

# Charlotte County Ends Chronic Homelessness

BY AMANDA ROSADO

Effective partnerships, a lot of hard work, and best practices ended chronic homelessness in Charlotte County. \* According to annual point-in-time count data released in January, 2021. Through leadership from the Gulf Coast Partnership (GCP) and full adoption of the housing first approach, Charlotte County is a model for other communities in Florida.

Located in Southwest Florida between the cities of Fort Myers and Sarasota, Charlotte County has a shortage of quality affordable housing and relatively low wages for entry-level work. These conditions demand a robust, coordinated, and consistent response from service agencies working to end homelessness. Fortunately, stakeholders in Charlotte County have fully implemented best practices in system design and implementation to address chronic homelessness. The need to end chronic homelessness and the way to do it are not unique to Charlotte County.

Chronic homelessness is a term defining persons with long episodes of homelessness and a disabling condition that impacts housing stability. People experiencing chronic homelessness often utilize crisis services such as hospitals and jails at high rates that come at a high cost to communities. Permanent housing offers opportunity for households to stabilize, and studies show stable housing leads to a decrease in utilization of crisis services. The GCP is responsible for coordinating the housing crisis response system in Charlotte County, and Chief Executive Officer Angela Hogan knows housing is the solution for homelessness. Operating in partnership with other local agencies under an initiative called One Charlotte, GCP manages a system that effectively and efficiently moves persons from homelessness to safe and sustainable permanent housing. This system, referred to

by practitioners as coordinated entry, is a process that ensures all people experiencing a housing crisis have fair and equal access and are quickly identified, assessed for, referred, and connected to housing and assistance based on their strengths and needs. Through intensive coordination and training, GCP and One Charlotte efficiently refer individuals to services, move them into housing, and ultimately support an exit from homelessness.



ANGELA HOGAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE GULF COAST PARTNERSHIP

Angela Hogan, Executive Director of the Gulf Coast Partnership Describing Charlotte County's success, Angela Hogan says, "Our community's success in ending homelessness for people with disabilities and multiple or long episodes of homelessness was the result of a collective impact effort. Our partners had a shared vision, measured their progress, coordinated services, and communicated regularly. Most importantly, we set a date - no one experiencing chronic homelessness would be sleeping outside by the end of the day on December 31, 2020."

Homelessness will always be a challenge in Florida, but it can be made rare, brief, and non-recurring through effective system management and rapid housing placements. Charlotte County and GCP will receive an award from the Florida Housing Coalition at our statewide conference for the exemplary management and utilization of best practices to effectively eliminate chronic homelessness.

\* HUD point-in-time count data, Charlotte County, January, 2021.



**Amanda Rosado** is the Ending Homelessness Team Director at the Florida Housing Coalition, and is a strong advocate for housing first and recovery-oriented systems of care. She is passionate about utilizing evidence-based practices and providing effective interventions to work with vulnerable populations. Amanda holds a Master's degree in Social Work from the University of South Carolina.