets minimal requirements such as being non-violent, he or she can seek shelter, no questions asked.) Creating safe, supportive environments that may draw in the more challenged chronic homeless population will increase opportunities for outreach and engagement. This philosophy has successfully guided the work of the Urban Ministry Center, which is only open during the day. What's currently missing is the low-demand shelter to provide a safe place for people to sleep at night.

Specifically, the plan recommends creating **200 year-around, low demand shelter beds for men and 50 low demand beds for women.** It also calls for establishing **two to three small safe havens** for chronically homeless men and women living on the streets who are suffering from severe and persistent mental illness. Most communities of our size have such safe harbors for mentally ill people who are potentially endangered by living on the street.

Other strategies for reaching out to engaging people who are chronically homeless include:

- **Streamlining and improving access to SSI (Supplemental Security Income and Disability Insurance) and Medicaid benefits,** which can be a lengthy and difficult process, particularly for people with no address, mental illness and other barriers. In many cases, these benefits could be the life-line for chronically homeless individuals with significant disabilities;
- **Developing non-traditional approaches** to connecting chronically homeless to mental health, substance abuse and health services; and
- **Expanding jail diversion strategies** for chronic offenders charged with public inebriation to reduce the strain and costs on the criminal justice system and to link offenders to intervention services.

Goal 3: Prevention: Promote Housing Stability for Those Most At-Risk of Homelessness

Our strategy to rapidly move homeless people into permanent housing will not work unless we are simultaneously doing all we can to prevent new families or individuals from becoming homeless. Otherwise, it will be like bailing water out of a boat and not fixing the leaks.

Multiple, linked factors can lead to a person or family becoming homeless, which makes prevention more challenging and housing stability more precarious. Losing a job, dealing with an illness, having a car break down or getting behind with payday loans might be the final blow that pushes an already vulnerable family or individual out the door. Divorce, domestic violence and other family issues may also catapult someone into homelessness as might personal issues with substance abuse, mental illness and/or poor decision making. Increasingly, homelessness has become a symptom of poverty and the growing gap between income and the cost of living. And then there are the men and women who are being released into homelessness from institutions such as jails, mental health and treatment facilities, hospitals and foster care.

While the underlying issues of poverty and disadvantage certainly need to be addressed, **we need to be strategic and target our limited prevention resources on those families and individuals at greatest risk of becoming homeless** including:

- Teens aging out of foster care;
- Families seeking financial and other assistance at Crisis Assistance Ministry on more than one occasion;
- Families who lose their housing as a result of evictions, code violations, or other public action;
- Victims of domestic violence; and
- People being discharged from prison, jail, hospitals, mental health facilities and other institutions.

The ten-year prevention strategies outlined in this implementation plan include:

- **Expanding the role of Crisis Assistance Ministry as a “one-stop” support center for families and individuals susceptible to becoming homeless.** An expanded center would provide a broader range of services than currently is offered at Crisis such as on-site and/or linked eviction and foreclosure related legal assistance, in-depth financial/credit education and counseling, benefits eligibility counseling and application, and housing case management and referral services. This is the place where thousands of vulnerable families and individuals come each year to stave off eviction and utility cut-offs. For good or bad, the agency has a “captive market”, and therefore, is a logical place for service expansion.
- **Expanding the capacity of mainstream service agencies to screen and assess their clients for risk factors for becoming homeless** through development of a web-based screening and assessment tool.
- **Developing and concentrating community-based prevention strategies and education in neighborhoods** where high numbers of homeless people have come from and/or most of the requests for emergency financial assistance and/or evictions emanate.
- **Stopping the discharge of people into homelessness from institutional settings**, including jails/prisons, mental health and substance abuse treatment and detoxification programs and foster care, by developing discharge planning policies and plans based “zero tolerance” for discharging people into homelessness. This includes expanding housing options, particularly for youth aging out of foster care.
- **Providing additional emergency beds and transitional housing for victims of domestic violence** so they receive the specialized support they need to help prevent further abuse and longer-term homelessness. (A large number of women and children fleeing domestic violence (DV) seek shelter at the Salvation Army because the Shelter for Battered Women only has 29 beds and regularly turns women away. The Salvation Army is not equipped to provide DV-related support.)

What's Essential for Successful Plan Implementation?

Establish a Dedicated Funding Source to Sustain Efforts

Lessons learned from communities underscore the importance of establishing a dedicated source of funding to sustain efforts to create affordable and appropriate housing opportunities for homeless men, women and children. Establishing a dedicated source of funding to help end homelessness and provide workforce housing should be a top implementation priority for Charlotte-Mecklenburg. We should explore options and take action to establish such a fund within the next year or two. Based on the success of other communities, key options to consider should include a real estate/land transfer tax, a non-profit affordable housing foundation or endowment and/or affordable housing bonds. A Ten-Year Plan Funders' Collaborative should be established to focus on resource development and identifying common funding priorities.

Create a Leadership/Accountability Structure

Creating the necessary leadership/accountability structure is essential to ensure coordination, oversight and accountability for execution of this plan at both policy (strategic) and operational (tactical) levels. Without such a structure, we will have limited success. The proposed structure would include:

1. **Establishing a high-level Ten-Year Plan Board of Advisors** appointed by City Council and the Mecklenburg Board of County Commission to provide advice on annual implementation priorities and to identify and help facilitate opportunities to help lift up and support the plan through resource development, partnership building, advocacy and the building of community/political will.
2. **Officially designating A Way Home as the manager and coordinator of the ongoing development and implementation of the ten-year plan.** A Way Home is the logical entity for this role in that the Out of the Shadows Task Force called for the creation of this organization in large part, to focus on system-wide strategic planning and coordination of plan implementation. The Task Force recommended that the organization should, at a minimum, have a three-member staff. However, since the start-up of A Way Home in 2003, the organization has been operating with only a Board of Directors and an Executive Director. Without additional resources, A Way Home cannot take on full accountability for managing and coordinating the plan's implementation.
3. **Developing/adopting a joint resolution among key entities and stakeholders** throughout the community to support implementation of the ten-year plan, and developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) outlining roles and commitments for involvement in its execution. This should also include establishing partnerships with local colleges and universities to support the work.
4. **Designating a community champion for each of the three goal areas**---housing, outreach/engagement and prevention---to lead Action Teams consisting of community representatives and stakeholders that would provide leadership and support for implementation activities related to their respective goals.
5. **Bringing the champions of the three oversight teams together quarterly** with the Director and Chairperson of A Way Home, the Chairperson of the Homeless Service Network, the City of Charlotte Neighborhood Development Director, a representative from the County Manager's Office and other key players to serve as the **Ten-Year Plan Operational Leadership Team.**

Focus on Data Collection and Measurable Results

Success with the implementation of this plan will require that we focus on achieving specific and measurable results. To this end, we must:

1. **Collect comprehensive, system-wide data** and organize it into an analytical framework that will allow us to track changes over time and make informed decisions about future action; and
2. **Develop specific, measurable outcomes** aligned with the implementation goals and strategies and then monitor and evaluate them on an annual basis.

Continue to Build Political and Community Will for Action

Ending homelessness is humane, makes economic sense and is achievable. To successfully implement this plan, we must build the political and community will to devote the necessary human, financial and political resources to solving the crisis. If we continue to ignore the call for action, our crisis will only worsen, more lives will be ruined and the costs and embarrassment to the community will multiply. To build this will, we must continually educate the public and our leaders about the desperate situation thousands of homeless men, women and children find themselves in every year and about the strides we are making to move toward long-term, cost effective solutions. **We can and will succeed!**

TEN-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
SUMMARY OF TEN-YEAR STRATEGIES AND 2007-2008 ACTIONS

PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS	TEN-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES	2007-2008 PRIORITY ACTIONS (New/Updated Priority Actions Will Be Identified Annually)	KEY IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS for ACTIONS	TARGET DATE
<p>GOAL 1: Get Homeless Families and Individuals into Safe, Appropriate Housing As Soon As Possible</p>	<p>1. Create 2,500 affordable rental units linked to services including 500 supportive housing units and 2,000 service enriched units.</p>	<p>ACTION: Pilot model for service enriched housing that results in the creation of 200 units for homeless “working poor” families.</p>	<p>A Way Home, Housing First for Families Advisory Board, Neighborhood Development</p>	<p>11/07</p>
	<p>2. Develop new sources of rent subsidies.</p> <p>3. Expand community-based case management services using “wrap-around” approach.</p> <p>4. Develop systems integration strategies to ensure access to mainstream resources.</p> <p>5. Incorporate housing assistance centers and rapid re-housing strategies into the overall homeless support system.</p>	<p>ACTION: Develop and a model for 50 supportive units for chronic homeless and prepare to pilot in FY09.</p>	<p>Urban Ministry Center, ACCESS, A Way Home, Neighborhood Development Area Mental Health</p>	<p>12/07</p>
	<p>6. Development and begin implement system-wide transition or conversion framework for shifting to housing-based model.</p>	<p>ACTION: Research and evaluate transition-conversion plans and approaches from other communities already using the housing-based model.</p>	<p>A Way Home, Mecklenburg County, HSN Continuum of Care Committee, local universities and/or colleges</p>	<p>12/07</p>

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<p>Goal 2. Link Chronic Homeless to Housing, Treatment and Services Through Intense Outreach and Engagement</p> <p>Outreach and Engagement (continued)</p>	<p>1. Provide chronically homeless men and women with more safe, low demand shelter options as a means of engaging them and linking them to housing, services and support.</p>	<p>ACTION: Explore opening the Men’s Winter Shelter on a year-around basis and/or identify other options for low demand shelter</p>	<p>Emergency Shelter Board, Uptown Men’s Shelter, Salvation Army, A Way Home, Homeless Support Services, Neighborhood Development</p>	<p>9/07</p>
	<p>This should include: - 200 year-around, low demand shelter beds for homeless men and 50 beds for women - two to three safe small havens for people living on the streets and suffering from mental illness.</p>	<p>ACTION: Develop a model and funding strategy for establishing a small safe haven.</p>	<p>Area Mental Health, ACCESS, Uptown Shelter, Salvation Army, A Way Home, St. Peter’s Homes, Neighborhood Development</p>	<p>9/07</p>
	<p>2. Streamline and improve access to SSI and Medicaid benefits.</p>	<p>ACTION: Convene a task team to evaluate, recommend and advocate for changes to SSI and Medicaid benefit processes.</p>	<p>ACCESS, Homeless Support Services, DSS, County Manager’s Office, State agencies</p>	<p>10/07</p>
	<p>3. Develop non-traditional approaches to connecting chronically homeless individuals with mental health, substance abuse and health services.</p>	<p>ACTION: Create and test a demonstration initiative to annually provide 15 chronically homeless individuals with a high level of concentrated services aimed at keeping them off the streets and placed in housing.</p>	<p>Area Mental Health, ACCESS, Health Department, Police Department, Veterans Office, DSS, Homeless Support Services, CW Williams</p>	<p>3/08</p>
	<p>4. Create supportive housing options.</p> <p>5. Expand efforts to divert unhoused people chronically arrested for public inebriation and nuisance violations from the criminal justice system.</p>	<p>ACTION: See housing action for creating 50 supportive housing units.</p> <p>ACTION: Research and evaluate jail diversion programs for offenders (inebriation/nuisance) established in other communities to identify possible local application.</p>	<p>Sheriff’s Department, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police, ECO, local universities and/or colleges</p>	<p>8/07</p>

PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS	TEN-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES	2007-2008 PRIORITY ACTIONS (New/Updated Priority Actions Will Be Identified Annually)	KEY IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS for ACTIONS	TARGET DATE
<p>Goal 3. Prevention: Promote Housing Stability for Families and Individuals Most At-Risk of Becoming Homeless</p>	<p>1: Expand the role of Crisis Assistance Ministry to become more of a “one-stop” center or clearinghouse for individuals and families at-risk of becoming homeless through the addition of eviction legal counseling, benefits counseling and application and other activities.</p> <p>2. Expand the capacity of mainstream service agencies to screen and assess their clients for risk factors of becoming homeless through a web-based tool.</p>	<p>ACTION: Convene multi-agency task team to develop a model and phased implementation plan for expanding prevention services at Crisis.</p>	<p>Crisis Assistance Ministry, United Way, United Family Services, DSS, Neighborhood Development, Legal Aid, Legal Services, Community Link</p>	<p>10/07</p>
	<p>3. Develop and concentrate community-based prevention strategies and education in neighborhoods where high numbers of homeless people have come from and/or most requests for financial assistance and/or evictions emanate.</p>	<p>ACTION: Collect address data to identify neighborhoods where high concentrations of homeless people and evictions come from and develop a demonstration initiative to target eviction and other prevention resources in one area.</p>	<p>Neighborhood Development, Crisis Assistance Ministry, United Family Services, Community Relations Committee, local universities and/or colleges</p>	<p>12/07</p>
	<p>4. Develop discharge planning policies, protocols and plans along with housing support and options.</p>	<p>ACTION: Establish discharge planning processes and protocols for the Mecklenburg County Jail.</p>	<p>Sheriff’s Department, ECO, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police</p>	<p>1/08</p>
		<p>ACTION: Develop and implement a faith-based scattered site housing model for youth aging out of foster care.</p>	<p>DSS, Neighborhood Development</p>	<p>10/07</p>

PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS	TEN-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES	2007-2008 PRIORITY ACTIONS (New/Updated Priority Actions Will Be Identified Annually)	KEY IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS for ACTIONS	TARGET DATE
	<p>3. Focus on data collection and measurable results.</p> <p>4. Continue to build political and community will to support the plan implementation.</p>	<p>ACTION: Data Collection and Outcomes Plan: Develop a specific plan to capture system-wide data and trends that will help track progress on specific indicators associated with the implementation plan.</p> <p>ACTION: CMS Curriculum Pilot: Partner with Fannie Mae and Topics Education to pilot a curriculum in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools that will help bring awareness of the links between poverty and homelessness to students.</p> <p>ACTION: Affordable Housing Awareness Campaign: Develop a plan for a community-wide awareness campaign on the need for more affordable housing in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and hold an affordable housing symposium.</p> <p>ACTION: Poverty Simulation: Promote, as part of homeless awareness activities, participation in the United Way's Poverty Simulation model to increase understanding of the challenges working families have in staying housed.</p> <p>ACTION: Community Cost Impact Study: Secure the funding to prepare a cost impact study to determine the community costs associated with homelessness as a baseline of information to help make business case.</p>	<p>Homeless Services Network Data Management Resource Committee, Bell Data Systems, local university and/or college</p> <p>A Way Home, Fannie Mae, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, A Childs Place</p> <p>Neighborhood Development, A Way Home, HSN Steering Committee, Charlotte Housing Partnership, Char Housing Authority, Foundation for the Carolinas, Social Venture Partners,others</p> <p>United Way, A Way Home, Homeless Services Network Steering Committee</p> <p>A Way Home, Local Universities or Colleges</p>	<p>7/07</p> <p>6/07</p> <p>2/07</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>7/07</p>