

Schenectady County Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness



Prepared by

The Schenectady County Homeless Services Planning Board
with Staff Support by CARES, Inc.

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**SCHENECTADY COUNTY
 PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS**

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EN YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Localities throughout the United States have been fighting an uphill battle to reduce the number of homeless individuals and families. Despite the best efforts of federal, state, and local governments, as well as not-for-profit service providers, the number of homeless persons has reached an all-time high. According to data released by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2007, it is estimated that on any given night 754,000 people are homeless in the United States.

The purpose of developing a Plan to End Homelessness is to identify and coordinate all available resources to achieve the goal of ending homelessness in a particular community. Studies show that there is an immense financial burden on emergency services, hospital emergency rooms, mental health and substance abuse services, law enforcement and correctional facilities in communities where individuals and families do not have access to adequate housing and supportive services. There is also a risk that economic development and business itself may be adversely impacted by the presence of chronically homeless persons in downtowns or by the lack of affordable workforce housing. Increasingly, communities throughout the country are recognizing the toll that homelessness takes on all of their members and have committed themselves to bringing together a wide array of community leaders and policymakers to develop a plan to ensure stable housing for all citizens.

In recent years, both the City and County of Schenectady have made economic revitalization a top priority. Under the leadership of Mayor Brian Stratton, the city has begun the development of *Schenectady 2020*, a comprehensive blueprint for strengthening our neighborhoods, housing, shopping, and recreational opportunities. Schenectady County has itself been active in a variety of development projects throughout the region and has made great strides in strengthening its economy and revitalizing the community. Ongoing efforts to retain existing employers have resulted in the expansion of job opportunities within the county. A significant expansion of the historic Proctor's Theatre and the recent addition of a state-of-the-art cinema are helping the City to position itself as a cultural and artistic haven. The region's persistent courting of the nanotechnology industry has brought hundreds of well-paying jobs to New York's Capital Region, a development that is sure to benefit Schenectady County as the new workers search the region for housing and recreational opportunities.

Despite these efforts, there is certain to be a segment of the population who is left behind. Individuals who are homeless or precariously housed are unlikely to be qualified for the high-paying tech jobs coming into the city, and the corresponding rise in housing prices is increasing the risk of homelessness, particularly for families. In addition, the attempts to revitalize the city's downtown have produced conflicts between housing providers, the business community, and neighborhood associations.

It is for these reasons that this planning effort is so vital. Both the service providers and the businesses can find common ground in the desire to keep homeless individuals off the streets and

Planning and ongoing coordination, Schenectady City and County are committed to a future in which all of their citizens can benefit.

The goals for the Schenectady County Plan to End Homelessness focus on preventing homelessness, guaranteeing the availability of emergency services for those who do become homeless, developing and retaining affordable housing, and providing support services to facilitate the transition to permanent housing and to ensuring housing stability. Recommendations for each goal include consideration for the special needs of each sub-population to be served.

- Homelessness Prevention: Increase resources for prevention efforts as the first line of defense in combating homelessness.
- Emergency Services: Establish a seamless safety net system to provide care during crisis situations.
- Housing: Expand the availability of safe, affordable permanent housing throughout Schenectady County.
- Support Services: Strengthen community supports for formerly homeless individuals and families to ensure housing stability.

When working in conjunction with each other, these efforts will successfully reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness, the length of time people are homeless, and eliminate future episodes of homelessness.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Throughout this document, terms have been used that may be unfamiliar to those who are not part of the existing housing and service delivery system for homeless individuals and families. Even among those who work within this system, terms have varying meanings. For example, the definition of "homelessness" differs among the federal and New York State agencies that fund programs that serve this population. The following definitions are used for the purposes of clarifying the meaning of the terms used in the plan.

Chronic Homelessness: In this document, the definition provided by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has been used. The HUD definition of a chronically homeless person is "an unaccompanied single adult with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for one year or who has experienced four or more episodes of homelessness within the last three years." Please note that this definition excludes families and homeless youth, even though many families and persons under the age of 18 may have experienced similar long-term homelessness. While the following plan addresses the needs of families and youth who have experienced long-term homelessness, only single adults with disabling conditions are discussed under the section that specifically addresses chronic homelessness.

Emergency Housing: Short-term housing provided in response to a housing crisis, offered in emergency shelters (congregate facilities used for this purpose) or motel rooms funded as emergency housing by either a public or not-for-profit agency.

Homelessness: This plan uses the HUD definition of homelessness, which is as follows:

- sleeping on the streets or places not meant for human habitation;
- sleeping in an emergency shelter (or a motel room funded as emergency housing);
- living in transitional housing after having been on the streets or in emergency shelter;
- staying for a period of up to 30 days in a hospital or other institution after having been on the street or in emergency shelter;
- being threatened with an eviction within one week from a private dwelling unit;
- or being discharged within one week from an institution in which the resident has been a resident more than 30 days and no appropriate housing has been identified.

It should be noted that this definition does not include persons who are precariously housed due to paying too high a percentage of their incomes for rent, nor those doubled up with family or friends because no other housing is available. However, the plan does include homelessness prevention strategies targeted to these at-risk populations.

Housing Choice Voucher: The current name for the Section 8 Housing Program, which still tends to be referred to as the Section 8 Program. (Please see "Section 8 Program" below.)

is focused on securing permanent housing, coupled with services, as quickly as possible for individuals and families after they have become homeless. In contrast, the more traditional housing model requires homeless persons to successfully complete different stages of housing (such as emergency housing and transitional housing) in order to demonstrate housing readiness. In the traditional housing model, completion of each housing stage requires physical movement to new housing, causing disruption with each move.

“Low-Demand” Housing: Housing that allows program participants who are in need of supportive and treatment services to determine the type and intensity of services that they receive, rather than having to comply with pre-existing service and treatment requirements. Studies indicate that most program participants eventually do agree to accept supportive and treatment services when allowed to access them according to their own timetable.

Low-Income Housing: Housing that is affordable to those who are at or below 30% of the median income for the area in which they live. This is housing for very impoverished persons, many of whom are reliant on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or temporary assistance through the Department of Social Services as their only income.

Permanent Housing: Housing that can be occupied for an indefinite period, as long as the tenant complies with lease requirements. One type of permanent housing is permanent supportive housing, which is permanent housing accompanied by ongoing supportive and treatment services. Many persons with disabilities require permanent supportive housing in order to remain stably housed.

Poverty: The set minimum amount of income that a family needs for food, clothing, transportation, shelter and other necessities. In the U.S., this level is determined by the Department of Health and Human Services. Federal Poverty Level varies according to family size. The number is adjusted for inflation and reported annually in the form of poverty guidelines.

Public Housing: Housing, usually operated by public housing authorities, established to provide decent and safe rental units for eligible low-income families, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Public housing comes in all sizes and types, from scattered single-family houses to high-rise apartments for elderly families.

Section 8 Housing Program (now called the Housing Choice Voucher Program): Housing assistance secured from a local housing authority or other authorized provider, in the form of direct payments to landlords, that low-income people can use to rent apartments and homes on the private market.

Single Room Occupancy (SRO): Permanent housing providing an individual a single room in which to live. These units may contain food preparation or sanitary facilities, or these may be shared with others.

...ne business or strategy undertaken by a nonprofit to
...ritable mission. "Earned income" consists of payments
received in direct exchange for a product, service or privilege. Social enterprises commonly
serve as a place of employment for consumers receiving supportive services from the not-for-
profit agency.

Social Security Disability Insurance: A federally-funded wage-replacement program, administered by the Social Security Administration, for those who have a disability meeting Social Security rules and who have paid FICA taxes. SSDI is financed with Social Security taxes paid by workers, employers, and self-employed persons. SSDI benefits are payable to disabled workers, widows, widowers, and children or adults disabled since childhood who are otherwise eligible.

Supplemental Security Income: A Federal income supplement program funded by general tax revenues and designed to help aged, blind, and disabled people, who have little or no income. The program provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter.

Transitional Housing: Housing coupled with supportive and treatment services that is provided on a time-limited basis (in most cases, not exceeding 24 months). The primary distinction between transitional housing and permanent housing is that in transitional housing, the program, not the participant, determines the length of stay.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD): A cabinet-level agency of the federal government whose mission is to increase homeownership, support community development and increase access to affordable housing free from discrimination. HUD is the primary federal funder of low-income housing for homeless persons.

U. S. Interagency Council on Homelessness: Congress established the Interagency Council on Homelessness in 1987 with the passage of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. The Council is responsible for providing Federal leadership for activities to assist homeless families and individuals.

ON 1: BACKGROUND

Introduction: History of the Initiative

Localities throughout the United States have been fighting an uphill battle to reduce the number of homeless individuals and families. Despite the best efforts of federal, state, and local governments, as well as not-for-profit service providers, the number of homeless persons has reached an all-time high. According to data released by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2007, it is estimated that on any given night 754,000 people are homeless in the United States.

Under the Bush Administration, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), with the support of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the National Conference of Mayors and other coalitions and advocacy groups, has encouraged communities to aggressively commit their efforts to *ending* homelessness, rather than simply addressing the problem from year to year. In what has become a national movement, the USICH challenged communities to develop and implement plans to end homelessness within ten years. Since 2002, more than 300 cities and towns have developed Ten Year Plans to End Homelessness, including the metropolises of Miami, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York City, among others, as well as smaller communities such as Austin, Texas, Burlington, Vermont, and Lansing, Michigan. Within New York State's Capital Region, Albany County released its Plan to End Homelessness in 2005, with Rensselaer County following in 2006. Saratoga County, New York, and Pittsfield, Massachusetts are in the process of developing their own plans.

While many of the Ten Year Plans developed nationally focus on the population of chronically homeless individuals, defined by HUD as unaccompanied adults who have been homeless for twelve consecutive months or who have experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years, the Capital Region plans have all expanded their scope to include families, youth and the elderly. Family homelessness in particular has been identified as the most pressing local concern, with the number of homeless families in the Capital Region reaching its highest level yet in 2006. Nationally, each year 600,000 families with 1.35 million children (about half of the annual homeless population) will experience at least one episode of homelessness. Last year in Schenectady County, more than 600 families were served by homeless service providers, with additional families placed in motels by the Department of Social Services and 336 seeking refuge from domestic violence. By expanding the scope and including strategies such as homelessness prevention and the expansion of affordable housing Schenectady County will ensure that its Ten Year Plan will have a broad and powerful impact.

The purpose of developing a Plan to End Homelessness is to identify and assemble all available resources to achieve the goal of ending homelessness in a particular community. Studies show that there is an immense financial burden on emergency services, hospital emergency rooms, mental health and substance abuse services, law enforcement and correctional facilities in communities where individuals and families do not have access to adequate housing and supportive services. There is also a risk that economic development and business itself may be adversely impacted by the presence of chronically homeless persons in downtowns or by the lack of affordable workforce housing. Increasingly, communities throughout the country are

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Developing the Schenectady Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness

In recent years, both the City and County of Schenectady have made economic revitalization a top priority. Under the leadership of Mayor Brian Stratton, the city has begun the development of *Schenectady 2020*, a comprehensive blueprint for strengthening our neighborhoods housing, shopping, and recreational opportunities. Schenectady County has itself been active in a variety of development projects throughout the region. While these efforts are already succeeding in attracting additional manufacturing jobs to the county and establishing downtown Schenectady as a cultural center, it is clear that without a concerted effort, this rising tide is unlikely to raise the boats of the county's most vulnerable citizens. That reality has illustrated the need to integrate planning for homeless services with the City and County's own plans for economic development.

In an effort to gather the greatest amount of community feedback, county and city government officials, non-profit service providers, policy advocates, and members of the community at large were invited to participate in the development of a Plan to End Homelessness for Schenectady County. For more than a year, focus groups, community meetings, and individual interviews were conducted to gain insight and perspective into the issue of homelessness in Schenectady County and to find mutual areas of agreement for ending homelessness as it exists today.

Economic Development and Ending Homelessness

Schenectady County is a community rich in history and accomplishment. First settled in the early 1600s, Schenectady has a vitality that has allowed the community to grow and adapt to the changing environments. Schenectady rose to great prominence when Thomas Edison founded what would become the General Electric Company. For generations, General Electric and all of the companies that developed to support the industry offered thousands of jobs paying a living wage. Beginning in the 1970s, changes in the economy, exacerbated by the Sunbelt migration and overseas outsourcing led to a dramatic reduction in Schenectady County's industrial base. The downsizing left the community with a reduced population, fewer job opportunities and an aging housing stock that has proven expensive to maintain.

In recent years, Schenectady County has made great strides to strengthen its economy and revitalize the community. Ongoing efforts to retain existing employers have succeeded in slowing the loss of additional jobs and are beginning to yield some small expansions of the company's presence within the county. A significant expansion of the historic Proctor's Theater and the recent addition of a state-of-the-art cinema are helping the City to position itself as a cultural and artistic haven. The region's persistent courting of the nanotechnology industry has brought hundreds of well-paying jobs to New York's Capital Region, a development that is sure to benefit Schenectady County as the new workers search the region for housing and recreational opportunities.

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It is for these reasons that this planning effort is so vital. Both the service providers and the businesses can find common ground in the desire to keep homeless individuals off the streets and in housing. Through collaborative planning and ongoing coordination, Schenectady City and County can ensure that their future is one in which all of their citizens can benefit.

Homelessness in Schenectady County

Identifying the number of homeless persons as well as their characteristics is a daunting task. It is not possible to merely aggregate the number of people served by each agency, since many homeless persons access services from multiple providers and the number of persons living on the street at any given time may change in relationship to the weather. In addition, many homeless persons stay in places that are hidden from public view, making them difficult to identify.

It is for these reasons that Schenectady County's homeless service providers have recently begun providing data into the Capital Region Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The Capital Region HMIS is an electronic data management system designed to produce an unduplicated count of homeless persons in the county, as well as a demographic profile of the population. While providers are still being added to the system, preliminary HMIS data shows that in 2006, more than 1,600 Schenectady County households experienced homelessness, including more than 600 families with children. With the informed consent of the clients, a significant number self-identified mental illness, drug abuse and alcohol abuse as special needs. Other commonly identified challenges included physical disabilities, domestic violence, and HIV/AIDS. All persons reported a need for assistance with housing stability.

Since the HMIS data is still preliminary, and even when fully implemented will only document those individuals and families who seek services, it is necessary to consider local data collected through other methods. Each January, Schenectady participates in the HUD required Point-In-Time count, a physical assessment of who is homeless. This count includes both reports from emergency shelters and transitional living programs, and also captures data about those individuals observed by teams of volunteers to be living on the street, in cars or abandoned buildings, or other places not meant for human habitation.

On the night of January 24, 2007, volunteers swept the county and counted 64 individuals living on the streets. In addition, 280 individuals and 45 families with children were living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and emergency motel placements. These numbers do not include the formerly homeless persons who are residing in programs specifically designed to provide long-term housing stability; these programs are included in the HMIS.

timeö numbers include the many individuals who are housed in facilities such as mental health and substance abuse facilities or jails and may very well have undercounted those living in cars or abandoned buildings, particularly in the county's more rural communities. Not included in either count are the large number of individuals, families and youth who live precariously doubled up with relatives or friends.

Who Experiences Homelessness?

Homelessness in Schenectady County, as in most regions across the country, affects all facets of the community. For purposes of discussion, we have sub-divided populations to better describe the general characteristics of each.

Chronic Homelessness

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines a person who is chronically homeless as: "a single, unaccompanied adult with a disabling condition who has experienced homelessness for one year continuously, or has experienced four episodes of homelessness within the past three years." A chronically homeless person is typically living on the street suffering with mental illness and/or a chemical dependency. Because of their disabilities and past negative experiences, chronically homeless people often distrust government and social service agencies and many have been unable or unwilling to access housing and services. Research suggests that while chronically homeless individuals account for approximately 10% of local homeless populations, they consume as much as 50% of the resources. In Schenectady County, there are an estimated 57 chronically homeless persons in need of housing. There are innovative programs in Schenectady County that have been successful in engaging and permanently housing this population, enabling many within this difficult-to-serve population to have a life filled with hope and dignity. These existing programs are operating at full capacity, and there is substantial demand for greater resources.

Family Homelessness

Both anecdotal and statistical data suggest that homelessness has increased significantly to include more families with children, non-traditional family types and a greater number of working poor households. In Schenectady County, when needed, motels are used as an emergency measure to ensure families are not living on the street. As families find it increasingly difficult to afford rising apartment rental and utility costs, they are staying in motels longer and longer. In 2006, the Schenectady County Department of Social Services (DSS) placed many families into motels for emergency housing. In response, DSS has increased transitional housing resources by 100%; however there are still many families that are not served in this manner. There are simply not enough safe, affordable apartments for all the families who need them.

Youth Homelessness

Youth who have nowhere to call home are often found living in abandoned buildings, on the streets, and most often "couch surfing" moving from friends' house to friends' house, or relying on an exchange of sex, drugs, and food for housing in a cycle that just barely escapes formal homelessness. Last year in Schenectady, nearly 200 youth under the age of 21 requested homeless services. It is likely that there are many more that would benefit from services, but

lack of awareness of what services are available, or a need for assistance. Schenectady County has made a significant effort to engage young people through the provision of street outreach services and an emergency shelter for youth, as well as several youth centers and enrichment programs. Expanding these resources is critical to providing teens and young adults with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in housing, education, and employment.

Elderly Homelessness

Just as the aging population is affecting services and resources in mainstream society, it is also affecting the homeless community. As the baby boom generation enters retirement age, more and more homeless persons who are already utilizing the homeless service system are aging in place. In fact, more than 10% persons in Schenectady's homeless service system are over the age of 50, including 2% over the age of 60. This aging population often requires specialized medical care and supportive services. Traditional homeless service providers are not sufficiently equipped or staffed to provide the necessary care to this vulnerable population.

It is important to remember that while the above subpopulation descriptions portray broad characteristics, these generalizations do not describe the individual circumstances of any individual or family who is, or has, experienced homelessness. All goals and recommendations for ending homelessness must offer sufficient flexibility for meeting the specific needs of individuals and families within each of the subpopulations.

Causes of Homelessness

There is no single cause of homelessness, nor is there a single solution for ending it. Among its contributing factors are poverty, lack of decent and affordable housing, an increasing inability for members of extended families to care for other disabled and/or impoverished family members, domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, physical disability, and other life challenges. While each of these factors puts an individual at risk of homelessness, evidence suggests that the most predictive factors for homelessness are poverty coupled with one or more disabilities. Mental illness, alcoholism and substance abuse generally do not lead to homelessness for those of middle or higher incomes. At the same time, many impoverished persons without a disability can live at the fringes for years without ever actually losing their housing. However, for individuals struggling with both poverty and disabilities, the risk of homelessness is significant.

Because of this, poverty must be discussed as a significant factor contributing to homelessness. The 2000 U.S. Census Bureau indicates that the poverty rate in Schenectady County is 10.9%, a rate lower than that for all of New York State (14.6%). Within the City of Schenectady, however, the 20.8% poverty rate is significantly higher than in the rest of the state and is nearly twice the level of the county's rural and suburban towns. This means that one in five persons in Schenectady County's city center is living below the federal poverty line.

The Census data also indicate that 67.5% of renters in Schenectady County earning less than \$20,000 annually spend more than 35% of their income on housing. It is clear that impoverished



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onate amount of income for their housing, creating
aining and maintaining stable housing quite difficult.

In Schenectady County, the HUD-calculated Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment is \$752, a figure that is meant to encompass the cost of both rent and basic utilities. According to the National Low-Income Housing Coalition's Out of Reach study, a Schenectady family would need to earn at least \$30,080 per year (an hourly wage of \$14.46/hr) to afford a modest two-bedroom rental unit. This study further concludes that these housing prices are outside the range of affordability for 51% of the County's renters, leaving them vulnerable to eviction if there is a crisis such as loss of employment, increased medical costs, or temporary disability of a family member. For these families, any increase in expenses, such as those in heating and other utility costs that are currently being experienced throughout Schenectady County, could place them at risk of homelessness.

It is important to recognize that many of those who become homeless have lost their housing due to a disability such as mental illness, chemical dependency, HIV/AIDS, or other physical disability. Mental illness and addiction may frequently result in a loss of employment, and can lead to behaviors that limit one's ability to retain their housing. Furthermore, without adequate discharge planning and community-based case management, those leaving institutional settings, such as psychiatric inpatient units, drug or alcohol rehabilitation programs, foster care, and correctional facilities, may face release into settings that are inappropriate for supportive care, leading to further instability, relapse and a continued risk of homelessness.

To further complicate matters, there are fewer decent, affordable apartments on the rental market. While Schenectady County housing remains affordable as compared to neighboring communities, low-income persons continue to be priced out of the market. There has been a 24.5% increase in the HUD Fair Market Rent in the region since 2000. Nationally, there has been a marked decrease of low-income housing units, beginning in the 1980's. In addition, there have been recent cuts in federally-funded low-income housing programs, such as public housing and Housing Choice Voucher (formerly called Section 8) programs run by local housing authorities. Simply put, there are just not enough places for impoverished persons in Schenectady County to live.

There are, of course, other contributing factors to homelessness besides poverty, the lack of affordable rental units, and disabilities. One of these is a change in family structure and composition. In earlier times, extended families often had the resources to care for a family member who was disabled, impoverished, or otherwise unable to live by him/herself. With the increased number of single parents, more people moving away from the areas in which they were born, and greater stresses on families, fewer extended families have the capacity to care for their less fortunate family members. In addition, as overall poverty increases, many families simply do not have resources that can be shared with others.

Inventory of Current Housing and Services

In addition to understanding who is homeless in our community, the characteristics of homeless persons, and the factors that contribute to becoming homeless, it is important to consider the

to assist homeless persons. Schenectady County offers a services to impoverished and homeless persons. The existing homeless housing and support services provide a full continuum of care to those in need.

Schenectady County's current homeless housing inventory is as follows*:

<u>Housing Type</u>	<u>Family Units/ Beds</u>	<u>Individuals</u>
Emergency Shelter	7 units/ 14 beds	56 beds
Transitional Housing	7 units/ 21 beds	16 beds
Permanent Supportive Housing	43 units/ 117 beds	207 beds
<i>*while additional capacity exists, beds are not specifically set aside for homeless persons, or are not available on a year-round basis.</i>		

The first time an individual or family is identified as being homeless is typically in an emergency situation when housing has been lost, and all alternatives for housing have been exhausted. In Schenectady County, the limited number of emergency housing beds forces many to seek housing with families, friends, or acquaintances, environments which may prove to be unstable and unsafe. For those with no alternative place of housing, emergency placement in motels can lead to further segregation from community resources and necessary supports. In recent months, the Schenectady County Legislature has made a commitment to open at least one new emergency shelter for families. This will help to ensure that critical services will be available to vulnerable families in their time of greatest need.

Transitional Housing is defined as housing and support services for persons who lack the skills and resources necessary to move directly into permanent or permanent supportive housing. Homeless persons who move into transitional housing are usually limited to stays of no more than twenty-four months. There are few transitional programs in Schenectady County that exclusively serve persons who are homeless. Most are targeted to persons with developmental disabilities or who are transitioning from corrections or inpatient mental health or substance abuse treatment facilities (though admittedly some percentage of these individuals would otherwise be precariously housed or homeless).

Permanent housing is the end goal for all who enter the homeless service system. Permanent housing is that which ensures that sufficient rent subsidies and support services are in place, allowing a level of stability for the household. Some homeless persons benefit from permanent supportive housing. Supportive housing can be site-based or scattered-site housing. Supports in this model are adjusted to meet the individual need of the household and can include case management, training in life skills, financial literacy, employment skills, education, mental health services, substance abuse services, medical treatment, and more.

In addition to housing, Schenectady County's homeless service providers offer a full range of prevention, outreach and supportive services designed to decrease the number of people experiencing homelessness, reduce the length of time people are homeless, and ensure housing stability after an episode of homelessness. In addition to rental and utility assistance, supportive services can include counseling, legal assistance, street outreach, case management, life skills training, employment training, child care services, and transportation, to name a few.

Despite the successes achieved in Schenectady County, the service system continues to leave too many men, women, and children without appropriate, safe, and affordable housing. To successfully end homelessness throughout Schenectady County, the traditional methods for working with homeless persons need to be addressed and modified.

Prevention efforts will need to be more proactive in identifying persons at risk of homelessness, and in providing appropriate services and supports to prevent the loss of housing. For those who are already homeless, safe and rapid emergency housing and services must be available.

While the current system appropriately focuses on rapid transition to permanent housing, the need far exceeds the resources. Additional case management services must be made available to assist homeless individuals and families in securing and maintaining permanent housing. Additional permanent supportive housing services are urgently needed.

The Schenectady community is committed to ending homelessness for each and every person experiencing this tragedy. These gaps in the service system make it nearly impossible to properly identify and serve those in need. It is time to acknowledge these challenges and to appropriately respond with adequate resources to serve our homeless population.

Schenectady County Plan to End Homelessness Goals

The goals for the Schenectady County Plan to End Homelessness focus on preventing homelessness, guaranteeing the availability of emergency services for those who do become homeless, developing and retaining affordable housing, and providing support services to facilitate the transition to permanent housing and to ensuring housing stability. Recommendations for each goal include consideration for the special needs of each sub-population to be served.

When working in conjunction with each other, these efforts will successfully reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness, the length of time people are homeless, and eliminate future episodes of homelessness. The following long-term goals provide the framework for this Plan to End Homelessness. Each of the goals is further defined and identified with strategies in the following sections.

- Homelessness Prevention: Increase resources for prevention efforts as the first line of defense in combating homelessness.
- Emergency Services: Establish a seamless safety net system to provide care during crisis situations.
- Housing: Expand the availability of safe, affordable permanent housing throughout Schenectady County.
- Support Services: Strengthen community supports for formerly homeless individuals and families to ensure housing stability.

Goal #1: Homelessness Prevention

Increase resources for prevention efforts as the first line of defense in combating homelessness.

Prevention is the key to reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness. Prevention efforts typically include strategies such as one-time or short-term rent or mortgage assistance, legal assistance programs, representative payee and direct payment programs, and housing placement services. Since it is often difficult to demonstrate success (i.e.: track the number of people who did not become homeless as a result of the programs), up until now little funding has been made available for these proactive services. Instead, emphasis and funding has most often been placed into costly reactive measures to treat and serve those who become homeless. Funders and providers should recognize the long-term cost savings that can be realized with these services and alter their funding priorities accordingly.

Homelessness can be prevented for those persons who are in jeopardy of losing their existing housing, as well as for those being discharged from institutional settings. Although housing stability is recognized across case management disciplines as a significant factor in treatment success (it is difficult to focus on mental health or substance abuse treatment if you do not have a safe, affordable place to live), many inappropriate discharges are made from institutional settings to precarious housing situations that quickly result in homelessness. Additionally, the short

tion does not always allow those persons already living in Schenectady County to secure safe housing. This can produce another group of clients for the already stretched emergency service system.

Recommended strategies for the prevention of homelessness include increasing funding for prevention based programs, eliminating inappropriate discharges from institutional settings, enhancing planning prior to evictions, and responding proactively when gentrification, the conversion of rental units, or the indirect effects of government policies threaten individuals and families' housing stability.

To successfully prevent homelessness in Schenectady, additional funding will need to be available to implement and expand prevention efforts. In the short term, this will require an increase in funding for homeless services. However, fiscal benefits will be realized over time when a decreased level of support is needed for emergency services. Cross-training among multi-disciplinary case management services is necessary to ensure that housing status is assessed as part of intake, discharge, and during on-going treatment. Finally, policy makers will need to be assisted in considering the potential unintended consequences of proposed legislation and policy as it affects impoverished and homeless persons.

Recommended strategies for the prevention of homelessness include:

- Maintain and enhance existing homelessness prevention programs to ensure educational programming, financial literacy, and job training is available to those identified as at risk of homelessness
- Work with code enforcement agencies to identify alternative housing before tenants are displaced from residence
- Commence efforts to coordinate medical, psychiatric, and drug/alcohol treatment discharges so that housing is obtained prior to discharge
- Develop a public policy campaign to examine local, state, and federal policies and their affects on homeless and impoverished persons

Goal #2: Emergency Services

Establish a seamless safety net system to provide care and serve during crisis situations.

While emergency housing and emergency services are not a solution to homelessness, they are a vital component of the service system. Emergency housing provides temporary housing until appropriate permanent housing can be arranged. Accompanying supportive services provide stability during this time of crisis and transition.

In Schenectady County, the emergency shelter system is extremely limited. There are just two units of emergency shelter for families not affected by domestic violence issues. All other families must be placed in motels, which are costly and segregate the families from community supports. An emergency shelter specifically designed for families would provide families in crisis a safe haven to re-group and ensure future stability. Families would have time and resources to process their current situation, receive intensive case management services, and develop the skills needed to secure and maintain housing for their future.

Emergency shelter units for families, there are also a limited number of beds available for those single adults who find themselves without a safe place to sleep. No shelter in Schenectady County will accommodate people who are actively engaged in substance abuse or who suffer from mental illness. This limited emergency shelter system leaves many to seek shelter on the streets, creating a situation of instability for both the individual and the community-at-large. Additional emergency shelter beds are greatly needed.

Finally, it is important to initiate a street outreach team to meet the basic needs of persons living on the streets and to provide a bridge to additional services. This outreach team would also provide a therapeutic alternative to summoning law enforcement when a neighbor or store owner finds themselves with a person in need of assistance. Experts on mental health and substance abuse would be available to respond and intervene as needed throughout the County.

Recommended strategies include the development of additional emergency housing for homeless families, and increasing the shelter capacity for single adults. At the same time, housing placement services should be expanded to rapidly re-house these individuals and families in emergency shelters into safe, affordable housing. Finally, a street outreach team with expertise in mental health and chemical addictions must be available to provide crisis intervention, immediate needs assessments, and triage services for those in need of a higher level of care.

Recommended strategies for providing effective emergency services include:


- Develop additional emergency housing for families
- Increase the emergency shelter capacity for single adults
- Expand housing placement services to rapidly re-house homeless persons into safe, affordable, permanent housing
- Develop a homeless street outreach team with expertise in mental health and chemical addictions to provide emergency services, immediate assessments, and identification of those individuals in need of a higher level of care.

Goal #3: Housing

Expand the availability of affordable, safe and accessible permanent housing throughout Schenectady County

Ending homelessness is dependent on the availability of affordable housing resources for low-income families. The continuing loss of Schenectady County's affordable housing units to deterioration and gentrification puts the need for developing additional resources in stark relief.

Permanent supportive housing is a cost-effective solution to long-term homelessness in which residential stability is combined with appropriate supportive services to meet residents' individual needs. Permanent supportive housing can come in a variety of forms. Some programs are "scattered site," meaning a client or agency leases apartments in the community, and the program subsidizes the rent. Others are located in a particular dwelling or apartment building where supportive services are available on site. Some programs require that clients utilize services as a condition for remaining in the program, while others offer services, but do not



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need for supportive services is reduced over time as

Providing housing for individuals who have been chronically homeless can be particularly challenging. People who have spent long amounts of time living on the streets are likely to require intense and comprehensive services in order to succeed in maintaining housing. The prevalence of mental illness and substance abuse is high in the chronically homeless population, and their time on the streets often produces, or exacerbates, chronic health issues and other physical disabilities. Providers also must recognize that many of these individuals have learned to be mistrustful and protective in order to survive. It often takes time and strong motivational skills in order to engage this chronic population in services.

Recognizing the difficulties inherent in working with a chronically homeless population, many communities have embraced the "Housing First" model. Whereas traditional housing models often required individuals to demonstrate success in treatment services before being deemed "housing ready," the Housing First model recognizes that it is nearly impossible to fully engage in services if you do not have a safe and stable place to live. Programs operating under this philosophy work to quickly place individuals in housing, and then provide case management and supportive services.

Many of these programs also provide "low-demand" housing, a model that makes sure that services are available, but does not require participation in order for housing to be maintained. This model works best when coupled with strong and consistent attempts to increase the client's own motivation for treatment. In Rensselaer County, Joseph's House, using a low-demand but high motivation model, has achieved significant rates of treatment compliance among its largely chronic client population.

Finally, a successful Plan to End Homelessness needs to look beyond housing for those who are already homeless to find ways to ensure that the community has an adequate supply of affordable housing. Doing so can prevent more people from becoming homeless and can provide a place to go for those who have risen from homelessness. Already, Schenectady County is making significant steps to expand its supply of affordable housing through efforts to establish a Housing Trust Fund. This dedicated source of funding will provide opportunities for the development of affordable housing for low-income persons.

Recommended strategies for expanding the availability of affordable housing include:

- Set a reasonable goal for the minimum number of housing units needed to end homelessness in Schenectady County.
- Develop additional low-demand housing for chronically homeless persons.
- Utilize a "Housing First" model for development of homeless housing programs for those with mental illness and/or substance abuse.
- Develop a Schenectady County Housing Trust fund to secure the development of low-income housing.

Strengthen community supports for formerly homeless individuals and families to ensure housing stability.

Housing stability is a function of a household's ability to access fundamental resources and supports that assure that when a crisis does occur, it does not threaten the security of that housing. For all households, these supports include affordable healthcare with mental health and substance abuse services available; employment at a livable wage and/or other income supports; and for families, childcare. These supports are all the more critical for impoverished households, for whom a crisis often means choosing among addressing competing essential needs for housing, food, or medical care.

Many low-wage workers require additional support to ensure that employment can be obtained and maintained. This can include traditional education programs and resume building, but also includes obtaining work-appropriate clothing, transportation, and safe and affordable child care. While taken for granted by higher wage workers, the lack of any of these components can make employment very difficult to maintain, thereby jeopardizing stable housing.

The United Way of the Greater Capital Region is working to develop and implement a "211" non-emergency service hotline. Such a resource will greatly assist individuals in need of assistance to determine what services are available and who they are available from.

Recommended strategies for strengthening supportive services include:

- Provide comprehensive case management supports that enable formerly homeless persons, or those at risk of homelessness, with necessary life skills for maintaining permanent housing.
- Provide a comprehensive housing education program that provides skills necessary to help clients maintain permanent housing.
- Provide comprehensive work supports for low-wage workers that ensure meaningful employment opportunities can be obtained and maintained.
- Assist in the development, implementation and marketing of the United Way's "211" hotline.



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Part 3: IMPLEMENTATION

The Schenectady County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness has established recommendations to prevent episodes of homelessness, to appropriately respond when individuals and/or families become homeless, and to reduce the amount of time they are homeless.

The above recommendations have been incorporated into a Work Plan (Addendum A) that includes proposed action steps for achieving the above-identified goals and strategies. The Work Plan is a living document that should be modified and expanded each year in order to address the changing environment. Over the next year, the Homeless Services Planning Board will prioritize the strategies and their action steps, and create a more detailed timeline for accomplishing them. At the same time, lead agencies will be identified to spearhead specific strategies.

Implementation of the Schenectady County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness will be guided by the Schenectady County Homeless Services Planning Board (HSPB). The HSPB's mission is to facilitate coordination and collaboration among providers, government agencies, and other stakeholders in order to benefit homeless and impoverished persons in Schenectady County. The HSPB also serves as the coordinating body for the HUD Continuum of Care funding application process and the Homeless Management Information System. The HSPB assists its members in identifying unmet needs, both through the HMIS and through the Continuum of Care needs assessment process, developing programs to better address customer needs, obtaining funds to address unmet needs, and coordinating services among providers. The HSPB also assists direct-service customers in obtaining better quality services, attaining access to housing, and acquiring the supportive services needed to prevent homelessness, or, if re-housed, to maintain housing stability. Participation in the HSPB is open to representatives of county and city government, not-for-profit organizations, consumers, service providers, housing developers, and foundations, and other community groups with a commitment to the HSPB's mission.

CARES, Inc. provides staff support including technical and administrative assistance to the HSPB, and in this role will continue to facilitate the implementation of the Schenectady County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness.

DUM A : WORK PLAN

Goal #1: Homelessness Prevention

Increase resources directed to prevention efforts as the first line of defense in combating homelessness.

<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Proposed Action Steps</u>	<u>Timeframe</u>	<u>Responsible Party</u>
Maintain and enhance existing homelessness prevention programs to ensure educational programming, financial literacy, and job training is available to those identified as at risk of homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Obtain additional prevention resources (funding to pay for past due rent, utility services, and eviction prevention services) ▪ Provide landlord and tenant training programs. ▪ Further utilize funds through ESG, CDBG and private funding sources to expand homelessness prevention efforts. ▪ Utilize United Way's 211 system as a frontline access to services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On-going ▪ On-going ▪ On-going ▪ 4/08 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Homeless Services Planning Board (HSPB) ▪ Evictions Task Force ▪ HSPB ▪ United Way
Work with code enforcement agencies to identify alternative housing before tenants are displaced from residence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop housing action team to assist in the re-housing of persons facing displacement due to code infractions. ▪ Utilize Evictions Task Force to assist in the re-housing of persons facing eviction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 12/08 ▪ On-going 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HSPB ▪ SCAP
Commence efforts to coordinate medical, psychiatric, and forensic discharges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work with case management services from all disciplines to conduct housing assessments as part of intake, discharge, and on-going treatment. ▪ Utilize mental health and substance abuse treatment discharge planning system to coordinate aftercare services prior to institutional discharge. ▪ Conduct needs assessment for specialized housing development for those leaving institutional settings. ▪ Develop and implement a prisoner re-entry program with correctional facilities that include housing placement, assistance with education and/or employment, life skills training, and linkage to needed mental health, substance abuse, and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 12/10 ▪ 12/10 ▪ On-going ▪ 12/10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HSPB ▪ HSPB ▪ New Choices Recovery Center ▪ YWCA

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop stronger linkages with adolescent mental health programs to provide additional counseling services for homeless and precariously housed youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/08 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAFE/ Youth Bureau
Develop public policy campaign to examine local, state, and federal policies and their affects on homeless and impoverished persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop community engagement committee to examine public policy and advocate on behalf of homeless and impoverished persons. Provide information on the inclusion of homeless issues in local, county, and state housing plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/08 and on-going On-going 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HSPB HSPB

Goal #2: Emergency Services

Establish a seamless safety net system to provide care and serve during crisis situations.

<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Proposed Action Steps</u>	<u>Timeline</u>	<u>Responsible Party</u>
Develop additional emergency housing for families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify best practices in emergency shelter for families. Secure capital and operating funds for development of family shelter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/08 12/08 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SCAP HSPB
Increase emergency shelter capacity for single adults.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct needs assessment which includes requests for emergency housing, capacity and vacancy rates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12/08 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HSPB
Expand housing placement services to rapidly re-house homeless persons into safe, affordable, permanent housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate services between Schenectady County Department of Social Services and homeless services providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-going 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DSS & provider agencies
Develop a homeless street outreach team with expertise in mental health and chemical addictions to provide emergency services, immediate assessments, and identification of those individuals in need of a higher level of care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate county-wide street outreach program for homeless individuals and families. Coordinate outreach activities with service providers and other community first responders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12/10 12/10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HSPB HSPB

Expand the availability of affordable, safe and accessible permanent housing throughout Schenectady County

<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Proposed Action Steps</u>	<u>Timeline</u>	<u>Responsible Party</u>
Set a reasonable goal for the minimum number of housing units needed to end homelessness in Schenectady County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review existing data on number of units that meet current criteria for decent, safe rental housing ▪ Examine census data and other data sources to determine the need for affordable housing units in Schenectady County. ▪ Examine the data on jobs and local needs, determine the need in each Schenectady County municipality; meet with municipal leaders to make them aware of the needs in their community. 	▪ 12/08	▪ HSPB
Develop additional low-demand housing for chronically homeless persons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create additional units of Single Room Occupancy (SRO) housing for chronically homeless persons. ▪ Develop additional units of scattered site permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless persons. 	▪ TBD	▪ Various housing providers
Utilize a "Housing First" model for supply of homeless housing for those with mental illness and/or substance abuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhance existing services to facilitate more rapid movement into permanent housing. ▪ Develop centralized program to assist homeless persons to obtain and maintain permanent housing. ▪ Provide on-going supportive and treatment services to ensure that housing can be maintained. 	▪ On-going	▪ Bethesda House/ SCAP and additional housing providers
Develop a Schenectady County Housing Trust Fund to secure the development of low-income housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue to explore development of Housing Trust Fund, including administration, fund development, and project grants. ▪ Secure a dedicated source of funding. 	▪ 12/08	▪ BNI

Strengthen supports for formerly homeless individuals and families to ensure housing stability.

Strategies	Proposed Action Steps	Timeline	Responsible Party
Provide a comprehensive education program that teaches the necessary skills to help clients maintain affordable housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Identify the appropriate organizations and/or individuals to deliver the program.</i> ▪ <i>Develop a coordinated system for information and referral of services.</i> ▪ <i>Develop a web-site of services that can be accessed by organizations, agencies, and clients.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>1/08</i> ▪ <i>1/08</i> ▪ <i>1/10</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>HSPB</i> ▪ <i>United Way</i> ▪ <i>United Way</i>
Provide comprehensive case management supports that enable formerly homeless persons, or those at risk of homelessness, necessary life skills to maintain permanent housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Develop flexible case management program that is able to meet the changing needs of consumers.</i> ▪ <i>Involve consumers in designing effective and user friendly case management and supportive services.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>On-going</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Various service providers</i>
Provide a comprehensive housing education program that provides skills necessary to help clients maintain permanent housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Create the educational curriculum to include development of appropriate decisions-making or life skills to maintain rent, solve credit problems, including back-rent and deposits, and learn to fix up and maintain homes/ apartments, etc.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>12/09</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>CARES</i>
Provide comprehensive work supports for low-wage workers that ensure meaningful employment opportunities can be obtained and maintained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Explore job coaching opportunities that support persons with disabilities in maintaining employment</i> ▪ <i>Seek continuation and expansion of work supports including subsidized childcare, family healthcare, and transportation assistance.</i> ▪ <i>Ensure free educational opportunities are available to assist with obtaining jobs paying a living wage.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>On-going</i> ▪ <i>On-going</i> ▪ <i>On-going</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>HSPB</i> ▪ <i>HSPB</i> ▪ <i>HSPB</i>
Assist in developing, implementing and marketing the United Way's 211 hotline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Contribute agency information to the United Way.</i> ▪ <i>Promote use of the system among current clients of Schenectady County homeless service and social service agencies</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>1/08</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>United Way</i>

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