

## **Westchester Continuum of Care for the Homeless Year in Review**

**Background:** Westchester County is having phenomenal success in moving homeless people out of shelters and into permanent housing. In 1990 the New York Times reported that Westchester had America's highest per capita rate of homelessness, 3 times NYC's rate. By 2011 we reduced the number of homeless in Westchester by 77%. Westchester's success stands in sharp contrast to NYC. NYC's shelters are at record high occupancy, while Westchester County is near record lows. Several factors account for our success. We created affordable housing. Westhab alone built or renovated over **2,000** affordable housing units. We worked with NYS to create a Shelter Supplement that now subsidizes permanent housing for **908** formerly homeless households. Our CoC funding supports **673** permanent housing units. HUD-VASH supports **125** permanent housing beds for veterans and their families. Local rent subsidies support **60** units. We also provide mobile case management for **1,580** mentally ill and/or chemically dependent people.

### **Challenges Overcome**

- ◆ Changing Grant Management Requirements at HUD: Over the last year HUD has imposed increasingly onerous and seemingly arbitrary reporting requirements that have delayed reimbursement for CoC sponsors, often by months. For example, HUD now requires that time sheets for last year be presented in a format that was not requested until this year, and it requires that time sheets be signed by both the worker and the supervisor, although the Office of Management and Budget guidelines clearly state that either signature is sufficient. HUD's new approach caused financial hardship, but we struggled through and survived. One resourceful housing provider tracked down a former employee all the way to Sierra Leone in Africa to have them counter-sign last year's time sheets in the new format!
- ◆ Organizational Changes: Saint John's Riverside Hospital has decided that it can no longer accept the administrative burdens required to maintain its small Shelter Plus Care program for 4 homeless people with HIV/AIDS. Two agencies volunteered to step in, and Greyston will take over in September. The Mount Vernon YMCA recently announced that it was closing its facility in Mount Vernon and ending its Shelter Plus Care contracts with the City. Pathways and the Yonkers YMCA have both volunteered to house the men being displaced.
- ◆ Staff Changes: We lost our HMIS administrator this year due to a contractual glitch, but everyone has pitched in to sustain our Homeless Management Information System and the County expects to have a new HMIS administrator in place by late summer or early fall. There were also numerous administrative changes. Jeanne Blum replaced Rosa Boone at the Coalition for the Homeless of Westchester, Danielle Scholar replaced Carmen Sylvester as the administrator of Mount Vernon's CoC program, and Donna Besteiro was hired as the new Executive Director for CHOP. DCMH hired Thomas Joseph to manage its Shelter Plus Care vouchering and MHACY assigned Marcie Ciuffetelli to oversee its CoC grants.
- ◆ Funding Lost and Partially Restored: Westchester lost \$2.3 million in eviction prevention funding in one brief period last year. Our CoC sprang into action. We helped persuade the County Legislature to restore \$400,000 in proposed funding cuts and the County Executive to release an additional \$300,000 in local funding that had been held up for years. We also advocated vigorously at the state level and now additional funding is being allocated to NYS OTDA so some of their statewide cuts in eviction prevention funding can be restored.

# Westchester Continuum of Care for the Homeless Year in Review (continued)

## Current Point-In-Time Numbers Served

Our Point-In-Time Count on 1/31/12 showed that our CoC had **1,703** homeless persons from **1,045** households in our emergency and transitional housing. Our CoC-funded projects alone were providing transitional housing for **285** people and permanent housing for **979**.

## New Funding Secured

- ◆ HUD Continuum of Care for the Homeless (CoC): This year our CoC received **\$11,767,752** in renewal funding for **45** projects. For 3 years in a row, we had scored just below the cutoff line for funding for new projects, one year by a heartbreaking 0.05 points. This year we improved our score to **11.75** points above the funding threshold and won **\$1,959,442** per year in annually renewable funding for **7** new projects including:
  - **\$655,593** for permanent housing subsidies and intensive case management for 32 parenting young adults (ages 18-24) and their children;
  - **\$326,685** for Rapid Rehousing time-limited shallow rent subsidies and services to move 52 homeless households into sustainable permanent housing in 24 months;
  - **\$323,748** for new transitional housing for 12 homeless young adults ages 18-24;
  - **\$233,799** for permanent housing subsidies, case management, crisis intervention and housing retention services for 12 disabled homeless adults from New Rochelle;
  - **\$178,338** for home-finding, permanent housing subsidies, service coordination, and housing retention services for at least 8 homeless families in Mt. Vernon;
  - **\$127,949** for rent subsidies and housing retention services for 12 homeless households in White Plains; and
  - **\$113,330** for permanent supportive housing for 8 physically disabled homeless adults.
- ◆ NYS Homeless Housing Assistance Program (HHAP): In May 2012 Westchester shelters received **\$8,160,720** from HHAP, an unprecedented **27.2%** of all HHAP awards statewide.
  - Grace Church Community Center: GCCC's Open Arms shelter had only a precarious month-to-month lease. It got **\$5,771,101** to buy, renovate and expand the facility.
  - My Sisters' Place: MSP's shelter in Yonkers needs extensive repairs that could only be done by closing the shelter. MSP got **\$2,389,619** to buy a new, larger, custom-designed facility with a flexible design to accommodate families of varying sizes.
- ◆ VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families: WestCOP received **\$965,025** to provide time-limited housing subsidies and other services to 1,000 veteran families in the Hudson Valley.
- ◆ HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH): Our 2012 point-in-time count showed that Westchester had **125** homeless veterans and their family members living in permanent housing subsidized by HUD-VASH.

## **Westchester Continuum of Care for the Homeless Year in Review (continued)**

### **New Models and New Collaborations Created**

- ◆ Westhab reconfigured its Coachman facility into distinct emergency and transitional components, speeding the rehousing process and providing an eligibility pathway for homeless families to access CoC-funded permanent housing.
- ◆ Pathways reconfigured its DSS-funded “housing first” programs into distinct emergency and transitional components, speeding the rehousing process and expanding capacity at no additional cost to county taxpayers.
- ◆ When HUD announced a second round of ESG funding and encouraged communities to focus these new funds on rapid rehousing, Westchester County and the City of Yonkers collaborated with each other and community partners to jointly develop protocols for using local ESG funds for rapid rehousing that incorporated lessons learned through our experience with the time-limited Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program.
- ◆ DSS, DCMH, Westhab, Children’s Village and the Recovery Housing Network found a way to piece together existing resources to create a new pilot housing for homeless youth aging out of foster care. The pilot will move in its first 3 youth later this month.
- ◆ New Rochelle opened its Section 8 waiting list for the first time in years. We helped coordinate outreach and HOPE Community Services alone moved over a half dozen of its HPRP clients onto ongoing Section 8 subsidies last winter.
- ◆ We’ve encouraged closer collaboration between the Municipal Housing Authority for the City of Yonkers and our CoC. MHACY already manages Yonkers’ allocation of CoC funding. We also coordinated outreach through local homeless shelters when Yonkers opened its Section 8 waiting list this year. The YMCA of Yonkers alone moved over a half dozen of its residents into Yonkers public housing over the last few months.

### **Structural Improvements in our CoC**

We made a series of major structural improvements to our CoC including:

- ◆ Drafting formal bylaws (now under review by various Law Departments),
- ◆ Developed a new structure that will allow much more community participation, which will be rolled out with a series of informational meetings later this year,
- ◆ Conducting a formal needs assessment outlined by HUD that enabled us to set clear priorities for the coming year,
- ◆ Creating a new Providers Committee co-chaired by Paul Anderson-Winchell and Diane Stern, and
- ◆ Creating a new Homelessness Prevention Committee co-chaired by Lisa Buck and Keemya Bullard.