

Focus Group Series Summary

10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness in Pitt County

Project Description

Three focus groups designed to identify issues and concerns related to the local homeless population and to share ideas for resolution were held during the month of February. Focus group participants were currently homeless and formerly homeless men and women and some with children women with children. Six to ten individuals participated in each focus group. The sessions were held at the Greenville Community Shelter, Zoe House and Flynn Christian Home.

All participants were asked the following questions:

1. How do you define homelessness?
2. How did you become homeless?
3. How long have you been homeless or were you homeless?
4. How has homelessness affected the way you think about yourself?
5. Thinking back to when you first became homeless, what would it have taken to prevent it?
6. What do you need to maintain a home/housing?
7. What would you do if you had unlimited resources and could end homelessness?
8. What effect has homelessness had on your children?
9. Many experts think estimates of the numbers who are homeless are not accurate because they do not include people who are doubling up with relatives or friends. Did you ever double up? Do you know others who have?
10. What three things should Pitt County do to end homelessness?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Findings

Homelessness was defined by participants as: not having roots in the community; no place to lay your head at night; no resources; nothing to call your own.

Participants expressed shame and embarrassment in being homeless. It was depressing for them, but also a motivation to do better.

The length of time participants have been homeless ranged from two weeks to over 12 years. All participants have “doubled up” and have lived with friends or family members.

The following as the causes of homelessness were identified:

- Drug abuse/drug addiction
- Limited education
- Mental illness
- Domestic violence
- Poor choices

Specific Strategies and Ideas to End Chronic Homelessness in Pitt County

- Increase outreach to the homeless
- Increase access to resources (grief counseling, legal aid, substance abuse counseling, domestic violence)
- Increase awareness among homeless individuals of available programs and services
- Educate community about homelessness (especially in rural areas)
- Educate those who administer services; better insight into the problems that homeless individuals face is needed

Participants recommended that the following be provided to homeless individuals:

- Childcare and transportation so that parents can seek and obtain employment
- Jobs for convicted felons
- Job training
- Assistance with education (college)
- Counseling after homeless individuals and families receive housing
- Financial literacy programs; budgeting and maintaining good credit are critical
- Life skills training; parenting skills
- Assistance with transitioning – help find a job and monitor them; need help managing self
- Affordable housing located in a decent neighborhood

Complete notes/transcripts of the public forums will be available online at www.pittcountync.gov/endhomelessness.