

# Homeless in Northern Virginia

Local Communities Respond To Preventing and Ending Homelessness



## Summary Report

**on the June 2010 Regional Forum  
and Recommendations for Moving Forward with Regional Solutions**

## Background

In May, 2010, the Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance (NVAHA) and the Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness (VCEH) teamed together, with funding from the Freddie Mac Foundation, to release *Homeless in Northern Virginia: Local Communities Respond to Preventing and Ending Homelessness*. The report examined the state of homelessness in the Northern Virginia region, the efforts being made by local governments and nonprofits to address this issue and the common challenges faced by those working on it.

NVAHA and VCEH had begun to convene groups of stakeholders – local government agency staff, non-profit service providers, funders and advocates – in late 2008 to discuss a potential regional effort that could promote progress on 10 Year Plans to End Homelessness for those jurisdictions with plans in place, and to provide support and assistance to encourage jurisdictions without 10 Year Plans to adopt them. The conversations revealed three key findings: (1) Jurisdictions were facing many of the same issues with lack of resources, strategy and data management; (2) At the same time, there was no systematic means to share information and expertise among jurisdictions, which meant there was no real way to ensure that best practices developed in one jurisdiction could be shared and adopted in another; and (3) A nation- and region-wide economic downturn that was already well underway threatened much of the progress jurisdictions had managed to make.

Providers were facing crushing levels of demand for their services, and there was little or no local money to pay for the additional services being requested. Government and service providers needed to work “smarter” to handle these new challenges. If it was clear years before, when the first of the Northern Virginia jurisdictions – Alexandria – adopted their 10 Year Plan, that it was no longer financially feasible to simply “manage” homelessness, it was even clearer once the economic downturn began to deplete resources. The changes imagined in 10 Year Plans, i.e. the collaborations aimed at efficiency, collective problem solving and cost effectiveness, the focus on quickly stabilizing families and individuals in housing as opposed to (expensively) serving them for long periods in the shelter system, and the involvement of entities other than just the service providers, needed to gain traction more than ever.

The Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP), established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 2009, provided the necessary boost for jurisdictions to begin implementing these needed changes. This real and substantial pool of resources (whose very design facilitated the changes that jurisdictions needed to make) provided an opportunity for NVAHA and VCEH to begin talking to government staff and service providers about how they were implementing, what challenges they were facing, and what could be done more effectively at a regional level, rather than in the silos of their respective jurisdictions. NVAHA and VCEH began gathering data and interviewing stakeholders, and this information formed the basis for the May report.

# Report Summary

Using data from the 2009 Point-In-Time Count for five Northern Virginia continuums of care – Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax-Falls Church, Loudoun, and Prince William – the report provided an overview of the numbers of homeless families and individuals in Northern Virginia, as well as more detailed data by continuum about the numbers of sheltered versus unsheltered, number of beds, subpopulations with chronic characteristics, and progress on 10 Year Plans or similar efforts. Overall, homelessness in Northern Virginia is still significantly higher than it was in 2005, however a few jurisdictions (like Fairfax and Prince William) have recently registered strong decreases.

Based on interviews with local government staff and service providers, the report detailed the following major findings and challenges common to all jurisdictions, and some promising practices that could potentially be shared:

**Funding and Staffing:** 10 Year Plans need dedicated funds and staffing in order to progress, but all jurisdictions have struggled financially, and have not committed adequate resources to these efforts. HPRP infused some funding, but it will not be available long-term, and it was neither available nor appropriate for serving individuals and families experiencing chronic homelessness. In some jurisdictions, government and service providers are collaborating to seek funding and target secured resources to their best use. Jurisdictions are also either dedicating staffing within existing agencies or establishing separate offices to helm their efforts to end homelessness.

**Serving Chronically Homeless Persons:** Chronically homeless families and individuals need a combination of housing, intensive case management and supportive services. The development of permanent supportive housing, however, has been stalled by funding, policy and political barriers. Jurisdictions have underestimated the amount of case management needed for this group. Further, jurisdictions need to do a better job of tailoring supportive services like work and wage supports to people with multiple barriers to employment.

**Data Management:** Jurisdictions need good data - uniform entry and useful reporting - to make informed decisions about service delivery. Many jurisdictions are not using the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) optimally, which limits their ability to make those decisions and allocate scarce resources effectively. Some jurisdictions have used HPRP funding to begin streamlining data collection. Still others are providing centralized training and technical support to promote that streamlining.

**Politics and Policy:** Progress on 10 Year Plans requires positive political will and leadership. An unwillingness to commit adequate resources to affordable housing and efforts to end homelessness has called into question the commitment of some local leaders. Forward-thinking jurisdictions are populating their 10 Year Plan/Continuum of Care committees with influential representatives from government and the private sector to ensure total community involvement and support.

**Philosophy Change:** 10 Year Plans require everyone to become much more community-focused and to collaborate on funding, service delivery and accountability, as opposed to focusing on their individual efforts. Processes around securing, distributing and using HPRP funds have been instruc-

tive in advancing these changes. Some jurisdictions have used the opportunity to establish coalition bodies to direct all of their decision-making.

**NIMBY:** Much of the 10 Year Plan housing secured thus far has been through the mechanism of the federal Housing Choice Voucher Program, providing rental subsidies for market-rate housing. Vocal opponents have tested the commitment of local elected officials to the development of new housing options for chronically homeless persons, such as group homes and affordable efficiencies. Supportive housing developers in some communities are engaging and educating legislators and other potential supporters early in the development process in order to head off the NIMBY-based opposition that will likely come later. It continues to be true that the most significant challenge to ending homelessness is the severe shortage of affordable housing options for households with extremely low incomes in our region.

**Population Migration:** Jurisdictions report, anecdotally, that homeless individuals and families do not typically migrate to follow “Cadillac” homeless services. There has not been good data collection to verify this point, though. Better data tracking in the future will provide for something more than anecdotal data on this issue.

## Regional Forum

As a follow-up to the release of *Homeless in Northern Virginia*, NVAHA and VCEH hosted a half-day forum on June 15, 2010. Over 100 local government staff, service providers, legal services professionals, housing developers and advocates responded to the forum invitation and participated that day, numbers that indicate a sizable and healthy interest in the prospect of formulating a regional approach to homelessness. The forum’s goals included:

- reviewing the report’s findings;
- sharing examples of how jurisdictions are addressing the challenges they are facing in implementing their 10 Year Plans or similar efforts; and
- developing concrete recommendations of how the entire region can collaborate to address common challenges.

After comments from Ralph Boyd, Jr., President and CEO of the Freddie Mac Foundation and Michael Scheurer, NoVA representative for the Virginia Housing Development Authority, Anthony Love from the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness delivered the keynote address. Participants then split into five breakout sessions to discuss jurisdiction-specific challenges and recommend areas for regional collaboration. The session topics were as follows:

### ► **Session 1: Changing Community Approaches and Systems**

Participants in this session focused on the philosophy and culture changes needed in order to embrace 10 Year Plans and similar efforts. They shared examples of new funding collaborations (particularly with HPRP funding), efforts to improve data collection and to use that data to make collective decisions about funding and service delivery, and new coalition bodies (government,

providers, and other stakeholders) implementing “soup to nuts” decision-making processes. As a result of their discussion, the participants recommended:

- Community “pools” of funding in each jurisdiction controlled by a coalition body of stakeholders;
- A regional advocacy plan to support state-level advocacy; and
- Collaboration to fund a regional data administrator who would ensure that data is uniformly collected so that all jurisdictions can share.

► ***Session 2: Partnering More Effectively with Mainstream Services***

Participants in this session focused on forging relationships with partners other than homeless services providers in order to improve workforce development opportunities for homeless clients and to decrease the likelihood of being released from hospitals and other institutions into homelessness. As a result of their discussion, the participants recommended:

- Working with workforce investment boards on a regional project aimed at increasing job readiness among those experiencing homelessness;
- Developing a regional employer network of those ready and willing to employ homeless persons;
- Exploring tax credits for employers who hire homeless persons and those living in permanent supportive housing;
- Partnering with home day care services to increase access to child care for client families; and
- Exploring and promoting uniform, regional discharge policies, and linking to institutions at points other than discharge.

► ***Session 3: Creating and Sustaining Permanent Supportive Housing***

Participants in this session focused on identifying and securing all of the resources needed to develop permanent supportive housing, including funding for capital, operating costs and service delivery, community education and acceptance, and political support. As a result of their discussion, the participants recommended:

- Securing a long-term dedicated funding source to provide deep rental subsidies to supportive housing projects and attract more private capital;
- Exploring accessing publicly-held land and underutilized commercial sites appropriate for developing supportive housing;
- Tracking cost changes in other government departments, e.g. schools, health facilities, and law enforcement as homelessness prevention and intervention efforts progress;
- Using that data to educate decision-makers and citizens on the community-wide benefits and increased percentages of success that are realized for clients who secure permanent supportive housing;

- Demonstrating the role of permanent supportive housing in the continuum of an individual's housing needs, which change over time, and emphasizing the need for simultaneous development of a range of housing options to serve people at different points of need;
- Exploring ideas for additional government assistance to landlords who incur added risks in providing permanent supportive housing units; and
- Proactively engaging politically-influential constituencies in 10-year plan development and advocacy.

► **Session 4: Identifying Resources**

Participants in this session focused on identifying new and/or non-traditional funding opportunities, particularly to continue programs and efforts initiated with HPRP funding. As a result of their discussion, the participants recommended:

- Advocating for local jurisdictions to complement/replace the one time federal funding;
- Expanding the Housing Choice Voucher program, and establishing locally-funded rental subsidy programs;
- Establishing a set aside in a future state housing trust fund for households at 30 percent of area median income (AMI) or less;
- Preserving the authority of local authorities to administer proffers in a future state housing trust fund;
- Improving access of shelter residents to day care subsidies; and
- Using project-based vouchers to target specific, underserved populations.

► **Session 5: Effectively Serving "Hard to Serve" Populations**

Participants in this session focused on the varying housing and service delivery models needed to reach different pools of hard-to-serve populations, such as chronically homeless persons, people with criminal backgrounds, and youth aging out of foster care. As a result of their discussion, the participants recommended:

- Exploring the creation of a regional affordable efficiency development;
- Providing wrap-around services to mental health clients at the regional level; and
- Providing training to new nonprofits targeting hard-to-serve populations.

The following recommendations were made in multiple sessions:

- Co-locating service providers to share resources and ease coordination of service delivery;
- Expanding the use of housing locators;
- Developing a regional "best practices" website; and
- Encouraging common performance and outcome measurements (which could also be adopted by funders and integrated into performance reports).

# Future Collaboration on Regional Solutions to Homelessness

In July, 2010 NVAHA and VCEH convened a steering committee of 14 local government staff, service providers and other stakeholders to review the recommendations from the June forum and identify specific action items ripe for regional collaboration and feasible given an existing timeline and resources. While other participants will be engaged on specific work groups, the steering committee will oversee the effort, taking responsibility for any decision-making to be done and report on progress. NVAHA and VCEH will continue to staff the effort and provide overall coordination.

The steering committee organized the forum recommendations into four categories – Systems Changes, Employment/Workforce Development, Housing, and Discharge Planning – that have become the basis for four workgroups that will implement objectives in their categories. The workgroups will meet and spend the Fall/Winter of 2010 creating their implementation plans, which should be available by early 2011. The work groups will keep abreast of efforts at the state level of the Governor’s Homeless Outcomes Advisory Group, the Governor’s Housing Policy Work Group, and the Prisoner and Juvenile Offender Re-Entry Council as they develop their plans.

The work groups will develop implementation plans for the following objectives:

## ► *Systems Change Work Group*

### **Objectives:**

- Demonstrate the success of, and advocate for the expansion of homeless prevention and rapid re-housing funds like HPRP; and
- Adopt five common key outcome measurements for preventing and/or ending homelessness.

### **Expected Outcomes:**

- Local government agencies better coordinate and streamline their efforts;
- Public-private partnerships actively engage in 10 Year Plan efforts; and
- New and/or expanded sources of funding are available and/or existing funding and data is being used in more effective ways.

## ► *Employment/Workforce Development Work Group*

### **Objectives:**

- Approach the Workforce Investment Board to partner in helping homeless persons access job training and employment resources; and
- Identify resources and partners to assist with the provision of supplemental and life skills training, as well as employers who are ready and willing to provide jobs to homeless persons.

### **Expected Outcomes:**

- Increased access to jobs for homeless persons who want and are able to work; and
- Resources for training that promotes job readiness and complements traditional job training.

► **Housing Work Group**

**Objective:**

- Promote and expand the “housing locator” model.

**Expected Outcomes:**

- Increased housing opportunities for households with extremely low incomes, so that no one spends more than 90 days in temporary shelter.

► **Discharge Planning Work Group**

**Objective:**

- Promote and expand a model discharge plan.

**Expected Outcomes:**

- A consistent, predictable, mutually agreed upon process governs the discharge of persons from jails and hospitals across the region, and is formally adopted by those institutions.

**Northern Virginia Regional Collaboration on Homelessness Steering Committee**

**Amanda Andere**, Executive Director, FACETS, Fairfax County

**Phyllis Chamberlain**, Executive Director, Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness

**Kari Galloway**, Executive Director, Guest House, Alexandria

**Frances Harris**, Executive Director, ACTS, Prince William County

**Dean Klein**, Director, Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, Fairfax County

**Michelle Krockner**, Executive Director, Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance

**Pam Kovach**, Executive Director, Good Shepherd Housing Foundation, Prince William County

**Dave Leibson**, Chair, Arlington County Implementation Task Force on the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness

**Ann Moore**, Director, Office of Community Services, City of Alexandria Human Services

**Helen Richardson**, Homeless Services Director, Volunteers of America, Loudoun County

**Angie Rodgers**, Consultant

**Cindy Stevens**, Chief, Housing Assistance Bureau, Department of Human Services, Arlington County

**Hope Stonerook**, Deputy Director, Department of Family Services, Loudoun County

**Kerrie Wilson**, President & CEO, Reston Interfaith, Fairfax County

