

Small Group Discussion Summary
Closing the Revolving Door to Homelessness:
Effective Community Re-entry/Transition Planning
Tuesday, April 8, 2008
Jarvis Memorial United Methodist Church

Small Group Discussion Questions

1. Given that many homeless people are released from institutions such as hospitals, jails, and prison just prior to their homelessness, how can we as a community best engage these institutions to strengthen their discharge planning so no one is released into homelessness? What resources do homeless individuals need and what does the community need?
2. How do we develop a safety net for 16-21 year olds before they become homeless? What safety net currently exists?
3. What supportive services should be offered in schools to address homelessness among this age group?

Participants' Comments and Recommendations (Group #1)

Question #1

- Work release program for soon to be released prisoners
- Transportation to doctors; faith community might have such resources
- People receive medical bills at the homeless shelter which affects a person's credit/cannot attain apartment with bad credit
- Offenders fell hopeless when they have restitution to pay and nor or very little income to live on and pay
- Need contact in community for parolees
- Financial planning/budgeting at hospital
- Medicaid eligibility is checked in the hospital
- Need a place to take care of medical needs - wash hands, change bandages, take bath , wash clothes, etc.

- Shelter could perhaps do this; people know where the shelter is; they are aware of resources clinic attached to it, needs to be open (part of it) 24/7
- Look at what other communities have enacted in order to partner with institutions.
- Volume in larger cities effects policies and procedures
- Partner with JobLinks - Job Links is in a position to better serve other agencies
- Other counties can come to Job Links meetings; the program would like to expand
- Teenagers in DSS custody seem to have a safety net – What happens for kids not in DSS custody?
- We have no Safe House in Pitt County for teens

Question # 2

- Partnering with faith community
- Rural areas sleeping in barns
- People are living in the woods (migrant workers, etc.)
- Overcrowding, couch hopping
- At 16 in NC children are adults (legally) and can drop out of school
- Youth should be given rewards to stay in school and to not get in trouble etc.
- Job Links – WIA partnering with links
- Earn “Links” (Job Links) bucks for good behavior.
- Lack of preventative care/follow-up
- Free clinics/Berstein Clinic; requires an appointment and there is a three to four month waiting list
- Transportation to the clinic is needed
- People are being discharged from any institution could benefit from a “personal advocate” to help them access resources

- Partner with ECU- Social Work Program (students with Bachelors Degree can assist with case management)
- Need place to use telephone and place people can call person/service provider back (point of contact or buddy system needs to be in place)

Question # 3

- In other communities schools are a part of the 10-Year Plan
- DSS is working on partnership with Pitt County Schools
- Mental Health Reform/Transportation has affected children in schools
- Counselors in schools are more academic
- Social workers in school should be proportionate to students
- Not very much continuity of care from school to school.
- Some families are not “needy/poor” enough for DSS assistance and fall between the cracks
- All children are not insured
- Schools have or should have homeless liaisons
- Parents teach children to hide their homelessness (and other issues) from school; fear of losing children
- Teacher contact school social worker and then DSS enters the picture
- Pitt County has more resources
- Rural cities use children to help combat homeless issues in schools
- If people go more to where the resources they give up natural supports such as families

Participants' Comments and Recommendations (Group #2)

Question #1

- Updated list of agencies who can provide housing and/or funding sources for housing
- Identify financial resources or expand financial resources that would be available to homeless individuals; “gap money” to fit short time
- Prior to release from prison begin employment training.
- Intermediate facility for short term convalescence
- Regular access to health care
- Cost study comparing cost of keeping homeless in hospital beyond – reallocation of money
- Discharging institutions should communicate what they need to the community
- Special units for discharging homeless individuals should be created
- Central clearing house where homeless individuals can be assessed and appropriate services
- Provide an infirmary
- Create a one-stop center - aging and disability resource center

Question #2

- Promise neighborhood
- Make providers accountable
- Integrate faith community into this solution
- Structure transitional housing from 16-21(dorm setting)

Question #3

- Create a magnet school model
- Provide life skills for special populations (in schools)
- Increase number of teachers and social workers
- Improve training for social workers and teachers to deal with special populations in schools

Other Comments (from index cards)

- Vocational resources for at-risk youth
- Access to health care for all indigents
- Teach accountability in school and in programs by having one homeless person being responsible for someone or something that would be critical to their life goal
- Additional comments from an individual participant:

1.) Given that many homeless people are released from institutions such as hospitals, jails, and prison just prior to their homelessness, how can we as a community best engage these institutions to strengthen their discharge planning so no one is released into homelessness? Although these facilities may or may not have classes to readily prepare people before leaving, I believe they should. There are many non-profit organizations who are eager to accept engagements for equipping and preparing people in society. I feel confident in saying that an Employment Security Commission representative would be happy to come and conduct a class on job preparedness and resume writing. Laity in the community can get involved as well. As we visit the shelter and offer our services, we are another hand in the glove helping to empower another individual. Although hospitalities, jails and prisons require confidentiality, participants will be required to complete the necessary process for working with these people.

What resources do homeless individuals need and what does the community need? In my personal experience at the shelter, I recognize many residents are not fully aware of how to manage their finances. They have jobs but do not have any secure place to house their money. In the past, some of them were dependent on others managing their funds. Some have swindled their monies with frivolous living. Whatever the case, money management seems to be a key issue. Therefore, I think personal counseling of money management should be offered. There will be those who will not be receptive or even want to embrace these offers. However, I do know there are those who want a better life and in order to achieve it they recognize they must do

things differently. We all make mistakes. How we deal with the mistakes determines whether we are successful. Since I am a taxpayer in Pitt County, I feel that we need to develop and mature citizens to be productive and self sustaining. In order to do this, we must provide adequate affordable houses, jobs, and education for people in our community. Not only are Financial planning classes needed but Survival skills planning is needed, as well. (finances, housing, employment, good citizen skills, etc.). In order to know what is going on, the community must get involved. Although we have families, we are called to serve as community, as well.

2.) How do we develop a safety net for 16-21 year olds before they become homeless? As aforementioned, teaching and training is key to help people remain sustainable. A wise man once said-teach a hungry man how to fish and he will know how to catch his own fish. If you do not demonstrate by example what should be done, a person will only rely on the one who bails him out.

What safety net currently exists? The various informational programs and sessions held at the shelter and the seminars and workshops held in schools. High school students are privy to job fairs and job preparation courses at school.

3.) What supportive services should be offered in schools to address homelessness among this age group? Although schools encounter homeless children all the time, they do not have to be pointed out. These children can enjoy the same opportunities of learning as any other child. They do not have to succumb to their situation. If they choose to be successful in life, there is nothing that can stop them. Understanding and practicing good moral principals is the frosting on the cake, it is not until a person begins to apply and believe the principals-he/she sees results. Job Fairs will readily prepare students for the working world. This will allow them time to prepare and create resumes which will afford them the opportunity of resume writing. Health classes will aid in the understanding and preparation for the family. Many students may not know how to deal with where they are at the present time. However, these classes can enable them to better understand the behavioral patterns of their family members (father, mother, siblings, etc.). Students whose parents cannot afford healthcare would benefit from a doctor and nurse being on the premises at least once a month. They will be responsible for conducting general exams to all students. This way, if there is a child who has a serious illness. The Medical providers can ensure they get the appropriate help. We, as taxpayers, should not have a problem in wanting to help our community. After all, a community is a group of people sharing common beliefs and interests who live in the same area. Since we are a caring community of folks in Pitt County, we should want to ensure that our children, elderly, homeless, and widow are taken care of.

Other Comments, Contd.

- Discharge planning – marketing the need; better cooperation from agencies and churches
- Resources the homeless need: care supplies, transportation and access to follow-up
- Need way to have a “co-signer” for these people
- University interns and volunteers from various program
- Expand access to jobs
- Promise neighborhoods in areas that have high levels of poverty and crime and low levels of student academic achievement incentives across the nation
- Provide a full network of services including early childhood education, prevention efforts, youth services, after school activities to entire neighborhood from birth to college
- Invest in rural areas and small businesses and fight to expand high speed Internet access
- Improve rural school and attract more doctors of psychology and psychiatry.
- Engage disadvantage youth in energy efficient opportunities; create a prison to work incentive and reduce barriers to employment
- Change transitional jobs into career pathways
- Create affordable Housing Trust Fund
- Tax relief low income working families – offer tax relief over 3 years.
- Fully fund Community Development Block Grant
- Engage with urban leaders to increase resources to the highest level in the community