

M E M O R A N D U M

November 17, 2009

TO: Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee
Health and Human Services Committee

FROM: Linda McMillan, Senior Legislative Analyst *LMM*

SUBJECT: **Update: Housing First Implementation Plan**

Expected for this worksession:

Uma Ahluwalia, Director, Department of Health and Human Services
Nadim Khan, Chief, DHHS Special Needs Housing

As a part of the FY09 budget, the county began implementing a Housing First plan which focuses on preventing homelessness and moving homeless families and individuals into stable permanent housing as quickly as possible. The joint Committee has been receiving updates on this plan in the fall and as a part of its budget review.

DHHS Director Ahluwalia has provided an update on implementation of the Housing First plan. Circles 1-2 provide an overview memo and ©3-7 provide an update on specific items in the plan. The Council has also received updates over the past year Director Ahluwalia on the impacts of the economic downturn on households in the county and the increased demand for housing assistance. Some highlights from the attached memo are:

- New policies have been put in place regarding the use of motels for temporary housing (©3-4). Flex funding is used to allow homeless families to stay in the community with relatives or friends, homeless families who lost permanent housing in Montgomery County can be housed in motels for up to 30 days (if no shelters are available), homeless families who cannot show proof that they had permanent housing in Montgomery County

before becoming homeless can be housed in a motel for up to 5 days and may be provided with assistance to return to their home jurisdiction.

- Families with complex issues are being staffed by a service integration team and may stay in a motel or shelter for longer than 30 days until satisfactory housing is found.
- Almost 7,000 crisis intervention grants were provided in FY09. About 2,000 of these were state funded, with the remainder funded through county general funds or from the dedicated portion of the recordation tax (©5).
- Two of the three family shelters have moved to an assessment shelter model as called for in the Housing First plan and the third will convert by December 1, 2009. Additional case management has been added to assist in moving families into permanent housing.
- The information at ©6-7 shows that almost all the rental assistance vouchers have been committed and that 99% of those who have been housed in the last 12 months remain housed. The information also notes that 76% of families receiving a subsidy are headed by a single female and 53% of individual households have been chronically homeless.

Increasing the number of vouchers in FY11 will be critical if more households are to be moved into stable housing. In addition, Council staff believes there is an opportunity to better use funds if there is more flexibility in the county voucher programs so that the level of assistance can be matched to the income-based need.



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

Uma S. Ahluwalia
Director

November 17, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable George L. Leventhal, Chair
Health and Human Services Committee

FROM: Uma S. Ahluwalia, Director

SUBJECT: Housing First Plan Update

Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is currently in the process of implementing the Housing First Model that is aligned with the current homeless Continuum of Care (COC). The four essential components of the model include: (1) Homeless Outreach and Intake, (2) Homeless Prevention, (3) Assessment, and (4) Rapid Exit and Permanent Housing.

DHHS continues to fine-tune its strategies and staffing plan to meet Housing First goals and address the needs of vulnerable residents, many of whom have been significantly impacted by the downturn in the economy. While reducing the length of stay for households who are homeless is the ultimate goal, the unprecedented demand for Housing Stabilization/ Emergency Services and Rental and Home Energy Assistance Programs to prevent homelessness has become the most urgent priority for the Department.

In addition to implementing the original Housing First Plan, the following strategies have been employed to address the current surge in need for services:

- Sought and received approval from the County Executive to add temporary staff to address the surge in service demand: three temporary contract social work staff (one for each service site (Germantown, Rockville and Silver Spring) to increase our capacity for Housing Stabilization/Emergency Services intake; and three term positions in the Rental and Home Energy Assistance Programs to process applications and issue benefits.

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- Expanded the Home Energy Assistance Program (OHEP) lobby at 1301 Piccard to handle the increased number of visitors seeking information and assistance. Increased demand for help with home heating and electricity costs has created an increase in Home Energy Assistance applications and consequently an increase in the number of people accessing the OHEP reception area.
- Developed new policies for motel/shelter placement in an effort to decrease motel overflow costs while continuing to ensure that families remained safe and off of the streets.
- In partnership with our community providers and other County agencies, additional winter overflow shelter space was opened to accommodate the unprecedented shelter needs for single individuals and work began on outreach strategies to homeless encampments.
- Collaborated with the Department of Transportation (DOT), the Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) and the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC), to identify vacant County owned properties purchased to make way for transportation projects which can temporarily house homeless households until their demolition occurs.
- Continued service integration efforts via meetings with leaders of other DHHS service areas to determine the most pressing housing needs and developing strategies for creating affordable housing for all special needs populations.
- Continued collaboration between the Housing First plan and the Neighborhood Safety Net Initiative to bring emergency assistance and entitlement programs to neighborhoods most impacted by the recession;
- Addressed Housing First policy and ongoing issues with the Housing First Leadership Workgroup consisting of DHHS and Homeless Continuum Partner agencies.
- Utilized the expertise of the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) to identifying best practices and provide technical assistance with the transition and development of assessment tools.

Attached please find a Housing First Implementation Plan Status Report, which outlines our progress to date on the major Housing First components.

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Attachment

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Montgomery County Housing First Plan Implementation Status Update November 2009

In FY09, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) began the implementation of its Housing First Plan. Housing First programs in general share the following critical elements:

- helping chronically homeless and hard-to-serve individuals and families access and sustain permanent rental housing that is not time-limited;
- delivering support services following a housing placement to promote housing stability and individual well-being; and
- making housing contingent upon compliance with a standard lease agreement rather than contingent upon compliance with mandatory services.

The key performance measure in Montgomery County's Housing First plan is to reduce the length of stay in homelessness and provide stable housing for those exiting homeless programs. The DHHS Housing First plan includes key strategies to support the achievement of this goal: (1) Homeless Outreach and Intake, (2) Homeless Prevention, (3) Assessment, and (4) Rapid Exit and Permanent Housing.

Outlined below are the accomplishments and ongoing activities within the plan's four (4) key strategies.

1. Homeless Outreach and Intake

- Developed and began piloting a uniform assessment tool for use by homeless intake staff. The tool centrally gathers client background information and identifies housing barriers at the point of intake. This enables staff earlier in the assistance process to target the services and housing supports most likely to be effective in rapidly exiting families from homelessness.
- Reorganized staff duties and hired additional temporary contract staff to increase intake capacity for assessing families seeking shelter. The high unemployment rate has resulted in an increase in the number of families becoming homeless.
- Developed and implemented a motel placement policy effective July 1, 2009 in an effort to decrease motel overflow costs and length of stay in motel while continuing to ensure that families remain safe and off the streets. Flex fund dollars if needed are provided in lieu of a motel placement for homeless families who can remain in the community for a limited time with families or friends. These families continue to receive case management services from DHHS; therefore, there is no delay in beginning services to resolve their homelessness.
- The new policy approves motel placement for up to 30 days (if shelter beds are not available) for homeless families who have lost their permanent housing in Montgomery County. Referrals continue to be made for housing need assessment and other supports; and for emergency financial assistance and/or short or long-term rent subsidies. Homeless families that cannot verify their loss of permanent housing in Montgomery

County or who have lost their housing after temporarily or informally living with friends or relatives who reside in Montgomery County may be eligible for motel/shelter placement for up to 5 days in addition to emergency financial assistance and/or transportation to the jurisdiction where their permanent housing was lost.

- Families with complex issues that are barriers to housing whose shelter placements are likely to result in a longer than 30 day shelter/motel placement are being staffed by a service integration team. The team assesses the family's needs and develops a plan early in the placement/assessment process to minimize their shelter stay.
- Increased shelter overflow capacity from November through March to accommodate increased peak winter demand for shelter by single adults. In FY09, a second winter overflow site was operated in collaboration with Montgomery County Public Schools and extended by one month the closing date of the women's shelter due to the unseasonably longer cold weather. In FY10, a second overflow site will be opened in collaboration with the Department of Recreation, which will increase the total overflow capacity to 200 individuals per night.
- Collaborated with United Salvadoran Communities (USC), Interfaith Works (IW), City of Gaithersburg (COG) and Volunteers of America (VOA) to locate homeless encampments and conduct a survey of encampment residents. The primary purpose of the survey was to define the severity of the issue in Montgomery County and recommend a strategy to address the issue. The survey was conducted from June 11, 2009 through July 11, 2009. Collaboration with these agencies is ongoing to develop and implement a plan to address the issue and to identify the housing capacity needs to be created to accommodate the encampment homeless persons

2. Homeless Prevention

Collaborated with the Neighborhood Safety Net Initiative to bring emergency assistance and entitlement programs to neighborhoods most impacted by the recession. Emergency Services intake staff is deployed to the Gaithersburg and Wheaton on day each week to assess the needs of families applying for emergency assistance to prevent eviction.

- Received approval from the County Executive to add temporary staff to address the surge in service demand: three temporary contract social work staff (one for each service site (Germantown, Rockville and Silver Spring) to increase our capacity for Housing Stabilization/Emergency Services intake; and three term positions in the Rental and Home Energy Assistance Programs to process applications and issue benefits.
- Awarded a grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and began implementation in FY10 of the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP). The prevention component of this grant serves individuals and families who are currently housed but are at risk of becoming homeless and need temporary rent and/or utility assistance to prevent them from becoming homeless or assistance to move to another unit. In the third year of the grant, the County's existing shallow Rental

Assistance Program (RAP) that provides limited financial assistance with rent to seniors, persons with disabilities and families who qualify will be expanded for approximately 50 additional participants for up to a maximum of 12 months.

- Crisis intervention emergency grants continue to be an ongoing critical tool in preventing homelessness. The use of Recordation Tax dollars began in FY09 to supplement ongoing eviction prevention resources. Over \$4.4 million was expended for 6,995 crisis intervention grants. This is an increase of 18% from the FY08 number of 5,911. The average grant amount also increased by 26% from FY08 to FY09 from \$504 to \$630.

Crisis Intervention Emergency Grants Issued in FY09 by Funding Source

GRANT TYPE (Most grants are given to prevent eviction and utility cut-offs.)	# of Grants	Expenditure	Average
STATE Funded	1,903	\$1,122,334	\$590
COUNTY Funded	3,430	\$1,865,513	\$544
Recordation Tax	1,662	\$1,416,786	\$852
Total	6,995	\$4,404,633	\$630

- The Rental Assistance Program (RAP)

An average of 1,727 households received County RAP in FY09, an increase of 4% from the FY08 average of 1,668. The FY10 budget will serve a maximum of 1,767 households each month, but there continues to be an application backlog of over 1,900 new households waiting for application review. Households referred by Emergency Services that need County RAP as an ongoing resource to prevent eviction once their immediate crisis is resolved are given priority to help ensure that housing is maintained.

Applications for the Office of Home Energy Assistance Programs (OHEP) increased by 15%, from 9,043 in FY08 to 10,435 in FY09. Over \$8 million was issued to help with home heating and electricity costs and past due bills. Preliminary current year application intake data indicate we may be facing an additional 13-15% increase in FY10.

In FY09, a pilot project was implemented at the Rockville Crisis Intervention Unit, which placed a Maryland Energy Assistance Program/ Electric Universal Service Program (MEAP/ESUP) staff person with Emergency Services and Income Support staff to provide assistance with applications for heating and electricity aid. This collaboration speeds up the process for customers and ensures that State OHEP funds are used first to resolve emergencies before County and State funds are accessed. However, due to the overwhelming number of applications, we are unable to deploy staff to other areas to continue this model.

- Provided 90-day eviction prevention case management for families who have had multiple evictions in order to stabilize their housing and prevent homelessness.

3. Assessment Shelter

- Converted two of the three family shelters to the assessment shelter model on October 1, 2009 and the third shelter will convert by December 1, 2009. The assessment model switches the primary focus to moving the family quickly to permanent housing. Previously the focus was on addressing the multiple needs of the family first. An additional case manager for each shelter was added who is dedicated to assessing a family's need immediately upon entry to the shelter, developing a housing plan and rapidly exiting the family into permanent housing.
- Added one case manager each to the Men's Emergency Shelter at Gude Drive and at the Women's Shelter at Wilkens Avenue to increase case management capacity.

4. Rapid Exit and Permanent Housing

- Awarded a grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and began implementation in FY10 of the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP). The rapid re-housing component of this grant serves individuals and families who are homeless and need temporary assistance in order to obtain and retain stable affordable housing. Two term positions were created to manage the HPRP program and provide case management services and one term position was created to manage reporting, data collection and fiscal duties related to check issuance.
- Contracted with Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) to hire two Housing Locators to work with Housing Initiative Program (HIP) applicants to locate housing and sign leases. The Housing Locators are responsible for helping participants find and move into a housing unit. When all of the HIP subsidies have been filled, these locators will work with HPRP households to locate appropriate housing.
- Collaborated with the Department of Transportation (DOT), the Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) and the HOC to identify vacant County owned properties purchased to make way for transportation projects. DHHS is seeking to use houses that are not being demolished in the near future to house homeless households.
- Continued service integration efforts via meetings with leaders of other DHHS service areas to determine the most pressing housing needs and developing strategies for creating affordable housing for all special needs populations.
- Leveraged an increase of 20 beds in the HUD funded Shelter Plus Care Program for homeless singles who are mentally ill by providing funding for a case manager for this program through an existing contract with the Mental Health Association.

The chart below shows the total number of households receiving deep subsidies through the former Supportive Housing Rental Assistance Program (SHRAP) and the HIP. One hundred and eighty-two (182) households (114 families and 68 single individuals) are currently receiving a subsidy. Only 10 of the 239 available subsidies remain

uncommitted; 20 households have been approved and are currently searching for units and 13 additional households have been referred and are pending approval of final documentation.

The remaining 24 subsidies are reserved to provide rent resources for chronically homeless men scheduled to occupy the Cordell Avenue PLQ, which is scheduled to be open in the Spring 2010. This facility is currently under renovation and will be operated by the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless.

Less than 1% of the households who have been housed at least 12 months have dropped from the program before completing 12 months.

	Singles	Families	Total
Housing Placements			
4/1/2007-6/30/2008 (FY08)	35	32	67
7/1/2008-6/30/09 (FY09)	31	41	72
7/1/2009-11/13/09 (FY10)	12	46	58
TOTAL Placements	78	119	197
Closures			
<i>Not Renewed (Over Income)</i>	-2		-2
<i>Deceased</i>	-3		-3
<i>Received HCV</i>		-2	-2
<i>Terminated (Failed to Maintain Lease)</i>	-4	-2	-6
<i>Closed - Client Request</i>		-1	-1
<i>Moved</i>	-1		-1
TOTAL Closures	-10	-5	-15
TOTAL HOUSED	68	114	182
Assigned to Housing Locator-Search for Housing	10	10	20
Referred for Placement, Pending Documents	12	1	13
Reserved Subsidies for PPH Cordell Avenue	24		24
TOTAL SUBSIDIES COMMITTED	114	125	239
TOTAL SUBSIDIES BUDGETED	124	125	249
TOTAL AVAILABLE SUBSIDIES	10	0	10

- 76% of family households receiving subsidies are single parent females
- 47% of the single individual households are between the ages of 51 and 61; 20% are over the age of 62
- 53% of the single individual households are chronically homeless