

Memorandum

January 15, 2016

To: Mayor Bob Stephens

From: Charlie O'Reilly, Co-Chair, Mayor's Task Force on Crisis Sheltering
Lynn Thompson, Co-Chair, Mayor's Task Force on Crisis Sheltering

Re: **Task Force Report and Presentation**

The enclosed report from the Mayor's Task Force on Crisis Sheltering is provided in response to the Task Force's charge.

It was a privilege to lead such a terrific group of thoughtful, caring citizen volunteers on this journey. We all learned a lot about the crisis sheltering challenges within our community, and our hopes for success are bolstered by the many individuals and agencies already working to address this challenge. As you will see in the enclosed report, we believe our community needs a "wake-up call" as to the need for additional financial support for the work they are doing for the homeless and those in poverty in our city. We are scheduled to present our report to the entire City Council during the January 19th City Council Lunch Workshop.

On behalf of the entire Task Force, we want to express our appreciation to the staff of the City Clerk's Office, the Department of Public Information, and the City Manager's Office for their ongoing support and professionalism.

We are also asking that you consider calling our Task Force back together again in December, 2016 to review and report on our community's progress toward the enclosed recommendations. The members of our Task Force have stated an interest and a willingness to re-convene for this purpose. If this is of interest to you, please let us know and we will begin pre-scheduling that meeting.

Again, thank you for giving us the opportunity to lead this process.



Mayor's Task Force on Crisis Sheltering

Final Report

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Task Force Charge

Within 60 days of the first meeting, recommend to the Mayor a plan of action to (a) provide additional crisis shelter units for families and/or (b) reduce the number of families placed in this crisis situation with a goal of meeting the current need.

For this Task Force, crisis sheltering is defined as overnight shelter for 30 days or less.

Problem

In fiscal year 2015, 533 families who identified themselves as homeless made in-person contact with One Door, Springfield's point of entry for homeless services to provide assessments and referrals to shelter-related services in Greene, Christian, and Webster counties. Included in these 533 families are 1,033 children.

At this time, our community has 48 units available for immediate crisis/emergency sheltering for families. If these 48 units are already occupied (which they are most of the time), the family has few options – living in their car or other places not meant for human habitation, “couch surfing” or doubling up with other families, or being split up (for example, the father to Victory Mission, the mother to Safe to Sleep, and the children to Isabel's House.) Due to high demand for limited resources, Springfield has a desperate need for short-term shelter options for households with children.

Process

In order to educate members regarding the supply and demand for crisis sheltering as well as current or planned initiatives intended to help address our community's crisis sheltering needs, information about national trends and best practices was provided and presentations were solicited from local service providers and/or experts in the field of homeless services in Springfield. The following organizations made presentations to the Task Force:

- One Door Centralized Homeless Services – Michael Tonarely
- Salvation Army – Major Mike Mills and Jeff Smith
- The Kitchen, Inc. – Rorie Orgeron and Randy McCoy
- Safe to Sleep – Romona Baker
- City of Springfield Zone Blitz – Greg Burris
- Victory Mission Emergency Shelter – Reverend Jim Harriger
- One Door Case Management – Pepi Wallace
- OACAC – Tommie Trammell
- City Utilities – Amy Austin and Steve Gore
- Burrell Homeless Services Division – Michael Lehman
- Community Partnership of the Ozarks – Michelle Garand



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The Task Force commends the hard work and dedication of each organization that serves the homeless in our community. It was evident through the various presentations that there is tremendous heart and passion within each as they work tirelessly, even when resources are dwindling and staff are faced with crisis situations on a daily basis.

The Task Force also had a presentation from Julie McFarland, a consultant assigned by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, to provide technical assistance (TA) to our local Continuum of Care. The Continuum of Care is a group that serves as the planning body to address homelessness in Springfield/Greene, Christian and Webster Counties. It is designed to assist individuals (including unaccompanied youth) and families experiencing homelessness and to provide the services needed to help them move into transitional and permanent housing, with the goal of long-term stability.

This TA is focusing on system level issues including 1) development of a coordinated system by which consumers access our federally funded homeless housing projects, 2) the governance and structure of our Continuum of Care, and 3) a system level analysis of all homeless housing projects in our Continuum of Care. Ms. McFarland's presentation focused on two areas—the need for a local prioritization policy and a formal shelter diversion program at the front door of the homeless system (One Door).

Shelter Diversion is a strategy that prevents homelessness for people seeking shelter by helping them identify immediate alternate housing arrangements and by providing individualized support and financial assistance to help them maintain or return to permanent housing. Shelter diversion reduces the number of families becoming homeless, the demand for limited shelter beds, and the waiting lists for current shelter programs. For the Springfield community, shelter diversion examples can include limited financial assistance for utility and/or rental deposit, moving expenses or short term storage (30 days or less), State ID cards, Birth Certificates, and transportation; hotel/motel vouchers for short term assistance; conflict resolution and mediation with landlord, friends and/or family; connection to mainstream resources; and housing search assistance.

Thus, the Task Force believes that emphasizing diversion strategies and applying resources “upstream” will result in fewer families becoming homeless and needing emergency sheltering. The community's return on investment (ROI) will be greater by providing “diversion” assistance to keep families in their existing homes versus covering the expenses of emergency sheltering. This approach is both more humane and makes more business sense.

Based upon the best practice and national trend information, information shared by Ms. McFarland and the other presentations, and several brainstorming sessions, the Mayor's Task Force on Crisis Sheltering makes the following recommendations to address the crisis sheltering issue in Springfield:



Mayor's Task Force on Crisis Sheltering

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Recommendation #1: The City of Springfield to increase funding for the One Door Program in the FY2017 budget to fund 3 FTE positions to allow for increased case management and to implement a full shelter diversion program, including training and additional space for operations, thus reducing the need for more crisis shelter units in the future.

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- As the initial point of entry, the One Door Program is key to ensuring that homeless families receive immediate assessment and connection to all the critical resources and services available in our community.
- Communities with a diversion program across the country are experiencing diversion success rates between 30-50% for families.
- Diversion is more cost effective than increasing shelter beds/units or building a new shelter.
- One new Assessment Specialist and two new Diversion Specialist positions are necessary to meet the need for increased case management for homeless families and to implement a diversion program.
- One Door will soon need a new facility; the facility they are temporarily occupying is not suitable for long-term use and will be demolished soon.
- One Door will recruit a volunteer "Triage Team" that will assist staff in performing initial assessments.

Recommendation #2: Increase community awareness about the issue and need for more community support for homeless families

- Leverage the City's increased funding of the One Door Program as a "match" to encourage community donations to be used for diversion resources such as utility and rent assistance, hotel/motel vouchers, transportation, etc.
- Expand the number of hotels/motels that offer rooms for free or at a discounted rate for crisis sheltering.
- Develop and implement a marketing plan to increase community awareness about the issue of homeless families in partnership with the Impacting Poverty Commission's Communication Team and others
- Encourage support for a community-wide campaign that increases donations and support for all homeless service providers as well as the City Utilities' *Project Share* Initiative for utility assistance.
- Encourage state and federal legislators to allocate increased support for services for homeless families.
- Encourage participation from all sectors—non-profit, business, faith, education, government, foundations and health care—in community awareness and financial support campaigns.
- Special note: The Task Force applied for and received a \$15,000 Emergency Fund grant for One Door from the Community Foundation of the Ozarks. These funds have been designated for shelter diversion and a portion of a part-time staff person. An additional \$15,000 was also received from the Musgrave Foundation. These funds will also be used for shelter diversion.



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Recommendation #3: Increase awareness and support for the efforts of the local Continuum of Care

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- Ask the Continuum of Care to develop and approve a local Prioritization Policy and urge all homeless service providers to follow it.
- Strongly encourage all homeless service and human service providers in the community to utilize the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to assist with coordination and data collection.

The members of the Mayor's Task Force on Crisis Sheltering appreciate the opportunity to serve, and thank Mayor Bob Stephens and City Manager Greg Burris for their proactive approach to this critical community issue.

The Task Force also requests that Mayor Stephens extend the responsibilities of the Mayor's Task Force on Crisis Sheltering for one year so the Task Force can reconvene in December 2016 to review and evaluate the progress of recommended actions after one year and to develop and finalize a one-year performance report for City Council's consideration.

The Task Force has developed the following overall goal for our community regarding crisis sheltering:

- **Overall Goal:** By 2018, zero families seeking emergency shelter will be turned away from One Door without diversion assistance or emergency shelter assistance.

In support of this overall goal, the Task Force has established the following dashboard of performance measures:

- The number of families (duplicated and unduplicated counts) coming to One Door seeking emergency sheltering will be reported annually to Springfield City Council.
- By January 2017, One Door will have hired three additional full-time staff to implement diversion and case management programs.
- By January 2018, recidivism will be reduced by 15% from the 2015 baseline.
- By January 2018, diversions will be increased by 30% over the 2015 baseline.
- By January 2018, demand for emergency sheltering will be reduced by 20% below the 2015 baseline.
- By January 2018, community awareness about the crisis sheltering need will increase by 15% over the 2016 baseline.
- By January 2018, community financial support for emergency shelters and One Door will increase by 20% over the 2015 baseline.
- By January 2018, the number of Project Share donors will increase by 15% and the Project Share donations will increase by 20% over the 2015 baseline.
- By January 2018, a common Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) will be in use by all homeless service providers and their partners.