

# One Day. One Stop. One Community.

## 2012 NCSHA Annual Awards for Program Excellence Special Needs Housing – Combating Homelessness

### Overview

*“I’ve been all over this state homeless for five years, and I’ve never seen anything like this in my life...I just heard about this ‘connect’ thing on the street...They’re saying out there that it’s not bull...They say you can get real help. I think they’re right.” –Project Homeless Connect Consumer*

Project Homeless Connect is a one-day, one-stop shop to deliver real services to people experiencing real homelessness in their communities. Project Homeless Connect is not about waiting in lines, signing up on long waiting lists, or creating false expectations. On-the-spot services are provided to citizens including items such as showers, healthcare, mental health screening, legal advice, employment counseling, housing, library access, haircuts, massage, clothing, identification cards, social security, health screenings, birth certificates and transportation. In addition, participants also receive lunch, groceries and hygiene kits. This event is not business as usual; people receive hospitality from the whole community.

The first Project Homeless Connect was created in 2004 by San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom to engage people who were homeless back into the community. Since that time, Project Homeless Connect has been recognized as a best practices model and has been replicated by more than 260 cities in the United States, Canada, and Australia.

Beginning in 2009, Missouri Housing Development Commission (MHDC), in collaboration with the Missouri’s Governor’s Committee to End Homelessness (GCEH), began participation in the Project Homeless Connect partnership by initiating the state’s first event in Columbia, Missouri. MHDC provided funding and staff to host the event that provided 748 services to 86 documented homeless individuals and families. Sparked by the successful initial event in Columbia, MHDC collaborated with GCEH and decided to provide an event each year and immediately scheduled its next opportunity in Branson. The Branson event was, again, quite successful. Continuing the commitment to host an event each year was an obvious choice and in 2011, MHDC funded an event in Sedalia. However, this year MHDC’s ideology shifted from a commitment to provide funding for one event in one community to a commitment to provide a model that can be replicated by providing education to multiple communities so that Project Homeless Connect can expand to a statewide level.

MHDC began a campaign to educate communities throughout the state and to date, events have now taken place in Branson, Columbia, Hannibal, Joplin, Poplar Bluff, St. Joseph, St. Louis, Sedalia, and Springfield. MHDC will, of course, continue to provide funding to host an event in

## **HFA: Missouri Housing Development Commission Entry Name: One Day. One Stop. One Community.**

a new non-metropolitan area each year; but we believe that providing education and modeling is a more important and even bigger step. We believe that statewide expansion of Project Homeless Connect is a move from simply managing homelessness towards really ending homelessness.

### **Program Education and Replication**

Although Project Homeless Connect is not a new program, Missouri's Project Homeless Connect as a statewide event is an innovative spin to the model. Statewide Project Homeless Connect allows communities throughout the state to simultaneously host events allowing citizens who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless to access community resources. While a statewide Project Homeless Connect is an undertaking, it can be replicated in any state. HFAs are the ideal vehicle to create a statewide Project Homeless Connect network. Nearly all HFAs already enjoy strongly established relationships with organizations that provide services to low-income and homeless citizens. It is through this network of relationships that a statewide program can be accomplished. In the case of Missouri (which has 113 counties), the process started by providing training and education on the Project Homeless Connect model in Continuum of Care meetings in metro areas and ten rural regions located in Missouri. MHDC committed the staff resources necessary to educate its network of non-profit organizations about the Project Homeless Connect model and encouraged the organizations to create events across the state. Presentations and education provided by MHDC staff include tips for planning an event, gathering resources and event operations. MHDC staff members are always available to provide advice and technical assistance to organizations hosting events.

### **Success, Measurement and Effective Use of Resources**

The collaborative nature of Project Homeless Connect is a major factor in its success. As with any event, costs are inherent, but the Project Homeless Connect model includes donated goods and services from a multitude of organizations so that no single entity must bear the financial burden of the entire event. For example, space for the event is often provided by a church or civic organization; lunch is donated by a local restaurant; and haircuts are provided by a local salon. What makes Project Homeless Connect such an attractive program is the ability to provide a very comprehensive array of goods and services while each partnering organization only has to donate a small portion.

An element of the program, navigation, facilitates measurement of success. Community volunteers become "Navigators" and guide the person receiving assistance throughout the process. For example, one family may need clothing, showers and haircuts, but does not need medical care or social security assistance. The Navigator helps the family assess needs and then guides the family from one service to the next to ensure that their needs are met. While guiding the family from service to service, the Navigator will also ensure that the family is treated with dignity and never has to stand in line to wait for services. Navigators are in the

## **HFA: Missouri Housing Development Commission Entry Name: One Day. One Stop. One Community.**

position to collect data regarding the number of services utilized. Navigators are also a first-line source of feedback regarding resources that were needed but not available so that future events can be improved in the ever-growing expansion of the program.

Another essential element of the model is to involve members of the community who are homeless in planning of the event. People who are homeless are the best resource for what is needed. Providers too often overlook this much needed expertise. MHDC also engages city officials. We ask the mayor to provide the opening statements to the volunteers, which provides an avenue to bring awareness to those who may not traditionally be engaged in providing homeless services. He

### **Conclusion**

Approximately, 24,000 Missourians are homeless every night, with 13,000 being children. MHDC views homelessness as unacceptable and is committed to programs that will eliminate homelessness in Missouri. Missouri's statewide Project Homeless Connect is one of those programs. It "teaches a community to fish" by providing the resources necessary to initiate, plan and operate a successful Project Homeless Connect event.

We believe that collaborative partnerships are the answer in the fight to end homelessness and Missouri's statewide Project Homeless Connect embraces that concept. The program enhances quality of life for the entire community. It engages civic leaders, re-engages homeless citizens, transforms homeless service delivery systems, dispels myths and stereotypes, and increases community pride and investment.

**HFA: Missouri Housing Development Commission  
Entry Name: One Day. One Stop. One Community.**



*Volunteers are available to help citizens register for the event.*

*Everyone gets a hot meal at Project Homeless Connect!*



*Take-away packages of food, clothing and hygiene items are available.*

