


# HOMELESSNESS

PREVENTABLE • SOLVABLE • UNACCEPTABLE



## Homeward Bound: Greater Kansas City Housing Sustainability Plan Executive Summary

A report to the citizens of the Greater Kansas City metropolitan area by the Greater Kansas City Homelessness Task Force.



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## Executive Summary

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Homelessness is a problem we can solve. Existing resources are currently being used effectively to address the problem of homelessness. However, if the community can identify ways to prevent homelessness, fewer resources will be required and this will be a more livable and attractive metro area. Preventing homelessness will help us become a truly great region.

Evidence from research emphasizes the role housing plays as an essential foundation for human and community development. Stable housing serves as the platform on which people build their lives. Without safe, decent, affordable places to live, people can't achieve and maintain good health, positive educational outcomes, or reach their economic and human potential.

Many studies conducted over the last several decades speak to the causes of homelessness. There is consistency in the findings. The primary causes of homelessness include 1) a lack of income to secure and maintain safe, appropriate housing and 2) a lack of affordable, safe and appropriate housing.

Two trends are largely responsible for the rise in homelessness over the past 30 years: a growing shortage of affordable rental housing and a simultaneous decrease in income. Two factors help account for decreasing income: eroding employment opportunities for large segments of the workforce and the declining value and availability of public assistance.

The current economic recession worsens the homelessness issue, increasing the overall cost to our regional community both financially and in terms of human capital and potential. History and research, though, tell us that these numbers can be reduced with measurable savings in both public and private dollars, and with demonstrable improvement in the overall quality of life in our metro area.

Current estimates put the number of homeless in the five-county Kansas City area at about 13,000 individuals with almost half of them in families. It is important to note that it is not just single men and women who are homeless. Area school districts identify nearly 5,000 homeless school-age children. Recognizing that a significant portion of the homeless population is families allows the community to address the negative consequences children suffer due to the family's economic situation. "Academically, homeless and runaway students face increased risk of school dropout, grade retention, low test scores, low grades, educational disabilities, and school behavior problems."<sup>1</sup>

## The homeless in metropolitan Kansas City include a diverse population.

### People who are homeless include:

Individuals who lack a regular/adequate nighttime residence.

Families with children or unaccompanied children and youth who lack a regular/adequate residence and

- share housing belonging to other persons due to a loss of housing;
- live in a car, motel, trailer park or campground;
- live in emergency or transitional shelters;
- live in or are abandoned in hospitals;
- are awaiting placement in foster care.

The lack of affordable housing is a significant barrier to ending homelessness. Currently, fewer than 3,400 emergency, transitional or permanent supportive housing units for homeless persons and families

exist in the Greater Kansas City area. In the entire metro area, there are only 40 emergency beds and 59 transitional beds for youth.

During the past 10 years, support for affordable housing programs has evaporated. Despite housing's importance in ending homelessness, the HUD budget for publicly assisted housing has been repeatedly slashed. A total of 18,225 public housing units and tenant-based vouchers are available in the Greater Kansas City metro area. The Housing Authority of Kansas City, Mo., and the Kansas City Kan., Housing Authority have 14,980 and 2,110 people on their waiting lists, respectively. For both communities, there is an average wait of four years.

The solution to chronic homelessness is permanent, supportive housing, coupled with support services as needed. The chronically homeless need access to service-enriched, permanent housing. For this population, permanent housing linked to intensive services is usually necessary to achieve stability.

## Homelessness Task Force Mission:

**To find solutions to end homelessness in the Kansas City metropolitan area through partnerships among nonprofit agencies, private business, governmental entities, philanthropic organizations, the investment community and citizens.**

The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, as outlined in the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness 2010 publication *Opening Doors*<sup>1</sup>, affirms six core values. These values guided the development of the Greater Kansas City Housing Sustainability Plan.

- ▶ Homelessness is unacceptable.
- ▶ There are no “homeless people,” but rather people who have lost their homes who deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.
- ▶ Homelessness is expensive; it is better to invest in solutions.
- ▶ Homelessness is solvable.
- ▶ Homelessness can be prevented.
- ▶ There is strength in collaboration.



<sup>1</sup>U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, (June 2010). *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*. Washington, DC.

Homeward Bound: Greater Kansas City Housing Sustainability Plan provides a road map for joint action by all affected stakeholders to work in partnership with state, county and local governments, and the private sector, to employ coordinated, cost-effective, comprehensive solutions to end homelessness.

Over the past 18 months, the task force involved hundreds of community stakeholders working in six subcommittees: Housing; Prevention; Services; Advocacy and Community Relations; Law Enforcement and Judicial; Finance, Membership and Development.

To move from a system of managing homelessness to eliminating it, a community-wide planning and implementation entity will be necessary to develop mechanisms that involve multiple agencies in complex interactions. Community-wide communication, coordination, collaboration and response is also essential.

The plan includes nine goals and 90 interlocking objectives. These goals and objectives contribute to accomplishing the plan outcomes.

**The ultimate goal of the Greater Kansas City Housing Sustainability Plan is to ensure that the people of Greater Kansas City are safely housed.**



## Goals:

In order to reach this long-term goal, nine preliminary goals were established to guide the ongoing implementation of the plan.

- 1 Build and sustain community awareness and support for coordinated responses to eliminate homelessness and enhance housing sustainability in the Greater Kansas City area
- 2 Establish and maintain an accountable, responsive infrastructure which promotes collaborative leadership and coordinated efforts across multi-jurisdictional systems
- 3 Expand private and community investment in prevention and support resources and safety-net services
- 4 Expand private and community investment in safe neighborhoods and safe multi-income housing
- 5 Re-house people in the Greater Kansas City area who become homeless on an emergency basis
- 6 Link people who are in jeopardy of becoming homeless with the support, resources, and/or services necessary to help them maintain their housing
- 7 Ensure that people have the necessary resources to maintain housing and basic necessities
- 8 Ensure that all Greater Kansas City neighborhoods are safe and have ample resources
- 9 Ensure that safe, multi-income housing is available in Greater Kansas City area neighborhoods

## Priorities:

The task force identified nine priorities which address all the plan's goals and objectives. Some target areas can be completed within one to three years, while others target long-term areas, which will be ongoing yet need to be initiated promptly. The priorities and some initial action steps presented below are not in any order of importance (for a more comprehensive list of action steps, see Section V of the full report [www.kcmo.org/htf](http://www.kcmo.org/htf)).

### **Priority: Develop and implement area No Homeless Youth or Children policies to eliminate homelessness among youth and children.**

- Work with local and state governments to pass “No Homeless Youth or Children” policies.
- Work with Missouri and Kansas foster-care and residential-care programs, school districts, correctional facilities, health-care facilities and others to identify areas where policy changes are needed to require discharge plans that include housing.
- Evaluate the current supply of emergency shelter, transitional and other bed resources and seek new funds to expand the available supply for unaccompanied youth or families with children.

### **Priority: Increase the inventory of affordable housing across the Greater Kansas City metropolitan area by increasing the amount of funding for housing vouchers, acquiring affordable housing through land trusts or other means, reducing the risk of foreclosure, and connecting housing resources with the homelessness response system.**

- Identify entities to hold title to housing resources, through management agreements with area housing authorities and existing agencies; explore a pilot program in targeted neighborhoods with Kansas City Local Initiatives Support Corporation.
- Advocate the use of property-tax incentives for residential development or restoration projects that will provide rental or home-ownership opportunities for low-income families.
- Work for land-trust, receivership, land-bank, and tax-credit legislation that provide more opportunities to acquire and reuse underutilized land and buildings for affordable housing.





**Priority: Increase meaningful/sustainable employment for homeless and precariously housed persons by improved coordination with existing employment programs and by building relationships with business organizations and area employers.**

- Strengthen connections between agencies providing case management and other services to homeless and precariously housed persons and the public workforce development system operated by the Full Employment Council and Workforce Partnership.
- Leverage and secure scholarships, job training and placement for homeless persons and those precariously housed by strengthening connections between homeless service agencies and workforce organizations including community colleges, technical schools, labor unions and workforce-development programs.
- Advocate for the development of incentives for employers to hire, train and retain homeless and precariously housed persons.

**Priority: Incorporate programs into the municipal justice system based on the GAINS Center Sequential Intercept Model for persons accused of “quality-of-life” offenses. This model keeps people out of the criminal-justice system by placing them into appropriate services including mental-health and substance-abuse services, while simultaneously emphasizing the need for housing. Program partners include police departments, prosecutor’s offices, courts, corrections and the community.**

- Help create a program, involving mandatory assessments of eligible offenders to measure risk and needs, that ensures case management with wrap-around services is a key component of programming. The program would be assigned to a specialized Municipal Court docket.
- Work with the city of Kansas City, Mo., to institute an additional court fee or fine sufficient to cover the costs for case management for some individuals coming before the Municipal Court.
- Work with the city of Kansas City, Mo., to repeal the current panhandling ordinance and revert to the prior ordinance that defined aggressive panhandling. The ordinance should include provisions to prohibit panhandling or fundraising along public streets which create safety issues. Other jurisdictions in the region should be encouraged to adopt similar ordinances.

**Priority: Develop a common, integrated process for determining housing and service needs of the homeless and precariously housed, and provide the public and stakeholders throughout the Greater Kansas City metropolitan area with a convenient and easily accessible method for connecting to housing and service resources.**

- Review and augment current processes (i.e., United Way 2-1-1, Mid-America Assistance Coalition, socialserv.com) for cataloguing area housing and service resources throughout the Greater Kansas City metropolitan area and providing the public and stakeholders with a convenient and easily accessible method for connecting to those housing and service resources.
- Systematically and proactively update and disseminate this information and how to use it to the homeless, police departments, emergency rooms, courts, social service agencies, etc., for coordinated housing placement and connection to services.
- Create a coordinated entry process in which each entry point uses the same assessment tool, working with existing programs and resources as available.

**Priority: Transform the homeless response system to one of Rapid Re-housing and Housing First with responsive services.**

- Work with housing service providers representing the geographic diversity of the area to document barriers to retool housing service-delivery systems and specific actions, at a local level, that align with the plan.
- Convene public health, mental health, and substance abuse providers to identify barriers and solutions for integrating Housing First into their outreach, prevention and treatment practices.
- Implement solutions for integrating Housing First into housing service providers' outreach, prevention and treatment practices, with priority given to unaccompanied youth and families with children.

**Priority: Develop a comprehensive funding strategy for Housing First and supportive services, including public and private support, to leverage current resources and pursue and distribute additional funding through community-based collaborative efforts.**

- Build awareness and understanding among private and public lenders/funders of the Housing First Model.

- Proactively pursue additional, national and state grants focused on Housing First and community-based collaborative efforts as they become available.
- Conduct research on existing and possible local funding mechanisms to increase resources to address housing needs and support services, including enhancement of the state housing trust funds or the development of an alternative funding mechanism (i.e., a mortgage transfer tax, etc.), to understand and to fully use all existing resources, and to support adoption of appropriate reforms and new financing opportunities.

**Priority: Educate stakeholders and the public about the causes of and solutions to homelessness, including the true faces of homelessness, and the core concepts of the Housing First Model to increase community understanding and to mobilize the community to commit to ending homelessness.**

- Develop and implement a comprehensive plan for educating the community and stakeholders beginning with a process for rolling out the plan.
- Establish a regular reporting schedule with local governments, the Downtown Council, Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, other area chambers, and other civic leadership groups.
- Continue to communicate the federal Open Door strategic plan's ideas for consolidation/efficiency to participating stakeholders and the regional community.

**Priority: Establish and maintain an accountable, responsive infrastructure for addressing homelessness issues to promote collaborative leadership and coordinated efforts across multi-jurisdictional systems.**

- Develop a governance plan and structure to support ongoing work.
- Raise resources to support the new regional homelessness work, and determine staff and other resources required to support the planning and coordination services.
- Align regional capacities with federal, state and private resources in order to more effectively serve the homeless population and reduce homelessness, including steps to increase collaboration, engage local officials, leverage existing public resources, identify new partners and connect the work to end homelessness with other community development initiatives.

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