

Notes for Luncheon Address – Charlottesville, VA
Norfolk's Office to End Homelessness:
City and Regional Efforts to End Homelessness
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History of the Office to End Homelessness

The Norfolk Homeless Consortium and its members have been formally planning, creating, and managing homeless services and programs since the initiation of the Continuum of Care process in 1994. Many of the provider members and the faith community had been providing services to families and individuals experiencing homelessness for decades prior to the Continuum of Care.

In February 2004, Mayor Paul Fraim declared that the City of Norfolk would end homelessness with ten years. In April 2004, the Norfolk Department of Human Services initiated a Homeless Action and Response Team (HART) to primarily intervene in or prevent family homelessness. A few months later, the Commission to End Homelessness was formed by appointment of the City Council and the Office to End Homelessness was created in the Office of the City Manager, Regina Williams. After the Commission had completed its work, the first director of the office was appointed. In May 2005, the Commission released the Blueprint of the Plan to End Homelessness, Norfolk's 10-year plan.

The Office to End Homelessness serves to develop a coordinated service strategy both within Norfolk and in collaboration with neighboring localities designed to end homelessness in the City of Norfolk. The office is responsible for:

- Developing and implementing the City's Plan to end Homelessness; including identification of key milestones and achievements.
- Assessing the services, resources, and service delivery continuum in the City of Norfolk and in the region in order to identify service gaps or other strategies that will prevent homelessness.
- Monitoring and evaluating existing City programs designed to combat homelessness; identifying and securing necessary resources to meet service gaps
- Serving as a central planning and oversight entity for citywide homelessness prevention or intervention programs.
- Facilitating broad-based community involvement in implementing strategies to end homelessness.

Office to End Homelessness Mission Statement:

The Office to End Homelessness is committed to assisting in the development of workable implementation strategies that will end homelessness in the City of Norfolk within ten years.

South Hampton Roads Regional Taskforce on Homelessness

In February 2005, Mayor Fraim of Norfolk and Mayor Meyera Oberndorf of Virginia Beach proposed in a meeting of the South Hampton Roads Mayors and Chairs that the group pursue the issue of homelessness on a regional level. Backed by the Southside Mayors and Chairs, the South Hampton Roads Regional Taskforce on Homelessness was formed with leaders from each of the communities.

The regional group works to:

- Provide a forum for communicating, sharing ideas, and developing regional strategies to address homelessness in South Hampton Roads
- Produce regional reports on homelessness to be delivered to local elected officials and city/county executives
- Plan and present a Regional Summit on Homelessness, highlighting best practices and supporting local and regional planning efforts to end homelessness
- Identify projects that can be implemented regionally, and
- Bring forward issues of regional concern that may be addressed through regional collaboration

By September 2005, the group released its first report on the status of homelessness in the region. The following projects were identified by the group for work:

- Develop an Affordable Housing Database
- Regionalize Intake and HMIS Systems
- Provide a Regional Summit on Homelessness
- Support the development of the Regional SRO programs

Highlights of Activities in Norfolk

The Office to End Homelessness (OTEH) maintains a close and active relationship with the Norfolk Homeless Consortium (NHC). Most programs in the city that have been developed from the 10 year plan, have had support and involvement from both NHC and OTEH. The following programs are highlighted as they are either managed by the Office to End Homelessness, receive ongoing support from the office, or the office was involved in their development. However, it is the collaborative efforts of all involved in these programs that contribute to their success.

HART Team – Including Rapid Exit and Re-Entry Services: Department of Human Services launched the Homeless Assessment and Response Team (HART) in 2004. It was projected that the team would serve 25 homeless/at-risk families per month, however 1,000 families requested assistance the first month. It also has a small unit dedicated to serving singles with one intake worker/case manager and one outreach/SOAR worker (see SOAR information below). HART provides assessments for mainstream resources, shelter, and housing assistance. HART is also the home for the following collaborative activities:

- Central Intake and Hotline for Homeless Families (January 2007)
- Housing Broker Team (August 2007)
- Case Management for Homeless Families (2008)

Norfolk Project Homeless Connect: Project Homelessness Connect is recognized as a “proven innovation to ending homelessness” by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness - where for one day the bottom floor of the Scope Arena is transformed to a one-stop service center where over 60 providers and hundreds of volunteers serve over 500 individuals experiencing homelessness. Since December 2005, the Office to End Homelessness - with strong support from the United Way of South Hampton Roads; Department of Human Services; Fleet Management; Norfolk Homeless Consortium; local, state, and federal partners; and generous donation and support from local businesses - has hosted Project Homeless Connect twice annually. Our 8th Project Homelessness Connect event will be held on September 30, 2009. More information on this national initiative and tools to start one in your community visit:

<http://www.usich.gov/slocal/NationalProjectHomelessConnectPromo.html>

Harbor House: This program provides post-incarceration housing and services to prevent and reduce homelessness for 16 men in a restored 1800’s home in Norfolk. The building’s restoration was complete and opened to its first resident in December 2006. The program is run by Second Chances, and they are in the process of identifying a building to renovate to house women. For information on the program and before and after photos of the building, visit <http://www.harborhouseprogram.org>

My Own Place: This housing first program is located at Norfolk Community Services Board and was piloted in May 2006 with 12 units of scattered site one-bedroom apartments. The PATH Homeless Outreach program identified individuals who have historically not been interested in mental health treatment and unsuccessful in housing. The pilot was a success and is now the CSB My Own Place Housing First and Assertive Community Treatment Team with a current capacity for 50 units.

Faith Partnership: This project was announced by Mayor Fraim in July 2008 and is managed by the Office to End Homelessness. Teams from the faith community are trained to mentor families who have experienced homeless or are at risk of homelessness. The Office to End Homelessness recruits and trains the faith communities, the HART team identifies families for the program, and the Planning Council manages a financial assistance account funded through donations from the faith community that can assist to help Faith Partnership families when in crisis.

Norfolk Employment Connect: This is Norfolk’s newest initiative and is co-sponsored by the Office to End Homelessness and the Norfolk Homeless Consortium. It was developed by NHC’s Employment Committee. This first year the event consists of two events, one week apart where case managers in NHC member programs refer their consumers who are interested in employment to a training session on employment and application skills. Those interested in applying for jobs return one week later to a job fair. The event is held at the Virginia Employment Commission office in Norfolk and along

with opportunities to meet with and apply for jobs with participating employers, they also have access to VEC services and job listings. Norfolk Employment Connect will provide persons experiencing homelessness or recently exiting homelessness an opportunity to obtain employment.

Homeless Prevention and Re-Entry Program (HPRP): The Office to End Homelessness is leading the planning and implementation for Norfolk's federal HPRP award under the Recovery Act. HPRP funding can be used to prevent or end homelessness for singles and families with financial assistance (rent, utilities, storage, deposits, etc.); outreach and housing stabilization services. This is a large initiative that will impact and enhance many of our delivery systems. Communities interested in HPRP should review the program information at www.hudhre.info and for non-entitlement communities at Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development www.dhcd.virginia.gov.

Highlights of Regional Activities

The Office to End Homelessness is a member of the South Hampton Roads Regional Taskforce on Homelessness. City, county, and non-profit members make up this voluntary partnership that includes Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Franklin, and Isle of Wight.

South Hampton Roads Supportive Efficiency Housing: Virginia Supportive Housing in partnership with the cities of Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Portsmouth, and Chesapeake develop regionally-funded Single Room Occupancy housing programs. Gosnold Apartments in Norfolk opened in December 2006, Cloverleaf Apartments in Virginia Beach opened in September 2008, and South Bay Apartments in Portsmouth is scheduled to open in the fall of 2010. Each building has 60 units and has a mix of units assigned to the cities. Each of these buildings have on-site support services funded with a mix of donations, local city funds, grants, and Medicaid billing.

Dragas Grant: The Dragas Foundation awarded Norfolk, Virginia Beach, and Chesapeake a total of \$2 million to be used over two years to fund programs that will intervene in the cycle of poverty and homelessness for families with children. The regional group works to align services and resources across the four funded communities and seek ways to continue the regional effort after the two year cycle. Currently, Norfolk funds financial housing assistance to families, afterschool homework and meals, transportation, and clinical case management.

Regional Summit on Homelessness: The regional partnership provides a best practices and training conference for providers across the region once every two years. This summit receives a great response and evaluations. It serves an important role in training our providers locally and launching innovative and effective practices and programs. The next summit will be held in March 2010.

Healing Place: The regional partnership and the member cities and counties have agreed to pursue the development of a regional Healing Place to provide a residential substance abuse treatment and housing program for persons experiencing homelessness. The group continues to work towards identifying a site, funding for renovation, and a funding plan for the ongoing operations and support services. It is believed this will have a significant impact on chronic homelessness in our area. Information on the Healing Place in Richmond, VA can be found at: <http://www.thpva.com/>

Hampton Roads SOAR Partnership: SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) is a community based methodology that provides community collaborations and clinical training to increase the approval rate and decrease the time it takes for Social Security Disability applications. It is designed to assist persons who are experiencing homelessness and mental illness, but is easily adapted for persons at risk of homelessness and those with medical and physical disabilities. The Office to End Homeless provides the leadership and coordination of this regional effort with assistance from the Virginia State SOAR lead at DMHMRSAS and the National SOAR TA Center. This regional project includes all of Hampton Roads communities (Peninsula and Southside).

Regional Needs Assessment: The Center for Urban and Community Services (CUCS) in New York is contracted to complete a comprehensive needs assessment of homeless services in South Hampton Roads. This was authorized by the regional group and is funded by the member communities. The results will help the region identify current gaps and plan for future efforts. CUCS has reviewed a large amount of data and documents and are planning their second visit to sites at the end of June.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges:

- Maintaining funding for existing programs in a tough economy and with several recent years of declining state and federal funding.
- Moving forward with new programs or program enhancements to meet our goals of ending homelessness in this same economic and financial climate.
- Housing units are still manageable to develop and support, but support services continues to be difficult to fund on an ongoing basis – regardless of economic conditions.
- Persons experiencing homelessness, recently exiting homelessness, or at risk of homelessness face increasing challenges to maintaining self-sufficiency with declining jobs and higher competition in their markets, tough competition for affordable housing units, increasing utility and household living costs, fewer opportunities / higher demand for safety-net support for medications, transportation, and food assistance.

Opportunities:

- Despite difficult economic times, political will has not faltered.
- Stimulus – Recovery Act funding will bring in new resources for the next few years.
- Community continues to strive for success.

- Providers are willing to be flexible and innovative to meet needs, including retooling programs and reallocating staff.
- Program quality and staff skill remains intact.
- New programs that were planned prior to the current economic trend are still on track. For example, the Salvation Army Transitional Housing program for women opens this month, the Union Mission will begin to move their programs to the new campus and expand services this summer, and South Bay Apartments development is still on schedule and the development/building funds from all four cities was approved in May.

What Makes it Work?

Political Will, Partnership and Leadership: Partnership and leadership are both critical to the success and the ongoing sustainability of momentum. Norfolk is fortunate to have the political will in place and to have strong partners already in the community. Having a high profile champion for ending homelessness in the Mayor continues to be important as well as the identified leadership position at the Office to End Homelessness and in the leadership roles carried out by Norfolk Homeless Consortium.

Market Successes and Recognize Leaders: When the Office to End Homelessness and/or the community has successes, we market and announce them assertively. We provide recognition to those in the community when their efforts have made a difference. The community takes pride in the work that is done when it is appropriately recognized. This helps to maintain momentum, encourage motivation, and the drive to begin creating the next success story. Mayor Fraim hosts an annual Blue Print luncheon where both staff and consumer accomplishments are recognized. In 2007, Mayor Fraim was honored by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness with the “Home for Every American Award” for his leadership and implementation of innovative approaches to ending homelessness.

Communication: Communicate constantly with partners, neighborhoods, organizations, and city departments, including city council and the management team in the city. It is important that people know what’s going on now, what is planned, what is going well, and what is still needed. Also, communicate with both stories and data to ensure your message reaches both hearts and minds. See the BluePrint to End Homelessness video at <http://wmstreaming.whro.org/norfolk/blueprint.wmv> and an example of the Office to End Homelessness newsletter at www.norfolk.gov/homelessness/pdffiles/1stquarter07.pdf . This year, the Norfolk Homeless Consortium published and widely distributed their first annual report, an important tool in communicating the leadership of and successes by this group. It can be viewed at <http://www.norfolkhomelessconsortium.org/2008report.pdf> .

Provide Value Added Services and Resources: The Office to End Homelessness can not only provide direction and leadership. It must also be an active provider and contributor to ending homelessness. In addition to the activities mentioned above, smaller efforts that make a difference are provided by the Office. For example, the office

provides no cost trainings and meeting logistics for the provider community, runs a cold water outreach distribution on the hottest days on the summer, provides the community providers with bus tickets to increase access to medical care and employment, serves consumers that walk into the office, provides supplies and snacks for consumers attending community events, runs the waiting list for the list for the SRO apartments, and performs outreach services in the community during special events or during emergency situations.

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