

HOMELESSNESS IN FLORIDA:

Working Together to Find a Solution



BY SUSAN POURCIAU

With support from the State of Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, the Florida Housing Coalition now provides training and technical assistance in best practices to end homelessness. Since April 2015, Florida Housing Coalition has traveled across the state to help local communities assess their homelessness response systems and consider how they can best reduce homelessness locally.

The number of people who were homeless in Florida decreased by about 13% from 2013 to 2014 and by another 13% from 2014 to 2015.

The state has made progress! However, as of 2014, Florida continued to rank third highest in the nation in terms of homelessness, with more than 41,500 people experiencing homelessness on a given day. Further, Florida has the third highest percentage of homeless individuals who are living “unsheltered,” i.e. on the streets or in the woods. In fact, on any given day more than 21,000 people who are homeless in Florida are sleeping in places not meant for human habitation. Some of our counties also rank highly nationally in terms of homelessness. Of the ten smaller City, County, and regional Continuums of Care (CoCs) with the largest homeless populations, three are located

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Networking at trainings helped bring together new partners. At one session, these participants solidified a partnership that yielded 60 housing vouchers for people moving out of homelessness.



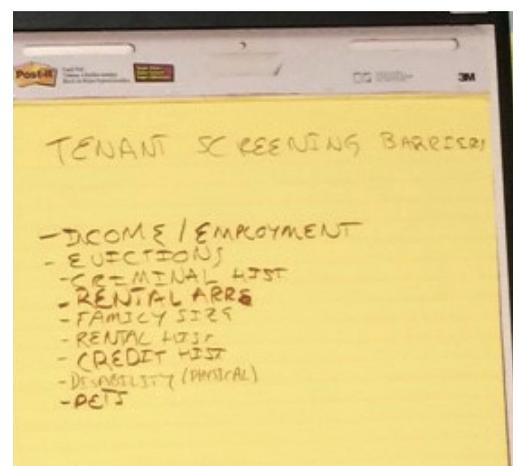
in Florida. Additionally, Florida accounts for three of the five smaller City, County, and Regional CoCs with the highest percentages of unsheltered individuals. Clearly, it is time for Florida to work better and smarter to effectively address homelessness.

The Florida Housing Coalition is committed to assisting nonprofits, CoCs, government leaders, and other stakeholders to find solutions to homelessness. We focus on ensuring that homelessness in Florida is (1) rare, (2) brief, and (3) nonrecurring.

First, to make homelessness rare, our communities must work to house individuals who are currently homeless and

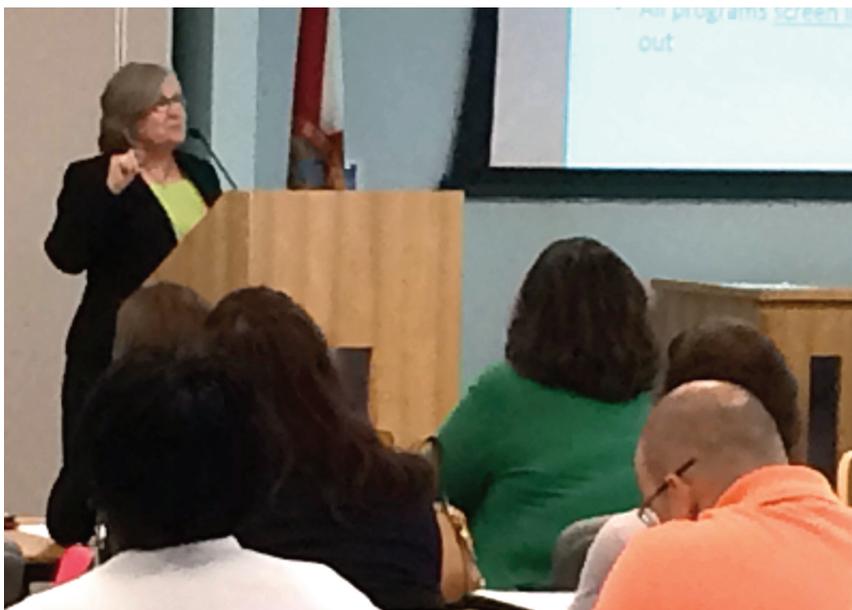
bring appropriate housing interventions to scale in Florida. Second, to reduce the length of time people are homeless in Florida, CoCs must retool the homeless crisis response systems and have appropriate housing interventions in place and accessible, so households can move quickly out of homelessness. Third, to reduce returns to homelessness, we must ensure that support systems are available on an as-needed basis.

In the last few months, through trainings, webinars, workshops, and site visits, stakeholders across the state have come together to begin to find solutions to homelessness. This work has engaged hundreds of people from dozens of communities, resulting in some lessons learned.



We have learned that Florida communities want to use best practice and the most efficient and effective means to address homelessness. For instance, there is substantial evidence that—in a policy environment where housing subsidies are limited—“rapid re-housing” with short-term financial assistance and services, is the most efficient and effective means of helping the vast majority of individuals and families move out of homelessness quickly and successfully, even when compared to longer-term transitional housing programs. The evidence is also very clear that “permanent supportive housing” with long-term rent assistance and services, is the most efficient and effective way to help those who are chronically homeless.

The challenge is that many communities may have overinvested resources in emergency shelter and/or transitional housing, and the process of “right-



WORKSHOPS

- Systems Design
- Rapid Re-Housing
- Homelessness is a Housing Issue
- Using HOME Funds for Homeless and ELI Populations

WEBINARS

- HEARTH 101
- Core Strategies for an Effective Crisis Response System
- Funding Sources, Grant Writing, and Responding to RFAs
- Coordinated Entry and System Change
- Bringing Rapid Re-Housing to Scale in Florida
- Match and Leverage
- Best Practices for Building Capacity
- Using SHIP to End Homelessness
- Legislative Wrap-Up: Funding for Homeless Services and Housing

TWO-DAY SYMPOSIUM:
Florida CAN End
Homelessness

SITE VISITS to ten local
Continuums of Care

HOMEWARD BOUND 2015
Revision

Training Attendees Had These Comments to Share:

"I've been working in the homeless assistance field for the last 15 years, and this workshop has given me many new ideas to discuss about developing housing models in my community!"

"I'm leaving this workshop encouraged with more creative ways to search for affordable housing and blended funding"

"I'm leaving with better knowledge to further help my clients gain permanent supportive housing."

"The most useful thing I learned was the importance of coordinating efforts to provide housing to start ending homelessness."

"With great presenters, I learned of new initiatives to implement and methods to reorganize our program design."

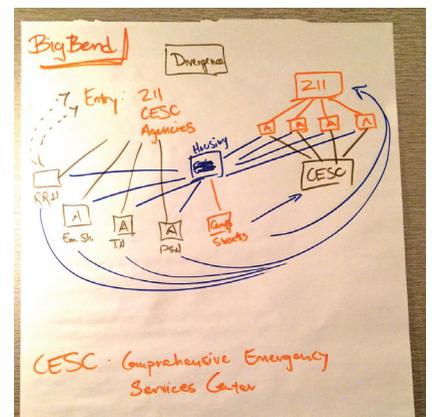
"The training was very informative. It was nice collaborating with the other agency representatives and hearing new strategies and ideas that they've found successful that could also help me."

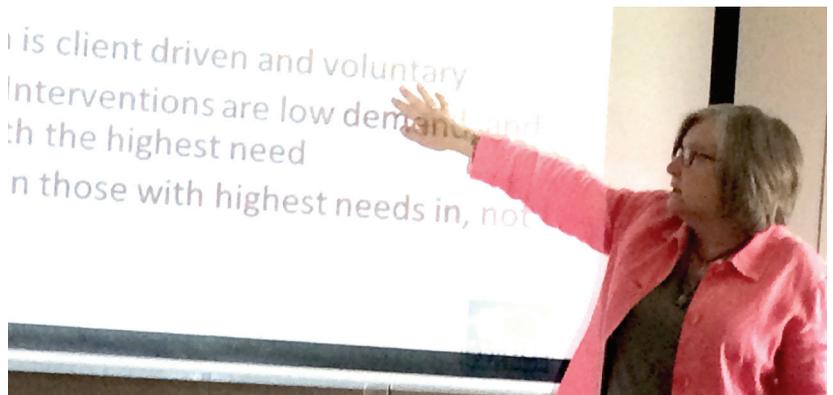
"The information that provided suggestions on building relationships with landlords in the community and how to better serve the homeless population was greatly appreciated."

"The information obtained will help us with our organizations strategic planning in the future for providing housing!"

"Job well done! Susan's presentation, especially her relaxed manner and wonderful flexibility in handling questions throughout, was very instructive, informative and helpful."

sizing" the homeless assistance system is challenging. At the same time, there are other communities that have invested minimally in homeless crisis response, resulting in large numbers of unsheltered chronically homeless individuals. Further, in the majority of Florida communities there is a dearth of truly affordable housing, which makes it even more difficult to help people move out of homelessness. In addition, rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing are both grounded in the philosophy of "housing first" – first helping a person move into permanent housing immediately with few barriers, and second following up with support services as needed after the person has been housed. The housing first approach is a concept that has been slow to gain widespread support in Florida.





"The most useful thing I learned? We have to work with partners to increase housing stock and we CAN do it!"

"After today, I learned how my organization will help initiate conversations when discussing planning of homeless services and housing."

"I now have a good, sound knowledge base to become more of an active participant in our homeless programs"

"Having participated in my Florida Housing Coalition webinars, many concepts and strategies have finally "jelled" and come to greater clarity!"

"I'm only 6 weeks into my new job in homeless assistance, and EVERYTHING I learned today will help me!"

"Not just helping myself, but the information learned will help my department by increasing knowledge about identifying and using different funding sources."

"This wonderful workshop gives me further impetus to implore for policy advocacy."

"I am now much more knowledgeable about homelessness issues, programs, legal, funding, and social methods to apply through my agency."

"Working with the community to identify more affordable housing is now easier."

Contact us if you would like additional information, to request technical assistance, resources, or a site visit.

Technical Assistance Hotline: 844-280-2683

Technical Assistance Email: info@flhousing.org

The good news is that another lesson learned is that so many Florida communities are seeking solutions and answers, creating new collaborations, and willing to do the work that is required to meet the challenges ahead. During trainings, webinars, and site visits, stakeholders learned about best practices, coordinated entry, targeting housing interventions, and increasing the stock of affordable housing for people who are moving out of homelessness.

As the Florida Housing Coalition's homelessness training and technical assistance moves forward, stakeholders come together to learn more about best practice, share their own experiences and resources, and develop practical strategies to implement solid local systems and housing solutions.

Past webinars and workshop materials are online at the Florida Housing Coalition website: www.flhousing.org.

Contact us if you would like additional information about working to end homelessness in Florida, or to request technical assistance, resources, or a site visit.

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To contact Susan Pourciau, Director of Homeless Training and Technical Assistance, email pourciau@flhousing.org

Susan Pourciau is the Director of Homeless Training and Technical Assistance for the Florida Housing Coalition. In this role, she coordinates and provides technical assistance to homeless Continuums of Care, nonprofit agencies, and local governments that are working to end homelessness throughout the state. Prior to joining the Florida Housing Coalition, Susan served as the Executive Director of the Big Bend Homeless Coalition. Susan has a Ph.D. in accounting and a J.D. from Duke Law School. 

