DESTINATION: HOME EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

10 YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS

2022 RECOMMENDATIONS

Produced in collaboration by:
Carnagua Consulting
Prosperity Indiana

April, 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The community of Evansville committed to cease managing homelessness and aim to end it by creating the first 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness in 2002, Destination: Home. This plan focused on strategies that increase housing options, prevention resources, and services for the most vulnerable, while reducing wait times and the number of homeless households in the region. The plan was updated in 2012 and again in 2022 based on local and outside expert input and community feedback.

Updating Destination: Home is an excellent time to consider the success that has been achieved through focused and strategic work. (Due to the effects of COVID, this plan will rely on population numbers from 2019, the last year data was reliable.) The 2011 Point in Time (PIT Count) was 482, and by 2019 that number was reduced by 15% to 410. Permanent supportive housing units have increased by 266 units, for a total of 333 units in 2022. The community now provides medical respite beds for the homeless, a re-entry program for ex-offenders that reduces recidivism by half, Homeless Connect, Bank On Evansville, diversion training, a police department Homeless Liaison Officer, and a Coordinated Entry System. The community collaboration has made it possible to receive stimulus funding and participate in demonstration projects, increasing the regions resources and knowledge base for providing excellent services. The 2022 update of the plan builds on past success and provides a blueprint for ongoing progress.

The overwhelming community feedback in 2022 is that affordable housing is a top priority, particularly for those with extremely low incomes, youth and young adults, households with eviction or utility debt, and those with mental illness. The community supports building a variety of new housing options to serve the lowest income and most vulnerable citizens. As the United States experiences a national housing shortage, the most vulnerable households are being pushed out of the market. Coordinated entry staff have observed a large number of households with income as the primary barrier to housing. These households don't qualify for permanent supportive housing supports, but they are unable to afford market rate housing. Increasing housing with subsidies and income-based rents would protect these households' stability.

In addition to the focus on affordable housing, Destination: Home planning efforts investigate the needs of special populations, explore how to build a data driven process, and examine collaborative efforts to build resources for the community. The following recommendations are based on a week-long charrette process and expert interviews. The charrette was hosted both in person in the CK Newsome Center in Evansville, Indiana, as well as online via Zoom. The plan topics reviewed and updated include:

- Permanent Housing
- Homeless Prevention
- Children and Youth

- Homeless Healthcare
- Re-Entry
- Performance Measures and Capacity Building
- Coordinated Entry

New Topics Discussed Included:

- The Need for Racial Equity and Cultural Competencies
- The Needs of Specific Populations Landlord/Tenant Relations
- Organizational and Individual Capacity in Homeless Delivery Systems
- Leveraging Myriad Funding Sources to Achieve Goals

Implementation of the following recommendations requires ongoing support from the Commission on Homelessness and the local Continuum of Care. Participating agencies are encouraged to provide staff support, prioritize decision makers' participation in collaboration, and think strategically about committees or coalitions committed to the plan. COH and CoC leadership are encouraged to refer back to the plan and use it as a guiding document as strategies and action steps are developed.

Increase and improve use of the landlord registry, by adding opportunities to contact landlords regarding rental assistance and other forms of assistance available to landlords. Increase data points in the registry to identify who accepts vouchers or other financial assistance. Create a publicly available version that is easy to navigate by the public and case managers assisting households from any organization.

Develop the "business case" to Leverage Multiple Funding Sources. The Commission on Homelessness and the homeless delivery system have the opportunity to help quantify the business case for public/private investments supporting safe affordable housing. Utilizing new data sources (e.g., the cost savings of diversion programs or the bottom-line impact of housing instability on employee attendance) to draft the business case for multiple funders to support housing systems. There is also an opportunity to research alternative funding models such as Recapture and Reuse funding strategies, the creation of social enterprises, or impact investing opportunities to increase funding and affordable housing options.

Prioritize advocacy for housing resources at the local, state, and federal level. Coordinated advocacy efforts can increase access to resources for increasing housing options, serving diverse populations, creating efficiencies in shelter and coordinated entry response systems, achieving equity, and closing provider service gaps such as medical and mental health support. The Commission on Homelessness has the opportunity to bring needs before city and county representatives to discuss particular local needs. Utilize the expertise and capacity of partners such as Prosperity Indiana and IHCDA to multiply the impact of efforts at the state and federal levels.

Build private/public partnerships for development. Increasing housing units is a goal for the public EHA as well as non-profit developers who see the low-income housing need. Increasing public and private partnerships could continue to increase the resources available and allow for increased creativity in how to develop and include low-income housing throughout the community.

Develop subsidized housing for those in need of ongoing income supports but not all the full permanent supportive housing supports. For many homeless and at-risk households, the greatest risk factor is income. The best way to meet his need is to increase housing with subsidies to offset the income.

Advocate for assisted living facilities that accept Medicare and resources for an aging homeless population. As the general population ages, the homeless population is also growing older. This population requires greater assistance than PSH provides. Explore and recommend best practices for both housing and care for this population.

Target single individuals and families for housing development. Affordable one-bedroom units can be hard to come by, but for many that is all they need. Participants pointed out that some under-recognized populations, such as those aging out of foster care, LGBTQ+ youth, or individuals returning from prison or jail, may have children and need housing that can accommodate their family.

Build the capacity of nonprofit housing developers through the collaborative, strategic efforts of a Housing Committee. Assess nonprofit and public entities to understand their current role and capacity. Consider how to strategically align or even merge these organizations to build capacity for doing more of the development process internally. Look for opportunities to include developers of color in collaborative efforts and build the capacity of

minority contractors.

Build housing where people feel safe and welcomed. Consider neighborhoods "where people look like me," are close to schools that welcome diversity, and provide safety to domestic violence victims. Engage community stakeholders as champions to avoid the Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) syndrome and promote services. Recognize the work of these champions as key stakeholders for success and consider compensating them for their time.

HOMELESS PREVENTION

Prioritize diversion efforts such as the Evansville Diversion Network to help households stabilize quickly rather than enter shelter. Diversion is "prevention at the shelter door" and is the best way to target prevention dollars to those most in need out of the at-risk population. Mediation, exploring existing relationships, and considering community resources still available to the client are primary diversion tools to provide "just-in-time" resources. As resources to support this strategy increase, diversion should become part of the coordinated entry process. Diversion decisions should always prioritize the client's needs and safety.

Pursue opportunities to increase landlord understanding of diversion strategies. Helping landlords understand how to connect tenants with services, the impact of lease restrictions on homelessness, and how to address habitability issues will build stronger landlord/tenant relationships and reduce evictions. Landlords could assist tenants in applying for Emergency Rental Assistance.

Increase collaboration through Charity Tracker. Evansville has a large number of organizations that assist with rent, utilities, and other financial needs, but restrictions on funding streams keep these pools of funds separate. Charity Tracker can help these organizations understand a household's situation and respond more holistically and with greater coordination.

Increase supports to households in public housing to reduce turn-over. Households who qualify for public housing have often waited years to get into a housing unit with a subsidy and cannot afford to live elsewhere. However, EHA sees some tenants lose their housing because they do not have enough supports. Partnering with home based services to provide voluntary case management could help at-risk households maintain their housing status and prevent them from returning to the homeless system.

Educate at-risk households about resources available and the importance of seeking assistance prior to eviction. The tight affordable housing market in Evansville and the prevalence of low incomes puts a large number of people at risk of homelessness. Eviction assistance programs have very little they can do at the point of eviction and assistance should be sought 2-3 months prior. Tenants should also be educated on the importance of attending the second eviction hearing to prevent excessive debt being assigned to them at court. Tenant Clinics, where attorneys are able to consult with tenants and landlords prior to court proceedings, deescalate conflicts and should be explored as an option to reduce evictions.

Case management support for at-risk households could help them identify resources and take action prior to eviction. Homeless service agencies and outreach programs cannot serve this population, but home based services can help them. Participation in programs like the GAIN initiative also provide support to help the household improve their circumstances over time.

Educate non-profit providers, faith-based organizations, and employers of the resources available to their clients and employees. Households at risk of homelessness often interact with services outside the homeless services system, but housing cost burdens and instability are a significant factor in their service needs. Helping other nonprofits understand what housing resources are available could improve response times and prevent evictions. According to Society for Human Resource Management, 79% of employers offer employee assistance programs designed to help employees work out non-work related issues that may affect performance. Employers should ensure that EAPs include housing stability and are familiar with local resources.

Learn from the community's COVID response and document what worked well and the limitations organizations faced in responding to the crisis. Use this information to inform a community crisis plan and to inform individual organizations about their role in a national crisis.

Develop an economic crisis plan with city, county, and Commission on Homelessness partnership. This plan would consider how to increase Evansville's resiliency in the face of economic downturns such as the 2008 housing crisis and 2020 COVID pandemic. The plan should include how to safeguard the most vulnerable residents and the organizations that serve them.

Consider private and corporate philanthropy, community loan centers, and employer-sponsored financial wellness programs to decrease households at-risk of homelessness. Federal funding can be challenging to obtain, particularly for asset-building strategies, but local resources such as philanthropists or employers may present new opportunities for fundraising.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Develop income limited housing that includes one-bedroom and family units. One-bedroom units are difficult to find for individuals, and at-risk youth may have children of their own they need to accommodate. Developing a mix of housing types for this population is important to truly fill the need.

Increase funding available for flexible services such as cell phones, car repairs, and other needs that help youth maintain safety, jobs, and income. These funds may also be needed directly for housing repairs to help a young person stay in a rental unit. Federal funding for these services can be challenging to obtain but individuals, corporations, and philanthropic organizations with youth funding priorities may be inclined to support these "barrier-buster" activities.

Increase awareness and connections to home-based services for students and their families. Many students live in doubled-up households and are unable to access strictly homeless services resources, but home-based services are available through other agencies to assist them in increasing income and stability.
Increase access to social workers in the schools, providing at least one in each building. Most EVSC schools are large enough to need two social workers. School social workers have the ability to get to know students well enough to know if they are homeless or housing instable. Without the ability to allow students to tell their experiences to someone, it is difficult to define the supports needed.

Connect students and parents to early learning and childcare resources. These resources can help parents stabilize income or students who are also parents to continue their education and increase their income potential. Increase childcare options for students and young adults who are working to complete school, training pro-

grams, or begin a career. Childcare can be difficult to find and hinder a young person's ability to establish themselves financially. EVSC has two sites that provide childcare for parenting teens who are completing high school. Childcare options that allow them to work or further their education after graduation are important to building a financially stable future.

Connect youth interested in early learning programs or childcare to workforce development. This is a field with high demand, especially in infant care. Training more young people would help fill the need for others while providing a source of income for themselves.

Increase funding through philanthropic resources. Research philanthropic resources for this population and build the business model and information that would appeal to this funding sector. This may include developing performance metrics for philanthropists interested in an outcomes-based approach.

Develop youth data points and collection strategies that would inform programs and funding development. This population includes doubled up youth identified by the school system, youth aging out of foster care, and young adults 18-24 in the homeless system.

HOMELESS HEALTHCARE

Reach further into the community through existing healthcare systems. This shift will require some research to identify how ECHO, hospitals, and individual practitioners can best serve the homeless population. Homeless individuals are living in an unstable crisis situation and often don't have the organizational capacity to keep or follow up on appointments or maintain their medications. Further support is needed for those individuals to get and maintain the medical care they need.

Expand the mobile health unit as a regular fixture of homeless healthcare. A mobile unit has been used as a COVID response to distribute vaccinations among shelters, but this model could be expanded to include regular medical care, telehealth, and other basic services. Discussion at the charrette identified the following needs for this unit:
* HERSA approval
* Large enough for entry
* Consistent operating times at each location
* Prevention and ongoing care
* Safe parking space with access from the building to the unit

Support staff recruitment for ECHO Healthcare. As the community's Federally Qualified Health Center they provide care to low and no income individuals on a sliding scale that goes to $0 for the homeless. This resource is indispensable for serving the homeless, but the national nurse shortage affects their ability to remain fully staffed and see as many clients as possible.

Identify new trends in healthcare needs among the homeless and design service delivery systems to match the needs.

Open the door for collaborative conversations regarding "Working Upstream" or understanding how prevention and systems issues impact health and homelessness. Incorporating health equity and Social Determinants

of Health principles into decision-making processes, funder conversations, and service delivery options could strengthen public health, reduce costs of services, and increase funding for services.

Advocate for use of the new database to identify and apply for resources prior to release. This database has recently been built by Laura Taylor with Building Blocks for use statewide. The Department of Corrections will be asked to make utilizing this database a regular part of the discharge process to help increase the resources available to ex-offenders immediately after release.

Establish funding to maintain the database and data collection. This process will require staff time to keep entries up to date and to go through the resources for each offender prior to release.

Partner with USI to collect and analyze the data. This process should improve outcomes for ex-offenders immediately and also help inform service providers over the long term. Because the system collects personal information and serves people, it must be overseen by an Institutional Review Board through the University.

Build relationships with small landlords and locally owned property management to increase possible rental units. Large companies have inflexible policies that exclude ex-offenders, but small landlords are more willing to provide housing for this population, especially if they know they are working with a program and have support.

Consider new models to secure and pay for housing that may offer the landlord more security. This may include paying program dollars directly to landlords, guaranteeing payment through a fund that covers missed payments, or flexible dollars to cover damages.

Deliver tenant and financial education courses if landlords are more willing to work with clients after completion. Explore this option with landlords already working with the Re-Entry Network and those who are interested to see if it may expand landlord options.

Invite a broad range of organizations to the network and educate them on how they can help. Supporting ex-offenders is most successful with a holistic approach, which requires a variety of community partners. Some agencies are willing to help but don't know how they can help this population. The Re-Entry Network bridges the gap between ex-offenders and community resources.

Engage Oxford House Development or another transitional housing developer to build transitional housing specifically for this population. Offenders are able to begin planning about 30 days prior to their release, but often this isn't enough time to find stable housing. Transitional housing provides the opportunity to land in a safe and stable environment while looking for employment and engaging with other community supports. Partner with permanent housing providers to help tenants move to permanent housing easily.

Identify and collect process level data to better understand how the service system is operating. This type of data includes points such as how long a Request for Tenancy Approval for Section 8 takes, the length of the inspection

process, length of homelessness, and more. This information can help identify structural challenges that could be improved.

Hire staff with sufficient time dedicated to data collection and analysis. This work requires intensive hours to identify the data the community needs, ensure it is being collected uniformly, and analyze the data in a meaningful way. Staff should focus on both HMIS and Charity Tracker to build a sufficient picture of community needs and outcomes. This person should also work closely with coordinated entry staff to use CE data to identify gaps and inform housing priorities.

Identify local data collection priorities. These priorities should include information that is helpful to improving equity, service delivery and development decisions. The following data points are recommendations, additional priorities should continue to be developed:

- Location of veterans who are eligible for services
- Composition of households in shelters in real time
- Background prior to the night before, especially if someone left another location to come to Evansville
- Youth homelessness
- Race
- Gender

Build the infrastructure necessary to collect this information. HMIS data fields are generated by IHCDA for the 91 county Balance of State Continuum of Care, but as a mid-sized city and regional hub, Evansville has greater data needs than many of the other counties. A secondary data collection system would allow Evansville to control the data they are collecting and access it more easily. Charity Tracker is currently being used by other nonprofits in Evansville and should be explored as an option for homeless services. The data system should allow specified users to run regional reports as needed. Dashboards making data easy to see at a glance and updated regularly would improve usability. Tableau is a data visualization software that could be integrated with the system or utilized by data staff.

Establish a data group to focus on the above priorities and assist in data collection and use outside of available staff time. Without a hired staff person, this group would be the primary parties responsible for establishing data priorities and strategies to obtain and learn from the data.

Improve HMIS data and find errors through a partnership of Coordinated Entry staff and IHCDA staff. Utilize this process to improve local training of HMIS users.

Build visibility of local performance measures and increase awareness of community goals and progress in homeless services.

Ensure all users have adequate time and training to enter data accurately. The timeliness of data should be a priority among all users, making sure data is entered within 5 days.

COORDINATED ENTRY

Map the homeless services system and use this process to identify gaps and needs in the system. Work with community partners to develop system changes or advocate for needed resources.

Use CE data to identify and increase needed housing options and system improvements. This work has identified the following needs:

- Permanent institutional settings for those who need ongoing mental health support or a group home environment. PSH is not designed to serve individuals with this type of need and there is no adequate placement within the homeless service system.
- More subsidized housing
- Accurate landlord understanding of PSH and what scattered site PSH programs can or cannot do for clients.

Continue to evaluate the system for scoring and prioritizing victims of domestic violence and special populations to ensure equity. Adjustments have already been made to account for time constraints on domestic violence shelters and the danger of someone's home situation.

Rebuild the resource framework of staff within the homeless services system. COVID has changed the system landscape through both staff turnover and agencies pivoting to meet emergency needs. Community efforts to train new staff in services available from other agencies and processes for accessing resources will improve client access to services.

Develop an advertising and awareness campaign to build community awareness and understanding of the CE system. Help people understand that the system operates on a prioritization list and ensures the most vulnerable people access to appropriate housing and services.

ADDITIONAL GOALS

Increase homeless involvement in planning and Commission on Homelessness activities. Develop funds to pay homeless or formerly homeless individuals for their involvement in committees just as agency representatives are paid to be at meetings. Develop strategies to increase their input in 10-year planning efforts.

Educate the community about panhandling and encourage giving less to individuals on the street and more to nonprofit service providers. The Evansville Police Department has documented that over $100k are given to panhandlers each year and, together with the COH, recommends redirecting those funds to support a Homeless Services Trust fund, PSH, Diversion, or other homeless and housing services. This requires a marketing campaign and a fund to collect redirected donations.

Develop systems to address the substandard housing stock in Evansville. As the housing stock in Evansville ages, units occupied by low-income renters are not receiving the maintenance they need and the housing quality is decreasing. Utilize code enforcement and other policy protections to require improvements. Determine how many units may be lost due to the financial burden of making improvements and move slowly to allow time for the community to replace them.

Increase cultural competency and translation services among nonprofit providers. Evansville is a culturally diverse community that has seen an increase in Hispanic, Haitian Creole, Afghan, and Marshallese populations. Nonprofits desire to be sensitive to cultural differences and provide adequate translation services so community resources can serve these populations well.

Build the strength of collaborations. Improve the effectiveness of Continuum of Care meetings by encouraging executive directors or other decision makers to be at the table. As new committees are created to address Destination: Home goals, design committee structures to increase action between meetings and decrease meeting burn out.

Increase staff welfare and reduce turnover by paying social workers more and staffing agencies at levels that allow staff to take time off. Creating a talent pipeline for professionals at the entry, mid, and senior level of services is required to help reduce stress and increase the impact of services. Having long term staff trained in the resources for serving the homeless requires pay and benefits that allow staff to continue to care for their families and themselves.

Seek and advocate for case management funding. Use this funding to pay existing social workers more and also to increase the number of staff members. Case management was a need repeated throughout interviews and the charrette, as many vulnerable clients need support to identify resources, make appointments, and follow through on application processes. Ex-offenders and doubled up households need greater access to case management services to stabilize their housing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

Carnagua Consulting is a private consulting firm that provides facilitation and planning services for nonprofit organizations and communities. Naila Carnagua has experience in homeless services and affordable housing with a background in urban planning and community development.

Prosperity Indiana (PI) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization dedicated to developing the skills of Indiana community economic development (CED) professionals. With more than 35 years of experience in providing services that build the capacity of homeless service providers, affordable housing developers and local units of government, PI strengthens the CED talent pipeline at the entry, mid-career, and executive levels.