

Creative Responses to Addressing Homelessness in Vermont

(submitted by Chris Donnelly, Champlain Housing Trust, February 2, 2017)

Last year, according to the Annual Point-In-Time Count, Vermont saw a reduction of 28% in the number of homeless individuals in the State compared to the year before.

This achievement brought the number down to approximately 1,100 – which is where we were in 2011.

This reduction is due in large part because of several creative responses instituted on the local level and a commitment of collaboration between housing nonprofit, homeless providers, other social service agencies and the State Agency of Human Services.

In order to reduce reliance on motels and to provide an opportunity to connect people to services, several communities set up local warming shelters for homeless individuals to have a warm and safe place to sleep with AHS and DCF support. All together DCF currently supports nine warming shelters located in Middlebury, Springfield, Brattleboro, Bellows Falls area, Hartford, Barre, Burlington, Newport and St. Johnsbury.

Here is a snapshot of some of the work underway or ahead in just a few communities to continue to make progress to attain our goal of making homelessness rare and brief – essentially ending homelessness in Vermont.

Windham County

The Windham & Windsor Housing Trust is purchasing an old motel and converting it to a mixture of apartments with services for people moving out of homelessness, as well as a few affordable rentals. Of the 22 apartments, half will be used for each purpose. They have agreements with Groundworks Collaborative, for services involving life skills and budgeting, and Health Care Rehabilitation Services, which will provide counseling related to mental health and/or substance abuse. They received a VHCB award last week.

Washington County

Downstreet Housing & Community Development is participating in the Family Supportive Housing Program where the Family Center of Washington County provides customized, intensive case management, service coordination and affordable housing to families with children who have experienced homelessness. Funding is available for supportive services for 15 participant families coming from homelessness and stays through at least their first 24 months of housing. Families are moving into apartments scattered throughout Downstreet's multifamily portfolio. The Good Samaritan Haven and local Heney Realty are partners in the program.

Rutland County

Rutland County has the greatest number of homeless per capita, is very close to Chittenden County in real numbers, and spends one-third of the State's GA dollars on hotel stays. There is no homeless shelter in the County. The Housing Trust of Rutland County is pursuing the creation of a family shelter in partnership with a private property owner, and working on plans for transitional and permanent supportive housing. Rutland Regional Medical Center, Rutland Mental Health, the Housing Trust, the Homeless Prevention Center, BROCC Community Action, the Women's Network and Shelter, and the faith community are working very closely to develop this new response.

To be connected to housing and service providers in your district, contact Chris Donnelly at chris@champlainhousingtrust.org.