

Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness

Prevention Group Recommendations

December 1, 2006

The following are the recommendations generated by the Prevention Work Group of the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness as of December 1, 2006. Because of the scope of the tasks assigned to the Prevention Work Group, we have decided to address key issues in phases. Below are the recommendations that relate to youth and families as well as discharge planning, which covers populations beyond youth and families. We also are working on recommendations that address the needs of veterans, senior citizens, and individuals discharging from the prison system who are at risk of becoming homeless. We will post these recommendations as soon as they are completed. We will also collaborate with the Employment and Education Work Group to consolidate recommendations that relate to broadening access to and increasing the amount of educational and vocational services as a homeless prevention strategy. The Work Group looks forward to any comments and suggestions regarding these and future recommendations.

Prevention Recommendation 1: Prevent Homelessness through Standardized Discharge Planning Process and Outcomes

- Ø Consistent with the Policy Statement issued on June 23, 2006 by the Department of Social Services (DSS), direct all DSS agencies to develop discharge policies that apply to all city and contract agencies within four months. The policies must at a minimum:
 - § Prohibit discharges to homelessness.
 - § Establish time lines for planning process.
 - § Require that DSS Cares data base be consulted while planning and prior to any discharge.
 - § Establish procedures for interagency delivery of services, planning, and conferencing.
 - § Designate an entity or department in each DSS agencies or contract provider responsible for leading and coordinating discharge planning.
 - § Establish a system for monitoring and quality control that includes oversight of DSS Department Directors, experts in the field and consumers.
 - § Establish an appeals process or ombudsperson's office to address disagreements in the discharge planning process or content.

- Ø Discharge Policies should be implemented within six months through:
 - § Policy directives, an executive order or bulletin from the Mayor, Managing Director and Director of DSS.
 - § Establishment of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) between DSS agencies and contract agencies.
 - § Inclusion of policies in contracts with provider agencies.
 - § Incorporation in DSS training manual and curriculum.
 - § Incorporation of discharge criteria in DSS Cares data base.
 - § Development and distribution of checklists/protocols to aid in meeting policy requirements for all levels of service delivery (front line workers to administrators).

Prevention Recommendation 2: Expand Housing for Homeless Youth/Young Adults through the Expansion of Age-Specific Programming and Expertise to Prevent Long-Term Adult Homelessness

- Ø Designate or create at least three to four shelters for homeless young adults (ages 18-23).
- Ø Provide supportive housing units for homeless youth and young adults (16-23 ages).
- Ø In collaboration with the Department of Behavioral Health and Office of Mental Health, provide supportive housing for young adults (ages 18-23) with moderate to severe mental health needs, including youth exiting residential treatment centers.

Prevention Goal 3: Prevent the Homelessness of Individuals and Families and Divert At-Risk Individuals and Families through Creation of a Housing Support Center

- Ø **Create a Housing Support Center**

Key Activities of Center:

- § Maintain a data base of available housing units in the private and public market, including waiting lists and vacancies, subsidized and supportive housing programs.
- § Work to actively develop affordable and subsidized housing units, including developing housing units for families involved with the Department of Human Services (DHS) and at-risk of DHS involvement, youth aging out of the child welfare and delinquency systems, individuals with behavioral health needs (including families) and individuals exiting the prison system.

- § Develop relationships with landlords.
- § Cultivate relationship with the housing authority.
- § Work with clients to find and apply for housing and address barriers to acquiring and maintaining housing.

Key Structure of Center:

- § Accessible to clients and service providers.
- § Advised by Youth Council and other Consumer/Client Groups.
- § Coordinate activities with those of existing housing “units” (Department of Human Services, Achieving Independence Center, Achieving Reunification Center).
- § Liaisons for all DSS agencies should be assigned to the Housing Support Center and should coordinate referrals and services from respective agencies.
- § Director of Housing Support Center is accountable to Managing Director and Director of DSS.

Prevention Recommendation 4: Prevent Youth Homelessness through Creation of Shelters for Minors

- Ø Authorize development of at least two-short term shelters for homeless and runaway minors (under age 18) where intense diversion services are provided.

Prevention Recommendation 5: Preventing Homelessness among Youth Discharging from the Dependency and Delinquency Systems by Increasing Housing Counseling Services

- Ø Add two staff persons to Achieving Independence Center Housing Unit to provide housing counseling, housing development, and housing placement for youth aging-out of the dependency system.
- Ø Provide two staff able to provide this same services to youth “aging-out” of the delinquency system who do not have housing plans.
- Ø Ensure that these youth housing specialists have an opportunity to participate in discharge planning for youth.
- Ø Implement Recommendation 1--Discharge Planning Policy Creation and Implementation.

Prevention Recommendation 6: Prevent Youth and Young Adult Homelessness through Creation of Homeless Youth Advisory Council

- Ø Create a Homeless Youth Council/Advisory Group that advises the Department of Human Services and the Office of Supportive Housing on prevention services, service delivery, and provides outreach and education to the community on youth homelessness.

Prevention Recommendation 7: Prevent Youth/Young Adult Homelessness by Expanding Capacity of Youth Education and Employment Services and Implementing Positive Youth Development Program Standards

- Ø Expand capacity of Achieving Independence Center, E3 Centers, Philadelphia Youth Network Programs to enhance employment and educational skills of at-risk youth.
- Ø Implement youth development service program standards in all youth serving programs provided by city and contract agencies. Standards should be guided by Youth Advisory Council and current work of the local and State Youth Advisory Board as well as agencies like United Way and the Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN).
- Ø Develop relationships with the School District of Philadelphia, private/parochial and charter schools to strengthen the services available to youth at-risk of homelessness.
- Ø Increase staff of the Homeless Youth Liaison for the School District to:
 - § Improve school enrollment, retention, and stability of homeless youth
 - § Expand ability of liaison to work with schools to identify and divert youth at-risk of becoming homeless.

Prevention Recommendation 8: Revise and Standardize Intake and Assessment Tools to Rapidly Identify Families at-risk of Homelessness and DHS involvement and Provide Specialized Family Services in Shelter

- Ø Revise assessment/intake forms to ensure inclusion of housing status, number of children, Department of Human Services involvement, and agencies involved at the following agencies/service providers:
 - § Upon DHS general protective services/child protective service investigation and acceptance of service
 - § Department of Behavioral Health
 - § Office of Supportive Housing
 - § Community based service providers contracted by city agencies
- Ø Expand existing shelter-based programs, such as the Family Shelter Support Team.

- Ø Office of Supportive Housing should assign a social worker to families who enter shelter who have any DHS involvement from eligibility determination to work and should help these families access the Housing Support Center.
- Ø The Department of Human Services and Office of Supportive Housing procedure should be modified to include quarterly meetings to ensure integration of families' housing and family service plans with DHS.
- Ø A standardized life-skills curriculum should be implemented at family and singles shelters, which includes hard and soft skills (relationships, decision-making, social interaction).

Prevention Goal 9: Create Housing Units for Families with Behavioral Health Needs as a Means to Prevent Long-Term Family Homelessness and Family Separation

- Ø Develop housing units for families that are affiliated or tied to existing treatment programs to provide transition after completion of in-patient treatment.
- Ø Housing Units should accommodate families and come with continued behavioral health support services so sobriety and stability can be maintained.