



The Pasco County Homeless Housing Surge: 254 Housed.

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The Pasco County Continuum of Care (CoC) achieved immense success this year by rehousing 254 households experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a new set of challenges for the housing crisis response system, especially addressing the challenges of unsheltered homelessness. Individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness are already in untenable living conditions that place them at severe risk of serious illness and early death. Family homelessness also increased in many areas as hours were cut back, employment was terminated, and housing was lost.

Unsheltered homelessness presents a complex challenge to our communities, calling for an immediate response and long-term solutions. Funding from the CARES Act allowed communities to begin a planning process to develop a framework to address unsheltered homelessness amid a pandemic. The CARES Act offered an opportunity to develop and implement a two-pronged approach to address those immediate and long-term needs through street outreach, emergency shelter, prevention, and permanent housing.

Over \$189 million in Emergency Solutions Grants funding was made available in the State of Florida specifically for

street outreach, emergency shelter, rapid rehousing, and homelessness prevention. This is almost 13 times the annual allocation entitlement communities receive. The Pasco County CoC contracted with the Coalition to help develop their Coordinated Investment Plan. The CoC, along with Pasco County, developed a plan to quickly address unsheltered homelessness by providing non-congregate emergency shelter and permanent housing. Individuals and families were prioritized based on their vulnerability to COVID-19, length of time homeless, and the extent to which they were unsheltered.

The goal was significant: Rehouse 225 households in 180 days and build capacity in the CoC through Coordinated Entry and housing-focused case management.

Funding was leveraged and maximized through several sources. The majority of funding for the rehousing effort was provided through the Emergency Solutions Grant allocated to Pasco County and the State of Florida. Non-congregate shelter was funded utilizing Coronavirus Relief Funds. Other funding included the regular CoC Program funding for rental assistance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Challenge Grant, and HOME Tenant Based Rental

Assistance. In total, \$3.8 million was allocated for the project termed the “Housing Surge.”

Service providers, the CoC, the County, and community stakeholders were excited to launch the Housing Surge. The Coalition provided training to service providers to help build their knowledge and capacity to quickly rehouse individuals and provide the support services necessary for households to find stability in housing. The Coordinated Entry System was completely revamped to provide a more efficient prioritization and referral process. Street outreach employees worked quickly to identify unsheltered households, get them connected into the Coordinated Entry System, and connect them to immediate emergency shelter. The CoC immediately developed a

A housing surge is an important strategy in the effort to rehouse unsheltered households quickly. It provides a time-limited window for a community to push resources out as rapidly as possible. Housing surges also present a bit of a culture shift for communities as they shift from deficit-based planning to resource-available planning.

master list of individuals and families waiting for housing.

While inflow kept growing, the outflow was not as swift. Providers quickly ran into the problem of a lack of units. Non-congregate shelter at area hotels also proved to be very expensive and households had to be prioritized by their vulnerability to COVID-19. The CoC began meeting weekly with stakeholders to discuss households waiting for housing, funding issues, and other challenges.

Don Anderson, Chief Executive Officer of the Coalition for the Homeless of Pasco County, states the biggest challenge faced during the Housing Surge was the lack of rental units available. “The extraordinary increase in property values played a big role with many landlords electing to cash out while the demand for sales was so strong.”

The community got creative and set up an email address where community members could snap a photo of a for rent sign or send in a tip with a potential rental. The Coalition for the Homeless of Pasco County would immediately help secure the unit.

Despite the challenges with the hotels and lack of available rental units, the community was finally able to meet its goal. It took longer than 180 days, but the community ultimately housed 254 households within 12 months. The Housing Surge represents the great success a community can have when they come together and work toward the common goal of ending homelessness.



Amanda Rosado is the Florida Housing Coalition’s Chief Strategy Officer, with an extensive background working with communities to prevent and end homelessness. Amanda is also a HUD technical assistance provider to Continuums of Care throughout Florida. As 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 some of the most vulnerable populations. Amanda holds a master’s degree in Social Work.