Service Providers Working Collaboratively to Document the Plight of the Rural Homeless

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What does homelessness look like in rural communities?

• The widely reported annual PIT data does not accurately represent the number of people truly impacted by homelessness in rural communities. Come hear about the process used in Columbia County to collect data from organizations that typically do not report data in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and on clients that are often not counted in other data collection efforts. This data has been used to create a profile of local needs and enhance program development. The presenters will discuss why this data is key to local, regional and CoC-wide planning efforts to reduce and end homelessness.
Why collect local data?
In Columbia County

- We began in 2013 with a model piloted in Bradford and Sullivan counties
- Researchers and practitioners collaborated on the design
  - Adapted it several times
    - Increased, decreased, and refined the questions
    - Changed the question order
    - Created a web based version
- We apply a broad definition of homeless and accept data from any group that works with this population.
We collect data on:

- Date of encounter, interviewer, organization, and county
- Head of household initials, and date of birth
- Number of people and children in household
- Specific needs
- Reasons they are homeless
  - If they are being evicted, why?
- Length of time homeless
- Income amount and types
- Whether that are a veteran, disabled, a domestic violence survivor, and whether they require accessible housing.
- Where they are currently staying
- What assistance (if any) was provided.
Compiling data:

• Initially service providers brought paper data sheets to monthly homelessness taskforce meetings

• Now most submit on-line

• Bloomsburg University enters, stores, and reports on the data to service providers
Challenges

• Some providers do not like asking the questions for fear it can offer false hope
• Not everyone participates
• Participation varies by season
• This makes data interpretation tricky

However

• Because it is truly local data and a collaborative effort, our team knows the context in which the data are collected and can account for this in our interpretation of the data
Data Overview

• 498 cases (469 unique individuals) between August 2013 and October 2017
• 6 main agencies contributing data
• 66% female
• Ages between 18 and 74
  • Most between 20 and 50
What are the characteristics of housing insecure individuals in our community?

- 45% are pregnant or parenting
- 41% sought help while facing eviction or foreclosure
- 32% are disabled
- 16% say that they are underemployed or unemployed
- 13% are domestic violence survivors
  - 5% attribute their housing status to domestic violence
- 10% sought help while going through a divorce or separation
- 7% are veterans
- 5% substance abuse
- 4% released from prison
- 3% have a dual diagnosis
- 3% are transient
With so many clients facing eviction or foreclosure, we asked why? Most said:

- Job loss or reduction in hours
- Unexpected expense (car repair, healthcare costs, childcare costs, heating costs, court costs, funeral expenses)
- Relationship change (divorce, conflict with parents or child)
How long have our clients been homeless?

- Not Yet Homeless: 45%
- 1 week or less: 10%
- More than a week but less than a month: 15%
- 1-3 months: 20%
- More than a month, but less than a year: 5%
- 1 year or more: 0%
What are the situations our clients are currently living in?

- Currently housed 50%
- With friends or family 33%
- Temporary Shelter 5%
- Domestic Violence Shelter 2%
- Street or structure not intended for habitation 9%
- Prison 1%
How do men and women differ?

- Men are more likely to be
  - unemployed or underemployed
  - transient
  - substance abusers
  - released from prison
  - dual diagnosis
  - veterans
  - already homeless but homeless less than 3 months
  - Lower income

- Women are more likely to be
  - Evicted of foreclosed on (27% compared to 49%)
  - Not yet homeless
What are the characteristic of our pregnant or parenting clients

• Less likely to have a disability or mental illness
• Less likely to say they are underemployed or unemployed
• Less likely to have substance abuse problems
• More likely to be facing eviction or foreclosure
• Not yet homeless (61%) or homeless less than 3 months 31%
• Higher income
What are the characteristics of our homeless veterans?

• Higher rates of disability and mental illness
• Higher rates of unemployment and underemployment
• Lower rates of eviction or foreclosure
SERVICE PROVIDERS WORKING COLLABORATIVELY TO DOCUMENT THE PLIGHT OF THE RURAL HOMELESS

Leigh Howard
Diana T. Myers & Associates, Inc. (DMA)
PA's Eastern & Western Continuums of Care
(PA Balance of State)
EASTERN & WESTERN PA COCS HAVE NEW FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLANS.

• There are differences within the two plans, but commonalities include the following goals:
OUTCOME:
Reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness by 50%
OUTCOME:
Achieve & maintain functional zero

- **Functional zero**: Your system has enough resources & capacity to quickly help those entering homelessness obtain housing again.
- **Chronic homelessness**: Long-term homelessness - 12+ continuous or episodic months - among those with a disability.
OUTCOME:
Achieve & maintain functional zero
REDUCE HOMELESSNESS AMONG FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

OUTCOMES:

- Reduce all homelessness among families with children by 50%
- Zero unsheltered families with children
REDUCE HOMELESSNESS AMONG UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH

OUTCOME: Reduce the number of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness by:
• 50% (West)
• 75% (East)

Youth: Those under 25 years of age, including single individuals and parenting youth.
SET A PATH TO END ALL HOMELESSNESS:
FAMILIES W/CHILDREN, YOUTH, COUPLES, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES INCLUDING ADDICTION, AND THOSE FLEEING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

5-YEAR OUTCOME:
Reduce duration of homelessness

- CoC’s long-range goal: Reduce the average length of time homeless to 30 days or less
SYSTEM PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Number of persons experiencing homelessness
- Number of persons who become homeless for the first time
- Length of Time persons remain homeless
- Successful place in or retention of permanent housing
- The extent to which persons who exit homelessness to permanent housing return to homelessness
- Employment and income growth while enrolled in CoC programs
OUR DATA

What we know about the number of households experiencing homelessness
## Coverage Rate within PA Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

### Eastern PA CoC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bed Type</th>
<th>Total Beds</th>
<th>HMIS %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Shelter</td>
<td>1,490</td>
<td>40.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Housing</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>76.02%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Western PA CoC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bed Type</th>
<th>Total Beds</th>
<th>HMIS %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Shelter</td>
<td>769</td>
<td>55.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Housing</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>87.54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Eastern PA CoC
- 2,170 total people
- 1,004 in emergency shelter
- 761 in transitional housing
- 405 unsheltered
- 156 chronically homeless
- 82 veterans
- 306 family households
- 206 youth

### Western PA CoC
- 837 total people
- 451 in emergency shelter
- 38 in safe haven
- 285 in transitional housing
- 63 unsheltered
- 29 chronically homeless
- 94 veterans
- 98 family households
- 57 youth
Outcomes on System Performance Measures (per FY16 SPM Report)

- Length of time homeless
  - East = 67 days in ES; West = 75 days in ES & SH
  - East = 125 days in ES & TH; West = 126 days in ES, SH & TH

- Income growth
  - East is more than doubling the % with earned income (11% to 25%); West increases in earned income are smaller and are off setting increases in unearned income

- Exits to permanent housing
  - East = 53%; West = 63%
STRATEGIES

- Increase Leadership, Collaboration and Civic Engagement
- Increase Affordable Housing Resources
- Increase the Economic Security of Households
- Expand & Align Resources
- Retool & Strengthen the Homeless Assistance System
- Increase Capacity for Data Collection & Analysis
COLUMBIA COUNTY DATA
Columbia County data, reported to Bloomsburg

- 498 cases (469 unique individuals) between August 2013 and October 2017
- 45% not yet homeless
- 14% homeless one week or less
- 11% homeless more than a week, less than a month
- 14% homeless between 1-3 months
- 10% homeless between 4-12 months
- 7% homeless between 1 year+
Columbia County data, reported to Bloomsburg

- 5% in temporary shelter (23)
- 9% unsheltered (42)
- 5% homeless because fleeing DV (23)
- 4% just released from prison (19)
- 7% veterans (33)
- Ages between 18 and 74
  - Most between 20 and 50
Columbia County Projects known to CoC

- Beyond Violence, Berwick Women’s Emergency Shelter
- Columbia County Human Services, Hotel/Motel Vouchers
- Orangeville Manor, Health Care for Homeless Veterans program
- The Women’s Center of Columbia/Montour Counties, Emergency Shelter & Transitional Housing
Data collected from Columbia County Projects on 2017 PIT night

- 15 people in Emergency Shelter
  - 2 families with 6 people
  - 9 single individuals
- 3 people in Transitional Housing
  - 1 family with 3 people
- 1 single individual found unsheltered
- 2 reported Severe Mental Illness
- 5 reported Chronic Substance Abuse
- 5 were veterans
- 8 were fleeing Domestic Violence
Other information we don’t know
To learn more about the Eastern and/or Western PA CoC:

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• **Visit** [http://pennsylvaniacoc.org/](http://pennsylvaniacoc.org/)