

The North Dakota Housing Finance Agency (NDHFA) is committed to supporting initiatives in our state that work to end the misery of homelessness. By offering a grant package to aid targeted communities in the development of 10-year plans to end homelessness, the Agency was instrumental in fostering a partnership of every level of government to gather the information needed to devise a strategy to abolish long-term homelessness within North Dakota's borders.

Background:

In a 2004 Statewide Housing Needs Assessment, North Dakota's homeless population was identified as a special needs group in dire need of assistance. Reacting to the assessment, the NDHFA made addressing homelessness one of its five housing priorities. Citing membership in the North Dakota Interagency Council on Homelessness (NDICH), the Agency pledged to support the Council's initiatives. Mike Anderson, NDHFA executive director, is the NDICH chairman.

Over the course of a year, an estimated 5,000 North Dakotans experience homelessness at least once. This number may seem low when compared to other places. However, emergency shelters are continuously overcrowded and it is increasingly difficult to meet the needs of the people seeking services.

Approximately 25 percent of the homeless individuals in North Dakota are the long-term homeless. The long-term homeless include chronically homeless individuals and families that have been without a permanent place to live for a year or more, or have had four or more episodes of homelessness in the last three years. Typically, these individuals or a family member has a disabling condition such as a mental health or addiction issue.

Studies show that the long-term homeless use a disproportionate amount of system resources. The often-cited cost analysis conducted by Drs. Culhane and Kuhn on the New York City and Philadelphia homeless system showed that chronically homeless individuals (10 percent of their homeless population) used 50 percent of the total resources expended on homelessness.*

Therefore, when the NDICH was established by Gov. John Hoeven in 2004, it was mandated that the Council develop and carryout a statewide 10-year plan to end long-term homelessness.

Project Description:

Since the make-up of the homeless population may vary among localities, the NDICH's approach was to encourage and work with community leaders to establish plans for waging battle first on a local level. Once these plans were in place, the Council would determine the role the state should play in assisting communities in successfully carrying out the work.

With the vast majority of homelessness occurring in North Dakota's nine largest communities and on its five Indian Reservations, the NDICH elected to focus attention there. The Council encouraged these communities to form taskforces to analyze the most recent Point-in-Time Survey data. The Survey, coordinated by the North Dakota Coalition for Homeless People, Inc., is a prerequisite for receiving US

* "Patterns and determinants of public shelter utilization among homeless adults in New York City and Philadelphia," D. Culhane and R. Kuhn. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 1998, 17(1):23-43.

Department of Housing and Urban Development Continuum of Care grant dollars. The information collected includes homeless population demographics and service utilization.

Initially, only North Dakota's largest city, Fargo, performed the analysis, and successfully completed and adopted a plan. The progress from other local jurisdictions varied from making a commitment to establish a plan but not knowing how to begin, to being undecided on making a commitment. A common obstacle for the community groups was a lack of resources to do the analysis required before developing a plan.

To help the NDICH move the project forward, the NDHFA offered to provide technical assistance grants. The grant dollars would enable the community groups to hire facilitators/consultants and pay for the cost of the data analysis essentially underwriting the process, including writing of a plan.

The grants, formally called Homeless Technical Assistance Grants, were funded utilizing NDHFA reserves. The Agency's \$52,000 commitment provided for up to \$4,000 per local jurisdiction. To receive a grant, the community submitted a letter of commitment to complete and implement a plan signed by the mayor or tribal chair, and agreed to complete and adopt the plan no later than December 31, 2007.

Results:

Over the next 18 months, public officials, nonprofit service providers, private businesses, law enforcement, and other stakeholders came together, forming planning groups committed to the common goal. The groups openly discussed how the traditional system that serves the homeless – while successful for many individuals and families – has limitations and does not meet the needs of today.

The taskforces developed strategies, devised action steps, methods of accountability and timelines, and identified resources and benchmarks. The plans, as adopted by the local governing bodies, aim to provide lasting solutions to divert individuals and families from the misery of long-term homelessness. Most importantly, the work will ensure that the NDICH's statewide 10-year plan encompasses the needs of all of North Dakota's long-term homeless.

Including the city of Fargo, ten communities have completed and adopted 10-year plans. The local jurisdictions assisted by NDHFA's grant program include: Bismarck/Mandan, Dickinson, Fort Berthold, Grand Forks, Jamestown, Minot, Turtle Mountain and Williston. Two of the plans coming from the state's Indian Reservation, providing valuable insight into a homeless population largely hidden because these individuals and families typically rely on friends and family for help rather than seeking assistance from service providers.

The work of the planning groups received regular media attention putting homelessness, an issue that is typically shunned, onto the front page of daily newspapers. The momentum prompted eight North Dakota mayors and one tribal chairman, the first in the United States, to publicly pledge to work to end long term homelessness by signing the US Interagency Council on Homelessness's (USICH) "America's Road Home Statement of Principles and Action."

The commitment to action in North Dakota, spirited by NDHFA's grant program, culminated in a statewide gathering in April of this year called "A Partnership to House Every North Dakotan." At the event, Gov. Hoeven was recognized by USICH Executive Director Philip Mangano with the "Home for

Every American" Governor Award. Only the third state leader in the country to receive the honor, the award recognized Hoeven for his foresight, leadership and commitment.

By simply providing the funding needed for data analysis and plan development, the NDHFA was able to carry forth the NDICH's primary goal. Most remarkable and worthy of notation is how this small financial contribution prompted the mobilization of a statewide effort. Long-term homelessness now has the attention of leaders from all levels of government, and because it is in the public eye, it is expected that the Council's 10-year plan and other recommendations will be difficult to dismiss during our upcoming legislative session.

Meritorious:

Innovative - While a grant program is not a new innovation, open discussion on the issue of homelessness in our state is pioneering. NDHFA's small financial contribution provided the support needed to bring the issue to the forefront, making it difficult to ignore and prompting a call to action.

Replicable - The grant program could easily be replicated, taking a minimal commitment of capital to incentivize action.

Respond to an important state housing need - Supports the development of a plan that addresses the burden that long-term homelessness places on the system.

Demonstrate measurable benefits to HFA targeted customers - As identified in the statewide assessment and the Agency's priorities, homelessness is a serious issue in our state. The grant dollars provided support the development of programs and strategies to address these customers' most important needs.

Have a proven track record of success in the marketplace - Seven of the eight targeted cities and two of the five targeted Indian reservations developed and adopted plans. Additionally, the only city and one of the reservations that did not participate have also expressed interest in the grant program and want to complete their own local plans.

Provide benefits that outweigh costs - By funding the development of the local plans, NDHFA has put into motion work that will result in significant cost savings to public health systems, law enforcement and homeless service providers. Ultimately, this body of work will enhance the quality of life of the long-term homeless individuals and families.

Demonstrate effective use of resources - There was little action without the financial support.

Effectively employ partnerships - The fiscal support provided brought together officials from all levels of government, nonprofit service providers, private businesses, and other stakeholders including faith-based organizations.

Achieve strategic objectives - By identifying the local strategies devised and resources needed, the NDICH will be able to determine the most appropriate state government response needed to successfully end long-term homelessness in North Dakota. The Council is currently in the process of finalizing the state's plan. It is anticipated that NDICH's plan will be completed and adopted by September 30, 2008.