

LEGISLATIVE

080469

Gainesville Region/Alachua County Empowerment

GRACE

for the homeless

City of Gainesville/Alachua County
10-Year Plan to End Homelessness



Our community's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness is called GRACE for the Homeless (Gainesville Region/ Alachua County Empowerment.)



When the plan was published in December 2005, Alachua County was home to approximately 1,000 persons experiencing homelessness, with over 650 unsheltered each night.

As of January 2012, these numbers have grown to more than 2,000 persons who are homeless, with over 1,200 unsheltered.

PROJECT
GRACE



So in the seven years since the plan was developed, our numbers of homeless persons has doubled.





In 2005, we still had a strong economy and job market.

The timelines for implanting the Plan were based on the assumption that the economy would remain strong and that the same level of community involvement shown when developing the Plan would be maintained.





Since that time, the economy has struggled, making it more difficult to both keep and find living wage employment and affordable housing.





We also experienced multiple changes in staffing at both the Office on Homelessness and at the Alachua County Coalition for the Homeless and Hungry.

The champions at the City and County Commissions are no longer in office and we've had multiple co-chairs of the Implementation Committee.



The good news is that there is currently a renewed sense of urgency toward getting the Plan fully implemented and reversing the rising tide of homelessness in our community.

We now have Commissioner Wells from the City and Commissioner Pinkoson from the County working on the issue and chairing the Implementation Committee. Both are fully committed to ending and preventing homelessness locally.



The causes of homelessness are complex but reoccurring themes emerge:

- Poverty,
- Lack of affordable housing;
- Need for services.





Gainesville does not have a housing shortage, but there is a lack of affordable housing.





There is a need for permanent supportive housing for homeless persons with disabilities.





The system of care is fragmented and limited.





Costs: It costs about \$9,000 a year to provide one year of housing and supportive services in a homeless emergency shelter.

Studies show it costs only \$3,600 to provide a \$300 a month housing subsidy to a homeless individual to ensure they remain in existing housing.

PROJECT
GRACE



To address homelessness, we must take a two-step approach:

- Close the Front Door and
- Open the Back Door.





We need to implement prevention strategies that reduce the number of persons who become homeless.





These strategies include:

- Centralized service delivery;
- Dedicated housing resources for individuals being discharged from public institutions such as foster care and jail;
- Financial assistance;
- Job and life skills training; etc.



We must also increase supportive services to homeless persons and expedite placement into housing.





Many of the strategies that are helpful for moving persons out of homelessness **are also effective for preventing homelessness** if individuals know where to go and how to access these services prior to a crisis.





The 10-Year Plan set up a number of program goals:

- Create an Office on Homelessness;
- Increase the number of beds available to homeless persons;
- Expand the local inventory of affordable housing;
- Increase access to services through a one stop center;



- Increase access to free medical care;
- Provide supportive services;
- Reduce the number of homeless arrests;
- Implement effective discharge planning;
- Homeless prevention through education, job training and
- Supportive services.



Some of these goals have been achieved or implementation has begun.

Others are still outstanding.





An Office on Homelessness
was established.

Staffing changed a few times
since its creation.





The number of beds available for homeless persons has increased through the development of new programs, especially programs targeted to Veterans.

However, since the number of homeless persons has increased so dramatically, the increase in beds has had minimal effect.





The inventory of affordable housing ebbs and flows.

For the most part, this is a response to market demand .





Access to medical care also varies depending on what service providers can do at the time and the number of volunteers that can be recruited.





We tried to implement a homeless court, but found that our community does not have the population necessary to warrant this. What was put into place was a method by which homeless persons can contact the State Attorney's office through an intermediary and see if interventions in lieu of jail are available.

Very few persons have availed themselves of this service.



A medical respite program was established to provide temporary shelter to homeless persons being discharged from the hospital.

This is a partnership between Shands, North Florida Regional, the Alachua County Health Department and St. Francis House.

The City and County jointly fund the program.



The number of supportive services, education opportunities and job training programs has grown, but are not always easy to access.





A limited amount of progress towards establishing a one stop center has occurred. The original plan called for this to be a phased project.

- Phase One called for the creation of an office to ensure coordinated homeless services.
- Phase Two called for expanding the office for better coordination of services.
- Phase Three called for the inclusion of housing as part of the one stop center.

GRACE
PROJECT



Part of the delay in establishing the one stop center is that the phases were combined and instead of first opening an office to provide one stop for coordinated service delivery, we instead tried to site and build a Phase Three center.

GRACE
PROJECT



The City is currently looking at the former Gainesville Correctional Institution as a possible location, at least in the interim, as a location for the one stop center. Discussions about what services could be placed there include an incredible array of services.



One key item that may make this site more workable is that planning is focused on a step-by-step approach and not on opening a full blown Phase Three type facility at the outset. The thought is to bring in services and service providers slowly, and to base what is brought in on community needs and remain flexible enough to change as community needs change.



The current vision for the site is for it to be community center for innovation. A place that addresses what the community needs.





Current discussions for services to be provided include:

- Job training and mentoring programs;
- Job search assistance;
- Behavioral and medical health care;





- Life skills training;
- Case management;
- Medical and dental care;
- Education opportunities;
- Housing;
- And more.





There are also discussions of services that could be provided beyond these such as:

- A drop off child care center for parents accessing the services of the center or going out on job interviews;





- Providing meals and with them, job training opportunities;
- Organic farming to supplies food for the meals as well as offer training; and
- Retail opportunities;
- Again, many more.





Before we can move forward at this site, we do need to approval of the City and for the City to go ahead with the purchase.

Plans are being made for the community to tour the site and to provide their vision of what should occur there.



The goal is for the community to drive the vision and become an active partner in the site.

For it to be effective, we will need everyone to know that this is where they can go to become empowered to move out of poverty and, stay in or move into stable, permanent housing .



In conclusion, the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness is now in Year 7.

During that time, we have seen dramatic increases in the number of persons who are homeless, largely due to a very unstable economy.



Parts of the plan have been successfully implemented, parts have been partially implemented or changed to reflect current needs and parts are still waiting.





The cornerstone of the plan, the one stop center, has been a moving target, but the community now seems ready to help make this a reality, especially if we go back to the original plan and implement it in phases