

Proposal to Reduce Homelessness

Homelessness is a complex social issue that is difficult to solve. It is an important quality of life concern both for those who experience homelessness and for the general population. Complex social problems like homelessness are not solved by one organization. They are solved through a coordinated system of programs, organizations, institutions, and people all working toward a common vision, aligned activities, shared measures, and strong communication.

Currently, there is a robust level of activity occurring in the community regarding the issue of homelessness. However, this activity is not coordinated, aligned, or clearly communicated throughout the community.

This proposal sets forth an aspirational vision for our community to achieve a state of “functional zero” regarding the number of people who are homeless. The term “functional zero” refers to a condition whereby more people escape homelessness each month than become homeless. And when homelessness does occur, our community would have a well-coordinated and efficient system that assures homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

This proposed scope of work is rooted in best practices from around the nation and based on our local context of social services and networks. This proposal identifies four inter-related community strategies and their supporting activities.

Strategy 1 – Work together as a community to significantly reduce the number of people who experience homelessness. Homelessness is a complex issue that cannot be solved by any single program or organization – working together as a community is imperative.

Activities Supporting Strategy #1

- a. Host 2 public workshops to engage the community and co-create solutions.
- b. Identify, communicate, and coordinate with key stakeholders.
- c. Create a shared community understanding of homelessness in our community.
- d. Analyze local policies that impact people who are homeless and the cumulative effects of how these policies impact each other.

Strategy 2 – Implement five modifications to the homeless service delivery system to streamline the process of getting people back onto their feet and into stable housing and stable jobs. All participants will be given the chance to join United Way’s Avenues to Opportunity Initiative (see attached). Avenues to Opportunity is coaching-based initiative providing a holistic set of intentionally designed services to move someone from poverty to self-sufficiency. The central focus of Avenues to Opportunity is getting and keeping a job. Having a job and family stability is key to maintaining long term housing. United Way works closely with several not-for-profit organizations that provide employment training and coaching. These organizations include the Lincoln Central Neighborhood Family Center’s Bartholomew County Works Program, Human Services’ Coaching for Success Program Sans Souci’s Employee Development Program, and others. United Way also works closely with several “second chance employers” who are flexible in their hiring practices and extend opportunities to some job candidates they might not typically hire - because they are enrolled in Avenues to Opportunity.

Homelessness in our community will not be solved by focusing on single programs – it must be focused on the people who are homeless. People who are homeless often have unique sets of deep challenges that defy parameters and interventions of any single program. Permanent solutions must address the root causes of homelessness and enlist the efforts, resources, and expertise of multiple organizations.

Activities Supporting Strategy #2

- a. Establish a coordinated entry system for people experiencing homelessness.
- b. Establish a coordinated assessment tool to be used by frontline workers who interact with people who are homeless.

- c. Implement a Homeless Response Team composed of service providers who meet weekly to remove barriers and provide support for people searching for stable housing.
- d. Design and implement a system to proactively help those people facing eviction or foreclosure.
- e. Evaluate, design, and test a “Street Social Worker” pilot program.

Strategy 3 – Make recommendations on targeted community investments into homeless related services. Identify and invest in eliminating key systemic barriers that prevent people from becoming and remaining stably housed.

Activities Supporting Strategy 3#

- a. Provide targeted recommendations on homelessness related services. Evaluate potential targeted investments designed to reduce homelessness in our community.

Strategy 4 – Robust communication with stakeholders and the public

Strategy Detail

Strategy 1: Work together as a community to significantly reduce the number of people who experience homelessness.

Detailed Activities Supporting Strategy #1

- A. Host 2 public workshops to engage the community and co-create solutions.
 - a. Stakeholders would include those with Lived Experience, housing advocates, and the public.
 - b. Workshop #1 would be a guided facilitation workshop focused on gathering public input, perceptions, and ideas for solutions. Workshop #1 would occur early in the process.
 - c. Workshop #2 would occur later in the process and would garner input on recommended solutions and general direction forward.
- B. Identify, communicate, and coordinate with key stakeholders. United Way of Bartholomew County would coordinate with key community stakeholders who are impacted by the effects of homelessness in our community.
 - a. Stakeholders would include but not be limited to:
 - i. Those with lived experience of being homeless.
 - ii. Mayor’s Office
 - iii. Police Department
 - iv. Code Enforcement
 - v. Columbus Housing Authority
 - vi. City Council
 - vii. County Commissioners
 - viii. Columbus Regional Health
 - ix. Not-for-profit organizations
 - x. Advocacy groups
 - xi. General Public
 - b. United Way of Bartholomew County would perform in-depth interviews with identified stakeholders.
 - c. United Way of Bartholomew County would propose and seek agreement from community stakeholders to a set of community principles regarding addressing the issue of homelessness.
 - d. United Way of Bartholomew County would stay up to date with other local affordable housing initiatives currently under way.

- C. Create a shared community understanding of homelessness in our community. United Way of Bartholomew County would strive to establish shared understanding of homelessness in our community and its impacts.
 - a. Deliverables would include creating and sharing the following community building tools:
 - i. Stakeholder map of the homeless system.
 - ii. Summary chart of “Who is Doing What for Whom” – (matrix of which organizations are involved, what they do, and who their constituents are)
 - iii. Identification of gaps and overlaps in the system.
 - iv. Shared terminology and definitions
 - v. Propose a dashboard of key community metrics to measure our progress in reducing homelessness.

- D. Analyze local policies that impact people who are homeless. This would cover policies of local government and other impacted institutions. United Way of Bartholomew County would provide a summary of policies that impact people who are homeless and an analysis of where policies may not align with each other.

Strategy 2: Implement five modifications to the homeless service delivery system to streamline the process of getting people back into a stable housing situation.

Detailed Activities Supporting Strategy #2

- A. Establish a Coordinated Entry System for people who are experiencing homelessness. The purpose of coordinated entry is to get people into stable housing as quickly as possible. United Way of Bartholomew County would work closely with key stakeholders to design and implement a “No Wrong Door” approach for people who are experiencing homelessness – regardless of where they enter the system. Common examples of current entry points include contact with police officers, code enforcement, City Hall, social service providers, Public Library, the Emergency Room, Stride Center, etc. Currently, the services made available to a person who is homeless is heavily dependent on where they enter the system and who they interact with. The depth and quality of the interaction and information they receive is highly variable. By establishing a coordinated entry approach, our community would ensure that people experiencing homelessness would get connected to needed services as quickly as possible and thus begin their search for stable affordable housing as quickly as possible. Key to this element is developing and launching a mobile app that could be used by anyone in the community who encounters a homeless person and would like to help them connect to resources.

- B. Establish a Coordinated Assessment Tool to be used by front-line staff who interact with those who are homeless. A common assessment tool enables organizations to have a common language, share pertinent information efficiently, and provide a basis for problem solving and connecting the person who is homeless to services in order to get back to a stable housing situation. A common assessment tool should be available on a mobile phone, simple, easily administered by front-line staff, quick to administer, assist in identifying vulnerability of risk of harm. United Way of Bartholomew County would work with community organizations to establish a single assessment tool that would lead to serving people who are homeless with a consistent level of service.

- C. Implement a Homeless Response Team composed of service providers that meets weekly to remove barriers and provide support to house people who are currently homeless or at risk of being homeless in the next 14 days. The primary objective would be to connect people to long-term housing that works for them. United Way of

Bartholomew County would convene this team weekly. It would be composed of key stakeholders involved in social services including Brighter Days, Human Services, Salvation Army, Columbus Township Trustee, Sans Souci, Su Casa, Code Enforcement, and others.

- D. Design and implement a system to proactively help those people facing eviction or foreclosure. Preventing people from becoming homeless is the most cost-effective way to keep people housed. Once a person becomes homeless – life becomes exponentially more difficult, and a downward spiral of negative effects build upon each other.

- E. Evaluate, design, and test a “Street Social Worker” pilot program. This program would be modeled after best practices in other communities and would be designed to meet people who are homeless where they are. People who are homeless often express frustration over how to connect to the system and what resources are available. This program would create trust-based relationships in trying to get people into permanent housing.

Strategy 3: Make targeted recommendations on community investments into homeless related services.

Detailed Activities that Support Strategy #3

- A. Provide targeted recommendations on homelessness related services. Recommendations would be based on proven best practices and local context regarding the social service delivery system and market housing conditions. Recommendations would serve people who are currently homeless, near homeless, and emerging from homelessness. Recommendations would be cost effective and consider NIMBYism.

Strategy 4: Robust communication with key stakeholders and general public

At each step of the way, United Way of Bartholomew County, in conjunction with the City of Columbus, will clearly communicate with key stakeholders and the public. This will be done through public reports, social media, newspaper, and radio.

Budget

Strategy 1 – Bring the Community together for shared understanding.

Engage the public in a meaningful way	
Host 2 Public Workshops to engage those with lived experience and the general public	\$15,000
Interview key stakeholders	\$9,500
Make the system visible	
Create a stakeholder map to make the system visible	\$2,000
Create “Who is Doing What with Whom” tool	\$3,500
Map the continuum of housing resources for those who are homeless, near homeless, or at-risk of being homeless	\$6,000
Analyze the System	
Identify gaps and overlaps in the service delivery system for those facing homelessness	\$2,000
Analyze local policies (public and private) that impact those who are homeless	\$4,000
Find Common Ground	
Find Common Ground regarding a shared community vision, shared metrics, and aligned activities	\$4,500
Subtotal	\$46,500

Strategy 2 – Implement modifications to the social-service delivery system to better serve those who are homeless.

System Modifications	
Establish a coordinated entry system across the community (includes development of mobile app)	\$27,000
Establish a coordinated assessment tool	\$6,500
Implement a homeless response team	\$7,800
Design and implement a system to proactively help those facing eviction	\$8,000
Evaluate, design, and test a Street Social Worker pilot program	\$30,000
Subtotal	\$79,300

Strategy 3 – Provide targeted recommendations on homeless related services.

Recommendations	
Provide a list of targeted recommendations	\$3,000
Subtotal	\$3,000

Strategy 4 – Robust communication with key stakeholders and general public.

Communication	
Robust communication with key stakeholders and general public	\$4,500
Subtotal	\$4,500

Total \$133,300