

The Impact of Training and Technical Assistance for Florida's Continuums of Care

By: Amanda Rosado

In 2015, the Legislature funded a training and technical assistance program for Homeless Continuums of Care (CoC) through the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO). The Florida Housing Coalition (the Coalition) has proudly served as the training and technical assistance provider ever since.

In Florida, there are 27 local CoC Lead Agencies working to collaboratively end homelessness in their communities. The Coalition partners with each CoC to deliver training and technical assistance to both leadership and direct service providers with the objective of ensuring each CoC implements evidence-based best practices to more effectively prevent and end homelessness. Through this

program, the Coalition has delivered 25 day-long regional workshops, 39 statewide webinars, and 85 local site visits, as well as two publications. Each of these activities has significantly contributed to the work local communities are doing to prevent and end homelessness. Through the hard work of all partners in the fight to end homelessness in Florida, including DEO and the Coalition, since the launch of the technical assistance program homelessness has decreased in Florida by more than 17 percent.

While much progress has been made, there are still nearly 30,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given day in Florida. Local communities continue to struggle with funding challenges, housing barriers, and some stakeholders still hold conflicting ideologies on how best to address homelessness. To sustain and accelerate progress, continued technical assistance and training is needed.

The Coalition is the only resource available to CoCs for expertise, support, and direct assistance at no cost to them.

And based on performance evaluations, participants feel the training is insightful, relevant, and provides clear action steps that can be implemented immediately in their communities. Specific feedback includes:

- The information I received will help my organization make better funding decisions.
- I came away with an extensive to do list of ways to improve my organization.
- We can rethink some of our practices to better align with HUD requirements and be more efficient in our outcomes.
- The workshop equipped us to write our vision and strategic plan.
- It was informative, and the information was a great reminder on the best practices in service delivery for clients.



Amanda Rosado, Florida Housing Coalition, works with participants of a DEO training.

In addition to providing workshops, webinars, and site visits, the Coalition has operated an email and telephone "hotline" to respond to individual requests for technical assistance. Over the course of three years, we responded to hundreds of such requests, providing individualized assistance for a wide variety of challenges and issues throughout Florida.

Though not an explicit component of the DEO contract, the Coalition recognized the need for increased assistance related to the HUD CoC Funding Application process. In response to this need, we host a weekly conference call for all the CoC Lead Agencies to discuss challenges and solutions related to the HUD CoC Funding Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA). The Coalition's specialized assistance with the HUD process for accessing federal support for CoCs helped bring in more than \$80 million in federal funding to the Florida.

To enhance collaboration between CoC Lead Agencies and Managing Entities, the Coalition convened a meeting with the housing leaders of both systems in April, 2018. Leaders



ABOVE: A full house for a DEO-sponsored workshop in Tampa on effective emergency sheltering.

spent a day evaluating the statewide efforts and successes of collaboration for special populations, including people with disabilities who are also experiencing homelessness. This convening complemented the Department of Children and Families efforts to address homelessness within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health system.

The Coalition has developed trusting and long-time relationships with each and every one of the Continuum of Care Lead Agencies in Florida. Through our previous and upcoming DEO-funded work, as well as our commitment to high quality services, the Continuum of Care Lead Agencies look to the Coalition for expertise in every arena. A Lead Agency Executive Director summed up the impact of our work as follows:

“[The Florida Housing Coalition’s] ability to educate and inform played a vital role in our CoC transforming from a low performing Continuum to one of the highest performing CoCs in Florida. Many of my counterparts across the state would agree that no one is more capable of developing policy, implementing positive change, and advising on complex issues.”

The Coalition’s Ending Homelessness Team is comprised of experts whose combined experience totals roughly 25 years of on hands-on service delivery and system development for people experiencing homelessness. With the experience at hand, The Coalition continues to provide realistic strategies and hands-on training in an effort to make homelessness rare, brief, and one-time. **HNN**



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