

City of Eureka Homelessness Policy Paper

FINAL September 5, 2014

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

The City of Eureka has engaged Focus Strategies to study the issue of homelessness and recommend strategies to address the problem. According to the most recently available data, the City is home to approximately 600 homeless people at any given point in time. At 2.2% of the total population, the community has a higher rate of homelessness than national averages or than in surrounding Humboldt County. The sizeable and highly visible population of homeless people and their impact on the community has been a subject of much discussion and debate. This report summarizes what we have learned about homeless people in Eureka, the effectiveness of existing efforts to deal with the issue, and concrete steps the City can take to more strategically reduce the number of homeless people in the community.

2. Findings

There is a large and visible group of people living in encampments in the vicinity of downtown Eureka and the Broadway corridor and/or spending daylight hours on the streets downtown. While little data is available on the composition and characteristics of this population, our information gathering suggests there are both "transient" people who have recently arrived in the community as well as many people who are long-term residents of Humboldt County. The vast majority are adults without children and many have chronic substance abuse and co-occurring mental health issues. The reasons for the larger than typical numbers are not known, but it is not uncommon in rural areas for homeless people to cluster in transit-accessible population centers where services and housing are more available.

The City of Eureka, Humboldt County agencies, non-profit housing and service providers, the business community and involved citizens have all worked together to create a range of services, shelter and housing to assist people who are homeless in the community. Most of this work is being led at the County level by the Humboldt County Housing and Homeless Coalition (HHHC), the collaborative body that is developing and implementing a coordinated county-wide approach to addressing homelessness. As the designated Continuum of Care (CoC) planning body, the HHHC coordinates the development of strategies to address homelessness county-wide. Their work is supported by the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services (H&HS), the designated lead agency for the CoC. Most of the federal and state funding for homeless programs flows to non-profit providers and some County agencies based on plans and priorities developed by the CoC. The City of Eureka is an active participant in these planning efforts and has also implemented some of its own initiatives, such as by assigning a homeless liaison to the Police Department.

In keeping with federal policy priorities and national best practices, over the past several years the HHHC has been emphasizing the creation of housing as the key to ending homelessness, with funding shifting

away from emergency and transitional services. New housing interventions available in Eureka include both permanent supportive housing (long term subsidized units with on-site services) and rapid rehousing (short term housing subsidies with time limited stabilization services). While the inventory of available housing has grown, it has not yet reached the scale needed to produce a sizeable reduction in the total homeless population. Nonetheless, County homelessness efforts are moving in the right direction. All available evidence shows that providing homeless people with housing, without making participation in other services a pre-condition, is the most effective way to reduce homelessness. Mitigation and management approaches, such as clearing out encampments, creating legalized campgrounds, expanding emergency shelter capacity, or offering services not connected to housing might reduce some of the negative community impacts of homelessness, but do nothing to solve the underlying problem of people who do not have anywhere to live.

3. Recommendations

Focus Strategies recommends that the City focus its efforts on solutions that will actually end homelessness, rather than attempting to better manage the problem. Existing federal policy, evidence from many research studies, and best practices in the field all point to housing as the solution. While expanding housing opportunities is a long term undertaking, there are some concrete steps the City can take in the short and medium term to increase the number of homeless people in Eureka who secure and maintain housing. These steps generally involve the City continuing to have a Leadership Group dedicated to working on homelessness, as well as working in strong partnership with the County and the HHHC as the County-wide planning body tasked with addressing homelessness.

A. Short-Term Recommendations (within 90 days)

The City and County have already begun to partner to develop a Behavioral Health and Law Enforcement team to conduct outreach to chronically homeless people living outdoors in Eureka. Focus Strategies recommends that the City continue strengthening this partnership and focus these efforts on conducting targeted outreach and assessment with the goal of identifying 10 to 15 people who are generating the largest number of police and other emergency calls and are the most frequent users of City and County resources. Once identified, these individuals should be prioritized for available permanent supportive housing or other housing units. The City can work in partnership with the CoC and the County to more specifically target available resources for those identified by the City as having the highest priority needs. This process can also serve as a launching pad for an overall re-orientation of the City's efforts towards a "Housing First" approach.

B. Medium-Term Recommendations (90 to 180 days)

Once some initial progress has been made to house high-need homeless people, we recommend that the City, County, and HHHC work together to formalize a <u>Homeless Outreach Team with a "Housing First" Focus</u>. This multi-disciplinary team would have the knowledge and resources needed to help connect unsheltered homeless people directly to housing. We also recommend the City and County work together to explore strategies to expand the use of <u>Mental Health Services Act (MHSA)</u> funds to provide housing for homeless people with mental illness who are high users of emergency services and not being adequately served by existing systems of care, as well as other housing options for chronically homeless people (including both CoC and mainstream housing resources).

C. Longer-Term Recommendations (6 months to 2 years)

Over the longer term, the City, County, and HHHC should convene a working group to analyze Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and program budget data, with the goal of understanding how funds are currently being invested, what outcomes are being accomplished, and how outcomes could be improved by changing existing programs and investments. This analysis will help determine how much additional permanent housing and rapid re-housing capacity is needed to completely end homelessness. A key initial step will be to work on improving the quality of the data that will be needed for this analysis. This would include adopting a robust methodology for collecting homeless Point in Time Count data during the upcoming January 2015 Count, as well as beginning to address the quality of Homeless Information System (HMIS) data and its usefulness in generating project and system performance data.

We also advise that the City continue to build and strengthen its ongoing partnership with HHHC and the County H&HS to ensure county-wide resources are being effectively targeted to serve the homeless people with the greatest needs, many of whom are living in Eureka. As the community with the largest number of homeless people, the City should continue to speak in a strong voice in support of County-wide solutions that will end homelessness.

D. Approaches to Better Manage Homelessness

Finally, Focus Strategies strongly advises the City of Eureka not to pursue approaches directed at better managing the existing problems, such as by increasing the frequency of police sweeps or creating a legalized camping area or "tent city." These approaches will not solve the underlying problem that people do not have a safe or healthy place to live, and there is little evidence that "management" approaches do much to mitigate negative community impacts of homelessness.

I. Purpose of Report

The City of Eureka is undertaking a General Plan Update, including an update of its Housing Element. As part of the Housing Element update process, the City decided to undertake a study regarding the issue of homelessness. According to the most recently available data, the City of Eureka has an exceptionally high rate of homelessness, with approximately 222 people per 10,000 residents. This is far higher than the national average and higher than in surrounding communities, including Humboldt County. The highly visible "street" homeless population and its impact on the community has been a topic of much discussion among community leaders, business owners, service providers and residents in general.

In order to better understand this issue and develop recommendations to address the problem, the City of Eureka has engaged Focus Strategies, a consulting firm with expertise in solutions to end homelessness. Focus Strategies has gathered information with the goal of understanding who the local homeless population is, causes of and impacts of homelessness in the community, what resources are currently available to address homelessness, and what local challenges exist. We have also developed recommendations for short-term, medium-term and longer-term strategies and action steps the community can take to begin to reduce homelessness.

II. Summary of Work

To develop our findings and recommendations, Focus Strategies has completed the following information gathering work:

- 1. <u>Telephone interviews</u> with 11 key stakeholders, including non-profit providers of services and shelter to homeless people, funders, City staff (Police Department, Planning, Code Enforcement) and County staff (Health and Human Services, Education, Housing Authority). Interviews were conducted in December 2013 and January 2014.
- 2. Review of materials on homelessness in Eureka and Humboldt County, including the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, annual applications for federal Continuum of Care (CoC) funding, newspaper articles, and other documents. See Appendix A for a list of documents reviewed.
- 3. <u>Focus groups and interviews on-site</u>. Representatives from Focus Strategies conducted three trips to Eureka on February 11-12, April 30, and July 17, 2014. During two of these visits we conducted three focus groups one with community leaders, one with homeless individuals and one with service providers. The third trip included a meeting with the community leader focus group as well as the Humboldt Housing and Homeless Coalition. Our staff also visited homeless encampments and spoke informally with homeless individuals and service providers.
- 4. <u>Research on best practices</u> for comparable communities. Focus Strategies researched programs and strategies that have been tested in other comparably sized communities and communities with a similar profile of homelessness.

III. Findings

A Homelessness In Eureka

1. Homeless Count and Demographic Data

In accordance with requirements established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Community Development (HUD), the Humboldt County Housing and Homeless Coalition (HHHC) conducts a bi-annual homeless "point in time" (PIT) count of homeless people. Conducted largely by volunteers, this count is conducted by interviewing homeless people who are either living outdoors or in emergency shelters. Questions in the survey include housing status, length of homelessness, household composition, income, disability, and other information.

Results from the last three counts show a decrease in homelessness during the period from 2009 to 2013. However, the HHHC cautions that these changes do not necessarily reflect a decrease in the population of homeless people but could rather reflect changes in the methodology of the count, such as the numbers of volunteers participating and where their efforts are focused, weather, and other factors.

Year of Count	Total Homeless People In Humboldt County	Total Homeless People in Eureka ¹	% of Total Homeless People in Eureka
2009	1,913	1,000	52%
2011	1,626	1,000	61%
2013	1,579	600	38%

The chart above shows the number of homeless people who reported they lived in Eureka on the night of the count for each of the last three counts. For each of the past three counts, Eureka had the most homeless people of any jurisdiction in the County. While it appears that the numbers have gone down somewhat between 2011 and 2013, this could, again, simply reflect changes in methodology. In 2013 a more concerted effort was made to count homeless people in rural Southern Humboldt County, which could have resulted in a relative undercount in Eureka.

According to the 2013 PIT Count, homeless people who responded to the survey had the following characteristics:²

- 43% were unsheltered (living outdoors or in vehicles) while 55% were sheltered (living in emergency shelter and transitional housing).
- Of those unsheltered; 77% were camping, 19% were living in vehicles and the rest in other locations.
- Of all households; about 75% consisted of only adults while 25% were households with children.
- Of all adults, 66% were male and 34% female.
- About one third reported a drug or alcohol abuse issue.

¹ The 2013 Point in Time Count Report includes a bar chart showing the breakdown of homeless people by City but does not show the actual numbers in each city. These are our estimates based on our reading of the chart. The actual numbers can likely be obtained from HHHC.

² This data reflects information for people in all of Humboldt County. Survey data just for people living in Eureka is not available.

- About 40% reported a mental health issue.
- 17% were veterans.
- 18% were former foster youth.
- 55% had been residents of Humboldt County for less than 1 year, 15% between 1 and 10 years, 30% for more than 10 years.

In general, this data presents a picture of homelessness in Humboldt County that is relatively consistent with national averages. However, in looking at Eureka, the total number of homeless people compared to total population is rather high. National data suggests that in a typical community homeless people represent about 1% of the total population. In Eureka, homeless people represent about 2.2% of the total population. There are a range of opinions about the reasons why Eureka appears to have a larger than typical homeless population, many of which are summarized below. However, Focus Strategies is not aware of any data source that provides evidence to support any particular explanation.

HUD requires that communities conduct a Point in Time Count every other year. The next mandatory count will take place in the last week of January 2015. See Section IV for recommendations on how to ensure the next count generates the most useful and accurate data possible given the HHHC's limited resources.

2. Community Perceptions of Homelessness in Eureka

Homelessness is a significant source of discussion and of community tension in Eureka. Based on our interviews with key stakeholders, focus groups, and review of documents, Focus Strategies has identified the following main viewpoints and perceptions.

General Community View of the Homeless Problem and its Impact on the Community

There is general agreement that there is a fairly large and visible group of people who are living in encampments in the vicinity of downtown Eureka and the Broadway corridor and/or spending daylight hours on the streets downtown. Their presence is a source of concern to people who live and work in Eureka. All stakeholders seem to agree that many of the visibly homeless people have substance abuse issues, with a particularly high prevalence of methamphetamine addiction. Many also likely have a co-occurring mental health issue.

Their presence has created a need for ongoing Police Department intervention in response to reports of loitering and trespassing, aggressive panhandling, public urination, public intoxication, destruction of property, crime, and other problems. While service providers and County agencies are working to meet the needs of this population, the size of the population does not appear to be decreasing. The general view of the negative community impacts associated with the homeless population seems to be fairly widely shared among business owners, service providers, city and county agencies and even homeless people themselves.

There also appears to be widespread community agreement about the negative impacts on those who do not have a place to live. Encampments in general are not healthy places to live, given their lack of proper kitchen and bathroom facilities, presence of pests and vermin, and environmental hazards. People living in the large encampments in Eureka lack access to proper health and behavioral health care, are frequently victims of crime, and are generally vulnerable to victimization.

Opinions About Who Is Homeless and Why

While there is wide recognition that Eureka has quality of life issues associated with homelessness, there is not agreement about who the homeless people are, where they come from, and why they are homeless. These issues have been debated and discussed in the community for many years. Below we have summarized some of the key community debates on this topic.

- Homeless People in Eureka Are Mostly Transient. The extent to which the homeless people living in Eureka are "local" versus "transient" is a subject of much discussion. Eureka is home to a number of people who are either passing through on their way elsewhere or who come to the region for seasonal work or jobs in the "underground economy" (many people we interviewed referred to them as "trimmers" -- young people who travel to the area to work in marijuana cultivation). Due to the unreliable nature of this work, they often fall into poverty and homelessness and cannot return to their community of origin. Yet there is also recognition that the homeless population includes many long-term residents, including families affected by the loss of jobs in the region and its sluggish economy, as well as many who suffer from addictions to methamphetamines.
- The "Homeless" Problem Is Really A Poverty Problem. The extent to which the people labeled as "homeless" are actually without housing is also a topic of debate in the community. Some people who are visible on the streets are categorized as homeless based on their behavior and appearance, but actually do have a place to live. Many of them are probably living in poverty and they may have substance abuse or mental health issues, be involved in the underground economy, and/or just passing through town. However, there is agreement that many of the homeless people truly do not have a place to live and are either living in one of the many homeless encampments, in a vehicle or some other place not meant for human habitation.
- Homeless People Are Attracted to Eureka. There are a wide range of theories about the reasons for the large number of people who are homeless in Eureka. Some believe that Eureka is a "magnet" for homeless people in the region due to the availability of services, low cost motels, informal camping sites near downtown, and accessibility via public transportation. Some also assert that the systems of care in Humboldt County discharge people in Eureka due to the availability of resources there. Another commonly cited reason for the large homeless community is that there are many opportunities for seasonal and casual labor.
- "The Homeless People All Want to be Homeless." Another source of debate is whether the people living outdoors in Eureka are simply seeking an alternative lifestyle "off the grid" and would refuse to move indoors even if housing were available. Homeless service providers report that many of the people living in encampments would prefer to remain there rather than move to shelter, due to a perceived lack of safety, enforcement of rules regarding sobriety and behavior, and not being able to take their pets. However, providers and homeless individuals expressed that the majority do want to move to housing.

While all of the above debates are important, there are currently no available data sources that illuminate exactly who are homeless in Eureka or why they are homeless. Experience from other communities suggests that there is a mix of both long-time and short-term residents, as well as some people who might appear to be homeless but are in fact housed. It is also common in rural areas for homeless people to cluster in accessible population centers where services and housing are more available. However, no

scientific studies exist to support the contention that the availability of services "attracts" homeless people who might not otherwise live in the area. Virtually all large homeless encampments in both rural and urban areas include a mix of both involuntarily homeless people and those who have chosen a nomadic or "separatist" life. Studies of people living in homeless encampments show that while the majority will refuse an emergency shelter, most do want to be housed and many will accept permanent supportive housing if offered.³

Given the lack of available data, Focus Strategies does not ascribe to any particular explanation for the prevalence of homelessness in Eureka. We would note that homelessness is a phenomenon that impacts all communities in the United States, both urban and rural. Like all communities, Eureka has its own particular local context. Yet, it shares the same reality as other places large and small - there are people in the community who do not have a place to live.

B. How Eureka Is Addressing Homelessness

1. Description of Existing Programs and Services for Homeless People in Eureka

The City of Eureka, Humboldt County agencies, non-profit housing and service providers, the business community and involved citizens have all worked together to create a range of services, shelter and housing to assist people who are homeless in the community. While these include some initiatives undertaken at the City level, many are county-wide programs operated either by non-profits or by County agencies. In California (as well as many other states) the planning and implementation of systems to address homelessness is primarily a County function, carried out by a locally designated Continuum of Care (CoC) planning entity. The Humboldt County Housing and Homeless Coalition (HHHC) is the county's CoC oversight group, with support from the County Health and Human Service Department, serving as the CoC Lead Agency.

The chart below summarizes the major homeless programs and services in the City.⁴

System Component	Provider	Program/Project	
Outreach and Engagement	Eureka Police Department	Community Services Officer	
	Eureka Police Department	/Homeless Liaison	
	County DHHS, Eureka PD	Crisis Intervention Training	
		(CIT)/Behavioral Health and Law	
		Enforcement Monthly Meeting	
	County DHHS	Street Outreach	
Day Services/Safety Net	Betty Kwan Chinn Center	Drop in center, day services, case	
		management	
	St. Vincent DePaul Society	Dining hall, safety net services	
	St. Joseph Hospital	Eureka Community Resource Center	
		Emergency shelter for single adults and	
Emergency Shelter	Rescue Mission	families	
		Seasonal extreme weather shelter	

³ Cousineau, M. (1993). *A Profile of Urban Encampments in Central Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles Coalition to End Homelessness.

⁴ Note that this is not intended to be a comprehensive list, so some smaller programs may not be included.

System Component	Provider	Program/Project	
Transitional	Redwood Community Action	Multi Assistance Center (MAC) –	
	Agency (RCAA)	transitional housing for families	
Housing	RCAA	Launch Pad – Transitional housing for	
ļ	RCAA	transition age youth	
Permanent Supportive Housing	Avente Harring Doutroughin	Apartments First – Scattered site	
	Arcata Housing Partnership	apartments	
	Humboldt Bay Housing Dev. Corp	MHSA PSH – Apartments	
	Humboldt County H&HS	Humboldt Housing – Scattered site	
		apartments	
		Project HART – Permanent housing for	
		homeless people with HIV AIDS	
	Housing Authority and North Coast	VASH – Housing vouchers for homeless	
	Veterans Resource Center	veterans	
Affordable Housing	Humboldt County and City of	200 public housing units	
		500-600 Housing Choice Vouchers	
	Eureka Housing Authority	(Section 8) are being used in Eureka	

2. Plans for System Improvement: The Humboldt County 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness

The City of Eureka is actively involved in an ongoing county-wide planning process to end homelessness in Humboldt County. As noted above, the Humboldt County Housing and Homeless Coalition (HHHC) is the body that has taken the lead in this process as the county's designed Continuum of Care (CoC) oversight group. There are representatives from the City of Eureka and Eureka-based providers on the CoC's leadership group and its working subcommittees.

Beginning in 2005, the HHHC led a community process to develop a county-wide 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, which was adopted by the County Board of Supervisors in 2009 and updated in 2013. The Plan adopts many of the key objectives and approaches set forth in the federal HEARTH Act and the federal strategic plan to end homelessness, *Opening Doors*. Federal policy prioritizes housing as the solution to homelessness and encourages communities to create programs that rapidly return homeless people to housing rather than having them spend lengthy periods of time in emergency shelter or transitional housing. Under the HEARTH legislation, communities are accountable for their results in meeting key performance measures: reducing the length of time people are homeless, reducing the rate at which people return to homelessness, reducing new entries into homelessness, and reducing the overall level of homelessness in a community. To accomplish these objectives, many communities are adopting a "Housing First" approach in which homeless people are first assisted to secure a stable place to live before receiving services to address their other challenges (e.g. substance abuse treatment, mental health services, job training, etc.).

In keeping with the key objectives and strategies outlined in Opening Doors, the 2013 update to the Humboldt County 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness sets forth increasing the availability of stable housing as a top priority. A variety of new initiatives and programs are in the planning stages to help meet this objective, including:

The re-allocation of HUD CoC funding from transitional housing to permanent housing. In 2013,
 the CoC applied to create two new permanent supportive housing programs using re-

programmed funds: (1) Crossroads to Housing, a 12 bed scattered site leasing program for chronically homeless people operated by the North Coast Substance Abuse Council (NCSAC) and; (2) a 3-bed scattered site project for homeless transition-age youth (TAY), operated by the County Health and Human Service's TAY Division. In June 2014 the CoC was awarded funds for the TAY project;

- Two providers, Arcata House and Catholic Charities recently applied for and were awarded funds from the State of California's Emergency Solutions Program (ESG) to create a rapid re-housing programs; and
- The HHHC has begun the planning work to create a coordinated system for intake, assessment
 and referral that will give homeless people more streamlined access to shelter and services and
 ensure that they are more quickly connected to housing options.

The 10-Year Plan for Humboldt County also outlines a number of other objectives, including expanding substance abuse treatment services, expanding emergency shelter, increasing employment opportunities, and addressing the needs of homeless youth.

3. Community Views of Effectiveness of Existing Strategies

Based on the interviews and focus groups we conducted and our review of materials, Focus Strategies has identified some prevalent community opinions about the effectiveness of existing approaches and what the community should be doing to address the homelessness problem. These views fall into three main strands of thought, which are to some degree mutually exclusive:

- Addressing Root Causes. Many of the service providers and homeless people we spoke with expressed the view that the only way to end homelessness is to tackle the underlying issues of poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, and mental illness that are highly prevalent among the homeless population. There was much skepticism about the idea of "Housing First," with many concerned that simply helping people to secure housing without addressing their behavioral health needs or increasing their income would be futile. There is widespread agreement that there is an inadequate supply of substance abuse treatment services in the community and these will need to be increased if homeless people are to gain the stability they need to become housed.
- Focus on Housing as the Solution. Others that we spoke with were of the opinion that the one thing that will most significantly reduce homelessness in Eureka is a greater supply of affordable and supportive housing. Over the past several years, the HHHC has been using the community's allocation of federal CoC housing funds to increase the inventory of supportive housing units for homeless people with disabilities. Programs like Humboldt Housing and Project HART are documenting strong results by providing chronically homeless people with stable, serviceenriched housing. Several providers also pointed to the success of the Humboldt Housing Now! Program, which operated between 2009 and 2012 using "one-time" federal funding for Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing (HPRP). Humboldt County providers received \$1.6 million over a three year period which was used to provide rental assistance and stabilization services to 3,000 homeless and precariously housed people. Providers reported that during this time there was an observable decrease in homelessness in the community. This appears to be supported by the Point in Time Count results, which show a decrease in homelessness from 2011 to 2013. While these federal HPRP funds are no longer available, the program generated such strong results across the country that it led HUD to adopt a strong policy priority for rapid rehousing projects.

• Managing the Problem/Making it Less Visible. Another commonly expressed viewpoint was for approaches to better manage the problem of homelessness and make it less visible. There are people in the community who feel that if there were fewer services available, there would be fewer homeless people coming to town. They would like to see approaches aimed at making it less comfortable for homeless people to live outdoors, such as police sweeps and other enforcement. Others would like to see an increase in the kinds of services that will help get people off the streets of downtown and/or out of encampments. Some suggested increasing the availability of shelter beds, and particularly shelters that allow pets. Others discussed the possibility of creating a legalized or "managed" campground or "tent city" that would have decent sanitation, on-site services, and better security to prevent homeless people from being victims of crime.

C. Best Practices from Comparable Communities

1. Ending Homelessness - Housing Focused Solutions

As noted above, federal policy is moving strongly in the direction of immediate access to housing as the key solution to homelessness. Many communities are also demonstrating "on the ground" how to end homelessness by rapidly returning homeless people to a stable living situation and then working with them to address other issues after they are housed. Below we have summarized some best practices that would be particularly relevant to the City of Eureka.

a. Homeless Outreach Teams with Direct Housing Access

Many communities have documented impressive results in reducing street homelessness through intensive outreach by multi-disciplinary teams that connect homeless people directly to housing. While many of these "Homeless Outreach Teams" and "Housing First" programs are in larger urban areas (San Diego, Philadelphia, Pasadena, Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles), there are also examples from rural areas such as the State of Vermont. ⁵

Key features of these model programs include:

- Specialists from different systems (mental health, substance use, health, criminal justice etc.) work
 together in an integrated service team providing mobile street outreach. This multi-disciplinary
 expertise is essential when working with chronically homeless people, who often have complex, cooccurring conditions such as mental illness and substance addiction.
- There is involvement by and support from the local police department. Patrol officers who have frequent, ongoing contact with the homeless population on the streets are either members of the teams or coordinate closely with the teams.

⁵ An excellent summary of best practices in homeless outreach may be found in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s publication entitled *Strategies for Reducing Chronic Street Homelessness*, published in January 2004. This report may be found online at www.huduser.org. A discussion of Vermont's Housing First Program can be found at: http://homeless.samhsa.gov/resource/rural-success-with-housing-first-55178.aspx

- Homeless people are offered the chance to move directly into permanent housing, bypassing the emergency shelter system. Research from the field shows that the majority of chronically homeless street people will not accept an offer of shelter or will leave shelter without securing housing.
- The program incorporates a "harm reduction" philosophy, in which clients are not required to become
 clean and sober as a condition of receiving housing or services. Instead, service providers focus on
 building a trusting relationship with the client and motivating them toward recovery and health by
 reducing or eventually stopping their substance use.
- The team has direct access to a wide range of long-term, low demand housing options.
- The program has a comprehensive data system to track clients and results.
- There is political will and top-down support from county government or through city/county partnership.

A highly successful and relevant example from California comes from the City of San Mateo (in the San Francisco Bay Area), where the initiative to create the Homeless Outreach Team came from the City's Chief of Police and the City Manager. Much like the situation in Eureka, the City was receiving numerous complaints from the business community and local residents about the large numbers of homeless people in the downtown area. The City partnered with the County to develop a multi-disciplinary Homeless Outreach Team that includes City police officers, County behavioral health staff, and outreach specialists from a local non-profit. Through targeted outreach and developing a housing plan for each person, the City has been able to significantly reduce street homelessness. They also invested funds in acquiring a local motel which has been converted to permanent supportive housing and allows the outreach workers to offer homeless people direct access to a housing unit.⁶

b. 100,000 Homes Campaign

The 100,000 Homes Campaign⁷ is a national initiative that is enrolling communities in an effort to find permanent homes for 100,000 of the most vulnerable and chronic homeless individuals by July 2014. Building off the national movement towards "Housing First," this campaign targets chronically homeless individuals and families – those who have been homeless for the longest periods of time and have the greatest barriers to securing housing. In participating communities, a coalition of community leaders, service and housing providers, and other stakeholders work together to set a goal to house a specific number of chronically homeless people and identify specific housing solutions for each person they identify.

One local example of a 100,000 homes campaign is Santa Cruz's Project 180/180.8 Like Eureka, Santa Cruz is home to a large population of unsheltered homeless people living in encampments surrounding the major downtown area, many of whom are "transient" through the area. The community has had an ongoing conversation about how to mitigate the impacts of the homeless population on downtown merchants and shoppers. After enrolling in the 100,000 homes campaign, a collaborative came together to create Project 180/180, a multi-agency initiative aimed at changing the community's approach to solving homelessness. The project's goal is to "house 180 of our most vulnerable, long-term, chronically homeless individuals by July 2014, moving them into permanent housing with the support services they

⁶ http://www.cacities.org/Member-Engagement/Helen-Putnam-Awards/California-City-Solutions/2010/The-Vendome-Housing-Outreach-Team-%28HOT%29-Program

⁷ www.100khomes.org

⁸ http://www.180santacruz.org/

need to stay housed." As of this writing Santa Cruz has housed 136 people and they are on track to meet their goal.

c. Homelessness Prevention and Shelter Diversion

Most communities have invested funds in a range of homelessness prevention efforts that generally provide households who are "at risk" of homelessness help to preserve their housing, typically through assistance with paying back rent, mediation with a landlord or legal services. Recent studies, however, show that while these efforts help stabilize low income families, it is not clear they actually prevent homelessness because they are not targeted to those households who actually are most likely to end up in shelter. For example, qualifying for prevention assistance typically requires that a household have an eviction notice, yet studies show that only 22% of families who enter shelter have ever been evicted. The most commonplace of residence just prior to shelter entry is living informally with friends or family, who typically would not quality for prevention help because they do not have their own lease.

In recent years, communities are increasingly moving to shift the focus of their prevention efforts towards those households who are most likely to actually become homeless - those who are actively seeking a shelter bed. Known as "Shelter Diversion" or simply "Diversion," these programs are designed to target people most likely to enter homelessness and provide assistance either to preserve their existing housing situation and/or help them move directly to more stable housing without an intervening shelter stay. Diversion programs typically are located at the "front door" of the homeless system, either at the shelter location itself or the organization that does initial intake and referrals to shelter. Diversion programs use screening tools to determine whether a household is actually going to lose their housing within 2 to 3 days, and develop a plan to keep the household in their housing. Many diversion programs are able to keep people housed using just mediation and problem solving, though they also offer financial assistance. Households who are successfully diverted typically are living informally with friends or family and their housing crisis is precipitated by interpersonal conflict and/or financial issues. Often simply helping with mediation between family members or some funds to help pay a portion of the rent will be enough to keep the housing intact. Once the immediate crisis is resolved, the households may also receive help to develop a longer term plan to transition to a more stable situation. Examples of highly effective Diversion programs include Cleveland, Ohio and New London, Connecticut. 10

d. Rapid Re-Housing Programs

Rapid Re-Housing is a program model that assists individuals and families to move quickly into permanent housing, usually to housing in the private market. It does so by offering targeted services and <u>time limited</u> financial assistance to make the move from homelessness to housing possible. Rapid Re-Housing has demonstrated effectiveness in ending homelessness, shortening the time people spend being homeless, and reducing the rate at which people become homeless again. Rapid Re-Housing also increases turnover in shelters, which allows them to accommodate more people over time without increasing capacity.

⁹ This was the conclusion of an extensive study of homeless families in New York by Mary Beth Shinn. http://usich.gov/usich_resources/solutions/explore/homelessness_prevention

¹⁰ http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/6.5-maximizing-system-effectiveness-through-homelessness-prevention1

Key components of Rapid Re-Housing include:

- Assistance with the housing search and application process if the household wants and needs it. The program staff has housing expertise and strong contacts with landlords, so they are adept at identifying what housing may be available to the household based on their strengths and barriers.
- 2. Flexible financial assistance to pay for move in costs such as deposits and utilities, and short to medium-term support with rent if needed, which can be adjusted over time.
- 3. Limited housing-focused support services such as housing stability planning to help the household identify strategies to increase income or improve budgeting; and
- 4. Links to community-based programs that can provide the majority of other services a household may need once re-housed, such as child care, employment training or health services.

Rapid Re-Housing programs can vary in length of time, and may be limited to a single payment for deposit and first month's rent or as long as 18-24 months of subsidy and support. Some programs begin with the assumption that most households require only a small amount of support, but are able provide more if needed. This type of approach is called Progressive Engagement.

All available research shows that rapid re-housing is highly effective in helping people quickly enter housing and that very few return to homelessness after the financial assistance ends. This approach has been successfully implemented in communities of all sizes and in many types of housing markets, including both urban and rural areas.¹¹

e. Drop-In Programs with Housing Linkages

Some communities have demonstrated strong success in addressing persistent problems with their unsheltered homeless population by creating easily accessible drop-in centers offering basic necessities (e.g. bathrooms, showers, food, clothing, telephone access, etc.) with strong linkages to housing options. Examples include the Opportunity Center of the Mid-Peninsula in Menlo Park (Santa Clara County), which has a drop-in center on the ground floor and 88 units of supportive housing in the floors above. ¹²

¹¹ Evidence of the effectiveness of rapid re-housing is summarized on the Focus Strategies website at www.focusstraegies.net/research

¹² http://www.communityworkinggroup.org/ochistory.html

2. Mitigating and Managing the Impacts of Homelessness

A number of communities around the country have implemented a variety of approaches to mitigate and manage the problem of homelessness. While these strategies do not ultimately solve the problem or reduce the numbers of homeless people, they can help ameliorate some of the impacts caused by the visible presence homeless people living in the streets and in encampments.

a. Legalized Camping Programs

In an effort to reduce the negative community and environmental impacts of homeless encampments, some communities have created officially sanctioned campgrounds, "tent cities" or "safe zones" in which homeless people are allowed to create make-shift shelters. Typically this allows the jurisdiction to ensure there are some basic levels of hygiene and security to ensure that homeless people are not being victimized. It also creates an environment in which it can be easier to engage with homeless individuals and offer services and shelter. Some commonly cited examples of this approach include Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon; Opportunity Village in Eugene; and a Safe Zones pilot program in Fort Lauderdale, FL. These approaches generally do not reduce homelessness but rather offer a way to better manage the negative community impacts. Results in some communities have not been positive. Ft. Lauderdale discontinued their program due to high levels of crime within the safe zone. The State of Hawaii, which like Eureka has a large population of "transient" homeless people living in illegal campgrounds, recently conducted a study of the feasibility of creating a legalized campground program. Based on their research this approach was rejected in favor of creating more rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing.

b. Other Approaches

A variety of other approaches to managing or mitigating the impacts of homelessness have been used in a range of communities.¹⁵ As noted above in regards to legalized camping, these types of efforts do not solve homelessness but instead attempt to address some of the more obvious impacts of homelessness. None of the examples cited below have resulted in any reduction in the numbers of homeless people.

Street "Ambassador" Programs. Some communities have hired street "peacemakers" to help
mediate tensions between homeless people, business owners, and customers in particularly
impacted areas of a downtown. One commonly cited example is the City of San Francisco which
employed Community Service Ambassadors in the Civic Center Area. These are not the same as
Homeless Outreach Teams (see above) in that they are not primarily focused on helping link
homeless people to housing.

¹³ http://www.tentcitiestoolkit.org/

¹⁴ http://www.popcenter.org/problems/homeless encampments

¹⁵ For a compilation of approaches, see the Center for Problem Oriented Policing's paper on homeless encampments (footnote 12). A recent study on neighborhood planning and homelessness in Honolulu's Chinatown also cites a number of relevant best practices.

http://www.aecom.com/deployedfiles/Internet/Capabilities/Economics/ documents/Neighborhood%20Planning %20and%20Homeless%20Study-28SEP2012.pdf

- Casual Labor Programs. In some areas there have been efforts to develop employment programs
 for homeless people with the primary goal being to reduce the prevalence of panhandling. San
 Francisco has partnered with the non-profit Urban Solutions to recruit and hire homeless people
 for day labor activities for event preparation and clean-up, using a combination of grants and
 philanthropic donations.
- Changes to the Physical Environment. Another approach is to try to make the downtown area less
 welcoming for people to sleep overnight, such as by removing benches or fencing park areas.
 Some communities have also attempted to make their downtowns more welcoming by installing
 public bathrooms and other facilities.
- Police Sweeps/Clearing Campgrounds. A very common approach is stepped up police enforcement, such as the clearing out of campgrounds and disposal of the possessions of the campers. While this creates a temporary fix, generally the homeless people simply move to another nearby location.

IV. Recommendations

Our overall recommendation is that the City focus its efforts on solutions that will actually end homelessness, rather than attempting to better manage the problem. Existing federal policy, evidence from many research studies, and best practices in the field all point to housing as the solution. The federal HEARTH Act challenges all communities to develop systems that ensure that no one is ever homeless for longer than 30 days. While getting to this point cannot happen overnight, there are some concrete steps the City can take in the short, medium, and longer term to increase the number of homeless people in Eureka who secure and maintain housing. These steps generally involve the City working in strong partnership with the County and the HHHC as the County-wide planning body tasked with addressing homelessness. The major federal and state funding sources available to fund interventions to end homelessness largely flow through the County (CoC funding, mental health and substance abuse funds, TANF, and others). Our specific recommendations below are designed to help guide the City in working in a more strategic way with the County and the CoC to ensure that county-wide efforts are targeted to reducing the very significant numbers of unsheltered chronically homeless people in Eureka.

A. Short-Term Recommendations (within 90 days)

1. Ongoing Structure and Process to Continue Work on Homelessness in Eureka

The City of Eureka has taken great strides in recent months by convening three Homelessness Focus Groups (Community Leaders, Homelessness Services Providers, and Homelessness Services Consumers) to begin working on the homelessness problem in connection with the General Plan Update. To continue this momentum, we advise the City to retain the Leadership Group and continue to meet regularly to oversee the implementation of the recommendations in this plan. To ensure the City's work is fully coordinated with the CoC and the County, the Leadership Group should designate a member(s) to serve on the CoC Executive Group Committee to represent the Leadership Group and specifically serve as a voice for the City, particularly in regards to efforts to address chronic homelessness.

2. Targeted Outreach and Assessment of People in Encampments

Given that much of the negative community impact is being caused by a relatively small number of people who are camping in close proximity to downtown Eureka, efforts to house this population should be prioritized. The City and County have already partnered to develop a Behavioral Health and Law Enforcement team to conduct outreach to chronically homeless people who are living outdoors in Eureka. We recommend that the City build upon this partnership to convene an informal "Housing First Team" that includes the Police Dept., Police Liaison, County staff (e.g. mental health, substance abuse), and service providers who are familiar with the homeless population in Eureka. This group would be tasked to identify the approximately 10 to 15 people who are generating the largest number of police and other emergency calls, are the most frequent users of City and County resources, and who are genuinely in need of housing (meaning they do not have anywhere else to live). This can be done by using existing available data and/or conducting a quick survey or assessment.

Through an ongoing process of engagement, determine what is needed to get the identified individuals into housing. For most this will probably involve finding a permanent supportive housing unit or a short to medium-term rent subsidy, though some might have the ability to enter housing on their own with some immediate financial assistance (e.g. first and last month's rent, deposit). Begin developing a rapport with homeless people based on a "Housing First" approach rather than offering services, asking about their willingness to become sober, or requiring a move to emergency shelter.

3. Prioritize High Need/High Barrier Homeless People for Available Housing

Identify what resources might be immediately available to house 5 to 10 people identified through the process described above directly out of the encampments. The City can work in partnership with the CoC and the County to more specifically target available resources for those identified by the Housing First team. Possibilities could include:

- Turnover in existing CoC-funded permanent supportive housing (Apartments First, Humboldt Housing, project HART);
- New permanent supportive housing units created through the 2013 CoC competition ();
- Flexible rental assistance funds (MHSA, TANF, general funds, philanthropic funds)
- New rapid re-housing slots recently awarded through the State ESG Program
- Public housing
- Clean and sober homes
- Private landlords (Betty Kwan Chinn Center has many relationships with landlords)

While it is likely that only a few people can be housed quickly using available resources, piloting with a small number of people will begin to get all stakeholders on board with a "Housing First" approach and demonstrate that it actually works. As part of this work the City could also consider inviting a speaker from a local community that has launched a 100,000 Homes Campaign to come and do a presentation on their efforts and results. This could generate enthusiasm for kicking off the effort to find housing for the highest need homeless people.

B. Medium-Term Recommendations (90 to 180 days)

1. Formalize Homeless Outreach Team with "Housing First" Focus

Over the medium term, the City and County can work together to develop a staffed Homeless Outreach Team that includes a lead outreach worker and rotating representation from the Police, County Departments, and service providers to conduct ongoing and regular engagement with the unsheltered homeless population, with a focus on problem-solving around securing a place to live. Build the capacity/knowledge of this team in regards to available housing options, including not just publicly-funded programs but also connections with private landlords.

While some homeless people can move directly from the streets into housing, in many cases a short stay in emergency shelter or "interim" housing (short-term transitional housing) is needed to provide individuals with a safe place to stay while receiving assistance with housing search and placement. Currently the City's existing emergency shelter (Rescue Mission) serves both families and single people, but the inventory of transitional housing is limited to serving only families. Given that the unsheltered homeless population consists mainly of adults without children, we recommend exploring some modest additional capacity to provide shelter or short-term (90 to 120 days) transitional housing for single individuals as part of an overall Housing First approach.

2. Explore Creating an MHSA-Funded Housing Program

The County currently is developing a plan for how to use MHSA funds over the next three years. These funds target people with severe mental illness who are homeless and under-served by the mental health system. The County H&HS is currently working with Humboldt Bay Housing Development Corporation on a small permanent supportive housing project that will include an investment of \$1.8 million in MHSA housing funds. There is some possibility that the County's MHSA Community Services and Supports (CSS) funds, which support Full Service Partnerships (FSPs), could be fine-tuned to provide more funds for housing assistance. These funds can also be used to create short-term stabilization units where clients receive assessment and then referral or placement to permanent housing or crisis residential treatment.

C. Longer-Term Recommendations (6 months to 2 years)

1. Conduct Data Analysis to Understand What Is Needed to Completely End Homeless in Eureka

Convene a working group including staff from the City, County and CoC to analyze Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and program budget data, with the goal of understanding how funds are currently being invested, what outcomes are being accomplished, and how outcomes could be improved by changing existing programs and investments. This can be done by populating the Performance Improvement Calculator¹⁶ (which was demonstrated by Focus Strategies in February). Additional analysis can be done to determine how much additional capacity is needed, particularly in terms of Rapid Re-Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing to completely end homelessness.

As a precursor to this work, the City, County and CoC should consider taking some steps to help improve the quality of the data that goes into the analysis:

¹⁶ http://focusstrategies.net/publications/

- 2015 Point in Time Homeless Count. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires communities to conduct a count of homeless people every two years. The next required count will be conducted in late January 2015 and HUD is expected to soon issue additional guidance to communities on acceptable methodologies for collecting the required data. Since the content of the guidance is unknown, we are not in a position to make specific recommendations about potential changes for 2015 in Humboldt County's count. We would advise the HHHC and the County to review the new guidance when it is issued and select the most robust methodology possible given available community resources.
- HMIS Data Quality. The main data source for evaluating the performance of existing programs and services is the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Managed by the County H&HS, this system collects data on all homeless people who are served in HUD funded programs throughout the community and is a highly valuable source of information on performance. For example, HMIS data shows how long homeless people are staying in programs and what percentage have a positive outcome when they leave (i.e. how many are exiting into permanent housing). However, in order for this type of analysis to be useful, the data in the HMIS system must be of high quality. In Appendix B we have provided some suggestions about ways the Humboldt County CoC can begin assessing the quality of its HMIS data, with the goal of moving the system to a place where useful performance reports can be run.

2. Continue Collaboration with HHHC to Develop and Implement County-Wide Solutions

The HHHC has developed an updated plan to end homelessness in Humboldt County that strongly aligns with federal policy direction and focuses on expanding housing opportunities; expanding rapid re-housing capacity; expanding substance abuse treatment capacity; helping homeless people increase income; creating a coordinated intake, assessment and referral process; and using data to understand results. Elected officials and staff from the City of Eureka as well as Eureka-based service providers have been very involved in this process and Focus Strategies would advise continuing and strengthening this partnership. As the community with the largest number of homeless people, the City should continue to speak in a strong voice in support of County-wide solutions that will end homelessness.

D. Strategies for "Managing" Homelessness

Focus Strategies strongly advises the City of Eureka not to pursue approaches directed at better managing the existing problems, such as by increasing the frequency of police sweeps; creating a legalized camping area, 'safe zone," or "tent city;" establishing more public facilities such as bathrooms and storage; or developing "street ambassador" programs to help mediate tensions between homeless people and local businesses/customers. These approaches will not solve the underlying problem that people do not have a safe or healthy place to live, and there is little evidence that "management" approaches do much to mitigate the community impacts of unsheltered homeless people.

Appendix A: Documents Reviewed

Reports and Plans		
Document Title	Authoring Organization	Date
Humboldt County 10 Year Plan: Action Steps	Humboldt County Housing	
Update	and Homeless Coalition	7/1/2011
	(HHHC)	
Humboldt County Plan to End Homelessness: 2013		10/13/2013
Update	НННС	10/15/2015
Humboldt County CoC 2013 Application	НННС	January 2014
Humboldt County 2013 Point in Time Count Report	НННС	January 2013
Humboldt County 2011 Point in Time Count Report	НННС	1/25/2011
Humboldt County Housing Inventory (HIC)	НННС	2005-2012
Meeting Minutes	НННС	2013

Newspaper Articles		
Headline	Name of Newspaper	Date Published
'A modern mountain man' Friends struggle to reconcile James' violent end with the peaceful man they knew	Eureka Times Standard	Sep. 16 th , 2013
'Evidence there's hope:' With outpouring of support, Betty Kwan Chinn Day Center opens its doors	Eureka Times Standard	Nov. 10 th , 2013
'Some people just break': Jeremy Hackney's plunge into homelessness and back	Eureka Times Standard	Nov. 15 th , 2013
A hand-out or a heavy-ho? Arcata confronts homelessness- again	The North Coast Journal Weekly	Jan. 13 th , 2005
A one-stop shop: Eureka day center to centralize services for area's homeless	Eureka Times Standard	May 23 rd , 2013
Arkley Blames Betty Chinn 'And Her Ilk' for Priest Murder	Lost Coast Outpost	Jan. 10 th , 2014
Our County and City are Being Taken Over by the Homeless	Lost Coast Outpost	Sep. 12 th , 2013
At Rob Arkley's Homelessness Symposium	Lost Coast Outpost	Sep.18 th , 2013
Arkley vs. Bridges: Two Perspectives on How to Treat the Needy	The North Coast Journal	Sep. 16 th , 2013
Arkley calls meeting on homeless issues; local businessman: Humboldt County a 'Mecca' for transients	Eureka Times Standard	Sep. 17 th , 2013
Assistance never seems to reduce homelessness	Eureka Times Standard	Oct. 25 th , 2013
Betty Chinn asks Eureka for help; Local philanthropist to kick off fundraising for homeless day center with Saturday dinner	Eureka Times Standard	May 9 th , 2013
Betty Chinn does enable the homeless to get off the street	Eureka Times Standard	Aug. 7 th , 2013

Newspaper Articles		
Headline	Name of Newspaper	Date Published
Betty's passion: Local philanthropist's improbable	Eureka Times Standard	Nov. 17 th , 2013
journey takes leap forward		
Blaming homeless? No class	Eureka Times Standard	Oct. 18 th , 2013
Chinn's Open House	The North Coast Journal	Nov. 12 th , 2013
Citizen Arkley's school of tough love	Eureka Times Standard	Sep. 22 nd , 2013
City: Bayshore Mall homeless encampment cleanup	Eureka Times Standard	Oct. 14 th , 2013
successful; Critics say people simply moved to		
other locations		
City to Bayshore Mall homeless: It's time to move	Eureka Times Standard	Apr. 21 st , 2013
on; occupants brace for cleanup, 38 encampments		
targeted		
Court of Relief	The North Coast Journal	Jul. 15 th , 2010
Another homeless court, another set of happily		
fine-freed customers		
Dead and Disconnected	The North Coast Journal	Oct. 3 rd , 2013
The sad, frustrating case of John Cooper-Gulch-		
Swamp Doe (and other abandonments)		+b
Eureka, meet your new police chief	Eureka Times Standard	Nov. 24 th , 2013
Extreme Weather Shelters begin operations for the	Eureka Times Standard	Oct. 31 st , 2013
season		ath con
Homeless Court- A new program could clear the	North Coast Journal Weekly	Nov. 10 th , 2005
slate for folks trying to do better	One of Calant (Plant)	C 40 th . 2042
Homeless People Don't Belong in this Town	Open Salon (Blog)	Sep. 19 th , 2013
Homeless Sites Narrowed	The North Coast Journal	Jul. 7 th , 1998
Homeless camping solutions within reach	Eureka Times Standard	Jul. 31 st , 2013
Homeless in Humboldt: the sweet life?	Eureka Times Standard	Oct. 1 st , 2013
Homeless rights, sister city up for discussion at	Eureka Times Standard	Feb. 16 th , 2013
Eureka council meeting		
Homelessness and Help	The North Coast Journal	Nov. 11, 2010
Humboldt homeless by the numbers: Point-in-Time	Eureka Times Standard	Jul. 10 th , 2011
survey results released; task force gains		
momentum		
Hundreds attend Arkley's meeting on	Eureka Times Standard	Sep. 19 th , 2013
homelessness: Raucous gathering shows		
community is deeply divided on the issue		
In the Can	The North Coast Journal	Jan. 5 th , 2012
What Arcata can learn from Eureka's public		
bathrooms	5 1 7 6 1	c anth costs
King arraigned in crossbow case: Clear Lake man	Eureka Times Standard	Sep. 27 th , 2013
pleads not guilty to murder, attempted murder	The Neath Constitution	1 40th 2042
New Direction	The North Coast Journal	Jan. 19 th , 2012
The fall and rise of John Shelter, homeless		
advocate turned entrepreneur		

Newspaper Articles			
Headline	Name of Newspaper	Date Published	
New day center opens for business in Eureka; local	Eureka Times Standard	Nov. 19 th , 2013	
foundation seeks volunteers to help change lives			
Point in time; volunteers needed to help with	Eureka Times Standard	Jan. 13 th , 2013	
homeless survey			
Point-In-Time	The North Coast Journal	Feb. 3 rd , 2011	
A countywide survey reexamines the harsh lives of			
Humboldt's homeless			
Poverty, homelessness, and results	Eureka Times Standard	Sep. 29 th , 2013	
Redefining rights: Statewide efforts to expand	Eureka Times Standard	Jan. 7 th , 2013	
protection for homeless has Eureka officials looking			
at current practices			
So-called homeless need to get off their rear ends	Eureka Times Standard	Sep. 29 th , 2013	
State, local vets: Homeless pups spreading	Eureka Times Standard	Jul. 5 th , 2013	
parvovirus			
What does Humboldt Plan to do to its Homeless?	The Plazoid	Apr. 26 th , 2009	
The world beneath the surface	Eureka Times Standard	Dec. 16 th , 2006	
Update: Arkley Draws Big Crowd to Talk about	The North Coast Journal	Sep. 18 th , 2013	
Homelessness			
Voices from The Edge	The North Coast Journal	Oct. 10 th , 2013	
Waiting for Chinn	The North Coast journal	Jan. 3 rd , 2013	
A day center in downtown Eureka will give			
homeless advocate Betty Chinn a home base			
Winter Shelter Program opens its doors to	Redwood Times	Dec. 1 st , 2011	
individuals, families in need			
Working together, we can better help county's homeless	Eureka Times Standard	Nov. 3 rd , 2013	

Appendix B: HMIS Data Quality Recommendations for the Humboldt County CoC

At the request of the City of Eureka General Plan Update Provider Focus Group, Focus Strategies has prepared this paper outlining some suggested approaches the Humboldt County Continuum of Care (CoC), can use to assess the quality of its HMIS data. This includes using reports that can be run from the Bowman Service Point system. The strategies we have proposed provide the CoC with suggested steps to further assess data quality and data quality improvement efforts, with the goal of moving the system to a place where useful performance reports can be run.

A. Dimensions of Data

There are three key dimensions of data quality:

- 1. Is It Complete? This dimension speaks to whether key/required data is missing.
- 2. Is It *Accurate*? This dimension reflects whether the best information is available for the analysis. Are there a lot of "don't know" or "refused" answers? Some inaccuracies are related to data entry errors, including entry dates before exit dates, people who are 100+ years old, or women entered in known men-only shelters.
- 3. Is It *Congruent*? This dimension is highlighted when answers to different questions are contradictory or incongruent. One common example is seeing a chronically homeless person without a disability. In this case, either the chronic homeless field or disability field would need correction.

B. Strategies and Tips for Assessing and Improving Data Quality

There are a number of strategies that communities can adopt to identify data quality issues. Below we have summarized some key approaches and tips. These suggestions are targeted in particular to help support data quality improvement for the purpose of generating useful performance reports.

1. Focus on Key Data Fields

The most important HMIS data elements to measure performance outcomes are:

- Prior living situation
- Program entry date
- Program exit date
- Exit destination

We recommend the CoC and providers should carefully review the data in these four fields and address issues on an on-going basis. The most common problem in these fields is missing data or insufficient data (e.g. "don't know", "refused" or "other" answer

choices). The CoC leads should work with end users to ensure that the most accurate and complete data possible is collected in these fields.

2. Compare System Entry To Current Homeless Population

The CoC should understand how people are entering the system and individual programs. System entry can be mapped using the Prior Living data field and compared to the current homeless population, including the number of those sleeping outside (from the most recent PIT). Programs with high entry rates from non-literal homeless locations (such as family/friends, institutions, etc.) may want to consider if they have problems with intake forms (e.g. staff don't understand how to ask and record prior living) or if program rules are not aligned with the population.

3. Review Data for Illogical Results

In addition to reviewing specific data fields that are used in system performance measurements, the CoC and providers should continually review the general state of the data in HMIS. Some illogical data outcomes that are easy to spot and that may point to larger data entry/quality issues include:

- a. People who are greater than 90 years old or less than 0 (e.g. "negative" age)
- b. People living in PSH who do not have a recorded disability
- c. Single adults in family programs and/or families in single adult programs
- d. Stays in programs longer than the expected programmatic maximum:
 - i. More than 90 days in emergency shelters
 - ii. More than 540 days in rapid re-housing
 - iii. More than 720 days in transitional housing

If there are particular programs or providers with significant data quality issues in these or other fields, it may be necessary to do a larger data quality review of particular program(s) and/or increase training and end user oversight.

4. Require that HMIS Records Match APR E-Snaps Submittals

In some communities, providers correct Annual Performance Report (APR) data outside of HMIS and submit this data to HUD through e-snaps. An important step in ensuring high data quality in HMIS is for CoCs to require that HMIS data records match APR data as submitted in e-snaps. Moving forward, data for all APRs should be pulled directly from HMIS, and any corrections needed should be made in HMIS. Ensuring that e-snaps and HMIS records are congruent is essential; without this step, it is nearly impossible to understand the impact of the existing array of programs.

5. Align HMIS Program Structure with Housing Inventory Chart (HIC)

In many communities, program organization and data structure in HMIS is driven by the organization of contracts with HUD. Unfortunately, HUD contract divisions do not always

agree with how programs are operated "on the ground". For example, a transitional housing program may have two HUD contracts – one for operations and one for services. In HMIS, this will appear as two distinct programs, but they are actually the same program. Keeping these contracts separated when measuring performance outcomes will lead both to double counting clients and watering down the impact/cost of the program. A good place to start identifying where these mismatches exist is reviewing the organization and data structure in HMIS against the community's Housing Inventory Count (HIC) and identifying where program means program, and where it means contract or organizational delineation of who does what.

C. ART Gallery Reports Related to Data Quality

In addition to adopting the strategies described above, many communities use standardized reports to check for data quality. The reports below are available in the ART Gallery of reports supported by Bowman. In general, our recommendation is to run the reports on a quarterly basis to identify data and correct data quality issues in a timely fashion. Further, several of the reports can be run at more than one level (e.g., program, provider and/or CoC). We recommend running the reports at the program level if possible because it is the level closest to the client and data entry. The ease of and speed for correcting data quality issues will be maximized at the program level.

0212 - Duplicate Clients in Service Point: HMIS Data Quality

This ART report assists in finding duplicate clients for one or more selected provider(s). The report identifies duplicates by comparing unique client ID numbers and Social Security numbers.

0213 - Universal Data Element Completeness: Entry Exit Workflow;

0214 - Universal Data Element Completeness: Closed Service Workflow;

0215 – Universal Data Element Completeness: Open Service Workflow

This report indicates if there are null, refused and/or unknown values in one or more of the eleven assessment based Universal Data Elements (UDEs) required by HUD. The report takes into consideration whether each client included in the analysis is an adult, child, or unaccompanied youth since the required data elements for these client subsets differ from one another. There are three versions of this report to accommodate three workflows.

- 213 for "Entry Exit" based workflows where program entries and exits are required for all clients
- 214 for "Closed Service" based workflows where service start and end dates are required for all clients, and services without an end date indicate a one-day completed service
- 215 for "Open Service" based workflows where service start and end dates are required for all clients, and services without an end date indicate an on-going service

0216 - Un-exited Clients Exceeding Max Length of Stay Data Quality Report

This report indicates if all clients in selected program/providers have a congruent program exit recorded. The report allows the User to examine the length of stay (LOS) for all current clients in up to five selected programs/providers at a time. The User also specifies the maximum length of stay for each program enabling the identification of clients whose LOS exceeds the limit.

0220 - Data Incongruity Locator - Age, Gender, Household Relationships Data Quality Report

This report locates client data which is missing, incorrect, or inconsistent with other recorded data for the same client. The report focuses on locating errors and incongruities in the areas of age, gender and household relationship. Twelve common data quality issues are identified.

0222 – Work flow Elements by Client Data Quality Report

This report indicates whether all clients in a selected program/provider have all the workflow elements required for that particular program. The report monitors ten common workflow elements including program entries, program exits, client needs, service transaction creation, service provision, referrals, client goals, call records, shelter stays and ROIs.

0252 -- Data Completeness Report Card: Entry Exit Version

This report is a data quality monitoring tool that produces a letter grade for the system as well as the individual providers. Prompts allow the user to specify a date range and to select the provider(s) on which to base the report as well as the option to include services or not.

0253 - Income Data Quality Report: Entry Exit Optional

This report captures data quality issues that occur within the income sub-assessment, including duplicate sources and amounts, earned income conflicts, and no income conflicts. The report displays a client's income sub-assessment records as of program entry or exit. It also displays income records for clients based on their income start and end dates and provider entering income.

0254 – Shelter History, Overlap and Return: Entry Exits or Shelter Stays

This report displays a client's Service and/or Entry Exit history with alerts to notify the user when the client has multiple stays in the same time period at different providers. The report can also be used to determine the number of clients that return to the shelter within a certain time period, allowing the user to calculate the percentage of returning clients within that time.