



TEN YEAR PLAN TO END CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

Winston-Salem/Forsyth County, North Carolina

Executive Summary
Draft for Public Comment
August 2005



V I S I O N S T A T E M E N T

*Winston-Salem/Forsyth County,
with the full support of the community
and homeless service providers,
will provide effective solutions and accessible services
to eliminate chronic homelessness and
improve the system's effectiveness
for all persons experiencing a housing crisis.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

Approximately 1,800 people experience homelessness in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County each year. Twenty percent are families; around 200 are children. Over the past 20 years, Winston-Salem has developed a strong, community-based response to this problem, with numerous agencies



working to provide short-term emergency services and shelter to people who find themselves homeless. Despite this earnest response and considerable investments of time, energy, and financial resources, our residents continue to experience homelessness—many repeatedly and for long periods of time.

Winston-Salem is not unique in this. *The Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities* released by the U.S. Conference of Mayors in 2004 indicates that requests for shelter rose an average of 6% nationally in the past year. As well, the report notes that in a majority of cities the length of time people remain homeless is increasing. These disturbing trends mean that Winston-Salem must work more effectively to resolve homelessness for our citizens. Our current approach, designed to assist people on a temporary basis, is insufficient to win the battle to end homelessness, particularly for those for whom homelessness has become a chronic condition. We need a new approach. One that takes what works within our existing system and pairs it with strategies that are proving effective in other communities at resolving homelessness for those still falling through the cracks.

Over the past six months, leaders in our community have come together to develop a plan for ending the chronic homelessness of these individuals, and improving the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of our system of care overall. We have demonstrated that we

have the commitment for this undertaking. With this Ten Year Plan as our guiding framework, we are poised to begin.

Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Blue Ribbon Task Force on Homelessness

In December 2004, the Mayor of Winston-Salem, Allen Joines, asked community leaders to participate in a Blue Ribbon Task Force on Homelessness. The Task Force's charge was to assess the needs of people who experience homelessness and develop a plan to end chronic homelessness in Winston-Salem and Forsyth County.

The Task Force agreed upon the following vision statement:

Winston-Salem/Forsyth County, with the full support of the community and homeless service providers, will provide effective solutions and accessible services to eliminate chronic homelessness and improve the system's effectiveness for all persons experiencing a housing crisis.

The Task Force gathered input from the community, examined local housing services and resources for addressing homelessness, studied service utilization patterns to better understand how persons experiencing homelessness are using the shelter system, and reviewed successful programs operating in other metropolitan areas. This research helped to more clearly define the needs of individuals and families who experience homelessness in Winston-Salem and identify evidence-based strategies and initiatives to resolve homelessness in the most efficient and effective manner.

The Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, the culmination of this effort, outlines the initiatives Winston-Salem will undertake to achieve the two broad goals of its vision and the philosophical approach that will guide them.

Specifically, the Plan calls for:

- Creation of approximately **600 new units of permanent, service-enriched housing** for individuals and families who are homeless. Because for many, particularly those for whom homelessness is more chronic in nature and complicated by issues of disability, affordable housing alone will not end homelessness, this housing will include the provision of a range of services.

- Development of **employment services** to ensure that persons who are homeless are assisted in finding work and achieving their employment goals.
- **Strategies to improve collaboration** among service providers.
- Adoption of a **“Housing First” approach** in developing and managing programs.
- A series of general **system enhancements** to ensure that mainstream resources and homeless-specific services are more effective.

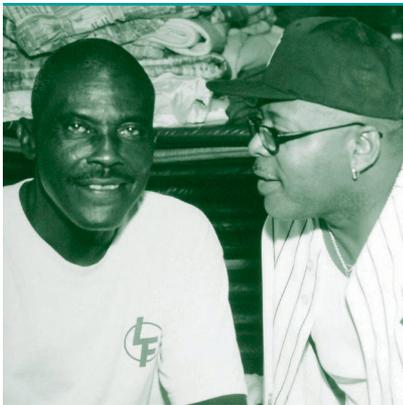
A New Approach

The Ten Year Plan calls for a “housing first” approach that emphasizes placing individuals and families who are homeless in safe and affordable housing as an immediate response to their crisis and then ensuring that the necessary supports are in place to sustain that housing. The Plan recognizes that access to



housing is a basic human need that should not be conditioned on external measures of client readiness, such as employment, sobriety, or willingness to accept treatment. Housing First is premised on the belief that the underlying causes of homelessness can be more effectively addressed once a person is housed. And, in fact, research shows that people are most successful at addressing issues that often contribute to homelessness such as unemployment, serious mental illness, and addiction when their housing is stabilized first and supportive services are then offered to promote housing stability.

Housing First represents a simple but profound shift in the way that the homeless system responds to those it serves. The Plan calls for quickly placing people in appropriate housing based upon clients' individual needs and preferences and encouraging them to accept needed support services. These supportive housing environments can vary greatly—ranging from private market apartments to which subsidies and services are attached, group living settings for persons with disabilities, treatment housing, to housing that mixes persons with disabilities, employed persons and/or other low-income residents. In addition, the Plan calls for a significant investment in a new supportive housing model called **Transition in Place**. Transition in Place takes advantage of existing private market rental housing and augments it with tailored, flexible supportive services that decrease in intensity over time based on the client's progress toward self-sufficiency. Transition in Place promotes housing continuity, maximizes use of existing housing resources, and reduces the density of homeless services in the central city.



Key Components of the Ten Year Plan

In its research, the Task Force learned that often the current system is effective at addressing the emergency needs of individuals and families who become homeless. Many of those served simply need temporary assistance in meeting their basic needs (e.g. safe shelter,

food, a place to shower, etc.) and access to resources. They are homeless for a short period and are able to resolve their housing crisis with fairly minimal assistance. The current emergency shelter system, however, is not an effective way to address the needs of persons who have been homeless for long periods of time and may struggle with disabilities such as serious mental illnesses, substance abuse, and/or physical disabilities. Persons who experience such

chronic homelessness need housing and services that the present system is ill equipped to provide.

For a system to fully and effectively address homelessness it must include a range of housing and service strategies that are tailored to meet the diverse needs experienced by individuals and families who become homeless—strategies that are firmly grounded in an understanding of how those needs vary according to whether homelessness is transitional or chronic in nature. To succeed, the existing homeless service system must alter its approach from one that responds to all individuals experiencing homelessness in similar ways, to one that differentiates between services for persons with short-term needs and those requiring long-term support.

Clients with Short-term Needs

The Plan calls for enhancements to the emergency shelter system to ensure that all persons in need of shelter have access to clean, safe accommodations and essential services, including linkage to community housing and benefits screening. As the front door to the homeless service system, these emergency facilities will serve those who are transitionally homeless and act as a gateway to other housing and support services for those persons who are at risk of becoming long-term shelter users.

In addition to this basic enhancement of the emergency shelter system, Winston-Salem’s coordinated response to individuals and families experiencing a transitional housing crisis will include:

- **Expansion of prevention assistance** to include time-limited (up to 3 months) of rental assistance, landlord-tenant mediation, and discharge planning with prisons and medical facilities to prevent releasing of individuals to homeless situations.
- **A “no wrong door” approach to shelter** so all clients experience enhanced emergency shelter services no matter what program they initially access:
 - **Housing First** response to homelessness with a focus on permanent housing placement and shorter length of stay in shelters (goal of placement within 30 days).

- **Housing First Resource Center** that serves as a central mechanism to manage information about market-rate and subsidized permanent housing properties; landlord relationships; prevention, transitional and permanent housing subsidies; and risk management activities.
- Development of **268 Transition in Place units** of permanent housing, providing community-based housing supports to families and individuals.

Clients with Long-term Needs

The Plan calls for development of supportive housing designed for repeat shelter users and persons living outdoors who have significant barriers to housing stability.

- Development of **69 Transition in Place units** of permanent housing.
- Development of **261 Permanent Supportive Housing units**.

Additional System Enhancements

The ultimate success of Winston-Salem/Forsyth County's Ten Year Plan will depend, in part, on the availability of other resources and supportive services in the community, and our ability to parlay our efforts into larger systems change. We must work to:

- Improve access through discharge planning and service linkage agreements with mainstream resource systems, such as employment, TANF, food stamps, mental health, and substance abuse treatment.
- Ensure the availability of employment and training services that improve access to job listings, communication technology, transportation, and community workforce development efforts.
- Develop performance measurement strategies to set outcome benchmarks, collect data, and track ongoing performance and needs at the program and system-levels.
- Call for needed change at the State and local levels and across systems of care through additional education and policy advocacy to improve the homeless system in the larger context of mental health reform, the criminal justice system, and accessibility of other mainstream resources.

How We Get it Done

Resources

The Ten Year Plan includes estimated costs for development, operation and services for the new system totaling nearly 1.2 million for the first two years. Some costs may be covered through the reallocation of current resources, but additional local



resources will also be required. These include funds to support qualified staff, sites and subsidies for new housing units, additional technology resources, communications systems, and other infrastructure enhancements.

The Plan identifies several options for the procurement of new financial resources, ranging from establishing dedicated local revenue sources for broad-based affordable housing activities to generating state and federal funding for specific projects.

Private and public sector organizations will play a major role in resource development and in implementation. By working in cooperation to achieve common goals, community resources will be used more efficiently. Although additional resources will be required, they will be managed more effectively through this community-wide collaborative.

Governance

System development and change efforts of the magnitude proposed in the Plan will require careful coordination and management by an entity that is wholly focused on the implementation of the Plan. Therefore, the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Ten Year Plan Commission will be created to be responsible for:

- Development and promotion of policies and programs to end homelessness.
- Collaboration with homeless service providers to transition the system to a Housing First model.
- Identification and coordination of funding efforts to support Plan objectives.
- Promotion of long-term system planning and responses to homelessness.

A Call to Action

In creating the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, our community joins the growing number of cities, counties, and states across the country who have committed to not just addressing, but ending chronic homelessness. And, we have gone further, dedicating our efforts to improving the system for all area residents facing homelessness. This work will require time, energy, resources and the sustained effort of many organizations and individuals. Yet we believe it can be done. United in our vision and goals, our community can take bold steps toward ending one of the most intransigent social problems of our time, and in so doing will reaffirm our commitment to our most vulnerable residents.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

This Plan was developed under the leadership of the City of Winston-Salem Mayor Allen Joines and the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Blue Ribbon Task Force on Homelessness, chaired by Councilman Nelson Malloy. This Plan would not have been possible without the information provided by adult single men, adult single women, and families residing in local homeless service programs, as well as feedback from key stakeholders and homeless assistance provider staff members. The Task Force also greatly appreciates the thoughtful guidance and support provided by Dr. Monica Lett and Tim West of the City of Winston-Salem Department of Housing/Neighborhood Development and the Winston-Salem/Forsyth Council on Services for the Homeless Executive Board.

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A complete copy of the plan can be downloaded from:

Housing/Neighborhood Development Department page at www.cityofws.org