

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

Gainesville Region/Alachua County Empowerment

GRACE

for the homeless



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

The people described in this plan -- those without shelter, who are vulnerable, suffering and struggling to survive -- belong to this community.

Homelessness carries a cost for all of us: financially for taxpayers, emotionally and physically for homeless persons. GRACE for the Homeless is designed to act on our compassion for our poorest neighbors.

Alachua County has approximately 1,000 homeless men, women and children. Our community has less than 350 shelter beds, which leaves over 650 people unsheltered each night. More than a quarter (27%) of the homeless are children under the age of 18.

Many of our homeless were born in Alachua County or grew up here. Nearly for-

ty percent of the homeless men in our community have served in the U.S. Military.

The primary causes of homelessness include unemployment, income that does not meet basic needs, and disabilities (physical, mental health, drug/alcohol addiction).

Homelessness has been called a national disgrace in the wealthiest country in the world. It is a national problem with a local solution.

The Gainesville/Alachua County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness marks a departure from the long-standing community approach of managing the symptoms of homelessness rather than attacking the root causes - poverty and a lack of affordable housing.

Hundreds of volunteers representing government, business, education, the criminal justice system, service providers, faith-based and community organizations, homeless persons, and other citizens, have spent the last six months developing our community's Ten Year Plan.

Our goal is to both end and prevent homelessness. Our plan includes innovative ideas based on successful models that have been implemented in other parts of Florida and the U.S.

In order for the Gainesville - Alachua County Ten Year Plan to be successfully implemented it will require the active support of all of our citizens. The fact that you are reading these words shows you have an interest. We invite you to take action and become part of the solution.



Peegen Hanrahan
Peegen Hanrahan
Mayor,
City of Gainesville

Rodney J. Long
Rodney J. Long
Alachua County
Board of Commissioners

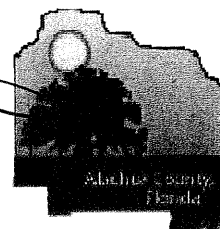


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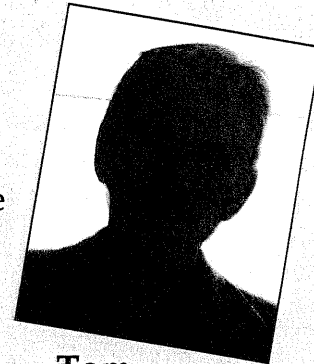
Alachua Co. Poverty Reduction Program

Cover photo by Gary Alan Kalpakoff. Inner photos by Bob Freeman and Jon DeCarmine. For information about the 10-Year Plan, its progress or creation, please call the Alachua County Housing Authority at 352.372.2549.

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December 15, 2005

“
St. Francis
House
Homeless Shelter and
Soup Kitchen is where
you expect to find
homeless people.



Tom

In Gainesville, you can find one formerly homeless and now very blessed recovering alcoholic working there. A Vietnam Vet with over 25 years of construction experience.

No one sets out to end up on the street, but it happens.

The trip to the bottom is sad and harsh to say the least. The journey back is nothing short of miraculous. The key was being told that I did not have to do it anymore.

All I had to do was develop some long-lost spiritual understanding and trust, and accept help from those willing to show me the way back.

Like so many others I didn't know there was help or people who actually cared.

I had spent over two years living in an alley before I came to the VA

Medical Center in Gainesville for an after-surgery eye exam.

I found out about and got accepted into the VA Residential Rehab Treatment Program. Through that program I learned of a partnership housing program between St Francis House and the Alachua County Housing Authority.

After a year as Resident Manager of their single-room occupancy hotel (SRO) called Sunrise Residence Inn, I received an invitation to be part of Gainesville's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.

Through all that has happened in the past 30 months, if I could claim any success it would be going into the shelter, seeing my peers and being able to say, "But for the Grace of God there go I."

”

Why End Homelessness?

The 10-year planning process will require long-term commitment, from the first planning steps to full implementation. It will require ongoing volunteer and staff time and energy.

Commissioner Long and Mayor Hanrahan have created a Homeless Implementation Committee to facilitate the 10-year plan process.

The Implementation Committee will comprise the chairs and co-chairs of the seven committees (Steering, Housing, Health, Public Safety, Services, Faith-based and Finance). It will begin meeting immediately in 2006 and will report its progress to the Steering Committee every six months.

The 10-Year Plan is intended to be a living document. It is a map for the next ten years which should be modified as needed.

Members of the public and elected officials need to embrace it as a beginning point. More than 100 community leaders have donated their time and energy into developing this plan.

It is essential to keep the momentum going.

For 20 years, communities throughout the country have been managing the homeless problem rather than seeking to address the root causes. The Federal Government has spent billions of dollars on homeless programs since the enactment of the McKinney Act in 1987.

Despite this investment, there continue to be thousands of people who experience homelessness locally. As many as 3 million people become homeless nationally over the course of a year.¹

To get a different result, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) has spearheaded a national effort to both end and prevent homelessness through the development of local 10-year plans.

Currently, there are over 200 cities that have developed 10-year plans and have committed energy and resources to their implementation.

According to U.S. ICH Executive Director Philip Mangano:

"Five years ago the notion of cities having 10-year plans to end homelessness was naïve and risky. No one thought it was possible. But the new re-

search and new technologies have created such movement and innovation on this issue that it may now be naïve and risky not to have such a plan."

Research has shown that supportive housing strategies can be effective in moving chronically homeless persons (those with long-term and/or repeated episodes of homelessness and some form of a disability) off the streets, out of shelters and on toward recovery and self-sufficiency.²

Nationally, recent studies show that while chronically homeless persons constitute approximately 10% of the homeless population, they typically consume over 50% of all emergency homeless services.³

"Homelessness is a national problem with local solutions. Working together, we can end this national disgrace."

Philip F. Mangano, Executive Director,
U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

In Gainesville and Alachua County there are an estimated 1,000 homeless persons. Our community has ap-

proximately 350 shelter beds, which leaves 650 persons unsheltered each night.

The stereotypical image of a homeless person as an unemployed, panhandling, single male with an alcohol problem is a misnomer that enables some people to look the other way.

The reality is that the homeless in our community include women with children, elderly people, physically and/or mentally disabled persons, veterans, and the working poor.

Another misconception is that the homeless are transients. Nearly a third (31.7%) of homeless people in Alachua County have lived here for 10 years or more. Over a fifth (21.6%) were born here or grew up here (see *"Who are the homeless in Alachua County?", following page*).⁴

Causes of Homelessness:

The causes of homelessness are complex, yet the reoccurring themes that emerge are: poverty, a lack of affordable housing and a need for services.

According to the most recent (January 2005) point-in-time survey conducted by the Alachua County Coalition for the Homeless and Hungry, the

primary causes of homelessness were: unemployment, income that does not meet basic needs, alcohol/drug problems, mental health issues, domestic violence, physical/medical problems, released from an institution (jail, prison, hospital) and divorce/separation.

Contributing problems:

Gainesville does not have a housing shortage but a lack of housing that is *affordable* for the people who live and work in our community.

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

Currently, we have inadequate service capacity for the needs of our homeless neighbors.

The system of care is fragmented. Homeless persons have difficulty accessing mainstream resources. Poor discharge planning from public systems (hospitals, jails, etc.) results in additional homelessness.

Existing ordinances, policies, and programs limit law enforcement options in terms of arresting homeless persons.

There is a fundamental need for enhanced public aware-

ness regarding the plight of the homeless.

The Costs of Homelessness:

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

It costs only \$3,600 to provide a \$300 monthly housing subsidy to an individual to ensure she or he remains in existing housing.⁵

The *New England Journal of Medicine* reports that homeless people spend an average of four days longer in the hospital, per visit, than comparable non-homeless people, at an extra cost of \$2,414 per hospitalization.⁶

According to Shands Healthcare officials, two of their Gainesville hospitals incur over \$3 million in uncompensated emergency room expenses due to homeless persons' visits to the emergency room (ER), which average approximately \$700 per visit. Shands officials point to a high number of instances where the ER visit could have been avoided with improved access to preventative care.

A handful of local organizations, primarily the Helping Hands and Equal Access clinics, provide urgent health

Who are the homeless in Alachua County?

LOCAL INFORMATION AND STATISTICS ON HOMELESSNESS

Demographics¹

(n=920)

Gender:

65% male; 35% female

Age:

Children (under 18): 27%

Adults (18-60): 67%

Elderly (60 and up): 6%

Family Status:

Single, no children: 69%

Single, with children: 16%

Married, no children: 10%

Married, with children: 5%

Education:

Grade School: 7%

Some High School: 23%

HS Diploma or GED: 34%

Some College: 24%

College Degree: 7%

Vocational/Trade School: 5%

Veteran Status:

39% of homeless adults (n=668) have served in the U.S. Military

Employment:

Not Employed: 70.5%

Employed Full-Time: 17%

Employed Part-Time: 5%

Employed in Day Labor: 7.5%

More than 1 in 5 homeless residents (21.6%) were born or grew up in Alachua County.²

Nearly a third (31.7%) have lived in Alachua County for 10 years or more,³ and nearly 60% have lived in the county for more than a year.⁴

Often, a person's options for shelter tend to dictate the type of work they are capable of holding down. More than half of our local residents experiencing homelessness who reported having a part- or full-time job during the January 2004 point-in-time survey lived in a shelter or transitional housing program at the time of the survey, whereas the vast majority of those employed via day labor agencies lived in the woods or on the streets.²

Using a lenient definition of shelter, such that it includes emergency & transitional shelters as well as temporary arrangements such as motel rooms, hospital beds, and the homes of friends and relatives, 52% of Alachua County's homeless population was unsheltered on any given night in 2004.²

The majority (57.4%) of homeless individuals in the county have been without shelter for less than a year.¹

Primary Causes of Homelessness¹

Unemployed or lost job: 17.5%
Alcohol or drug problems: 14%
Mental health/emotional issues: 13%
Income doesn't meet basic needs: 12%
Moved out to escape abuse: 10%
Physical/medical problems: 9%
Released from jail, prison, hospital: 4%
Break-up/divorce/separation: 4%

Hunger in Alachua County

Hunger is a real and persistent problem in Alachua County, despite perceptions to the contrary. The Hunger Work Group of the Alachua County Coalition for the Homeless & Hungry conducted two annual surveys (April 2003 & April 2004) of local organizations that provide food, meals, commodities, vouchers and other food and nutritional assistance to individuals and families in Alachua County. **Survey results indicate a significant shortfall in local organizations' ability to meet the current demand for food.**

Please contact Poverty Reduction Program Director John Skelly at 352.264.6749 for copies of the surveys and results.

Substance Abuse, Mental Health & Disabling Conditions

Nationally, approximately 23% of the single homeless population suffers from some form of severe and persistent mental illness. The U.S. Conference of Mayors' most recent report on homelessness estimated that 30% of those without homes are afflicted with drug or alcohol addictions.⁵

Persons reporting disabling conditions, January 2005⁴

Physical: 23.5%	Drug/alcohol addiction: 14.5%
Developmental: 5%	HIV/AIDS: 2%
Mental health (including depression): 25.6%	

1. Alachua County Coalition for the Homeless & Hungry Annual Report to the FL Dept. of Children & Families; June 2005; 2. ACCHH Point-in-Time Survey/Enumeration; January 2004; 3. ACCHH PIT Survey/Enumeration; February 2003; 4. ACCHH PIT Survey/Enumeration; January 2005; 5. U.S. Conference of Mayors. A Status Report on Hunger & Homelessness in America's Cities: 2003.

care free of charge to those in need (at a cost of less than \$20 per visit).

Locally, public safety agencies spend nearly \$1 million annually dealing with homelessness-related issues, including enforcement of local ordinances, transportation to emergency rooms, and investigations of civil and criminal matters. The cost to arrest, transport, book, house and process a person through First Appearance is more than \$600 per incident.⁷

The Fort Lauderdale Police Department Model for police response to homelessness is based on the understanding that the homeless are not "problem people," but rather "people with problems."

The human toll of homelessness is incalculable. The emotional scars are slow to heal. Many homeless people suffer from low self-esteem and a diminished sense of hope.

Individuals who were once active members of the community become physically and spiritually beaten down as a result of their experience with homelessness. It is difficult to imagine the vulnerability that one must feel

sleeping, unprotected, on the streets or in the woods.

These feelings are exacerbated for homeless persons with disabilities such as physical illnesses, mental illnesses and drug or alcohol addictions.

There are members of our homeless community who are elderly, who are suffering from cancer, or who are physically challenged (using a walker or in a wheelchair).

Their medical problems become acute when living on the street and, in some cases, life-threatening.

It hurts our entire community when we fail to act to help homeless individuals to become healthy, productive citizens again.

Strategies to Address Homelessness:

For 20 years homeless programs locally and across the country have experienced an occurrence best characterized as bailing a leaky boat.

While they have actively moved homeless people out the back door of homeless programs the emptied beds have refilled immediately.

For 20 years, this cyclical pattern has continued. Out the back door.

In the front door.

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness recommends a two-pronged approach to addressing homelessness:

1) "Close the Front Door"

Implement prevention strategies that reduce the number of people who become homeless; and

2) "Open the Back Door"

Intervention strategies that increase supportive services and expedite placement into housing for people who are currently experiencing homelessness.⁸

Some community's plans focus exclusively on the chronically homeless. This plan focuses on both short-term and long-term homelessness as well as those at-risk for becoming homeless.

"Waiting for at-risk populations to fall into homelessness only creates more homeless-specific programs, increases costs, and deepens the human tragedy."

Philip F. Mangano, U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

Effective prevention strategies ("Close the Front Door") utilized by other communities include centralized service delivery to increase coordination; dedicated housing resources for individuals discharged from public institutions; discharge planning protocols; and rent, utility and other financial assistance.

Effective intervention strategies ("Open the Back Door") include the provision of multi-disciplinary treatment; supportive housing for homeless persons with disabilities; and improved access to free health care, mainstream benefits (food stamps, Section 8 vouchers, etc.) and affordable housing.



Ten-Year Planning Process:

On March 31, 2005, the City of Gainesville - Alachua County hosted its first Homeless Summit in an effort to mobilize the community.

Key stakeholders were invited to attend, including business and civic leaders, politicians, law enforcement officials, downtown business owners, chamber of commerce representatives, housing developers, service providers, hospital administrators, neighborhood associations, faith-based and community organizations, homeless individuals and the general public.

Alachua County Commissioner Rodney Long and City of Gainesville Mayor Pegeen

Hanrahan co-chaired the Summit.

Over 200 people attended the four-hour conference which included a keynote address by Philip Mangano of the Interagency Council on Homelessness.

The Summit included presentations on model programs in Jacksonville and Tallahassee. Following a discussion on the 10-year planning process, five committees were formed to begin working on the plan.

The committees included Public Safety, Supportive Housing, Services, Health (includes Mental Health, Substance Abuse and primary health care), and a Steering Committee. Since that time, two more committees were added: Finance and Faith-based.

Many communities have taken a year or longer to develop their 10-year plan. Our community chose to expedite the process in order to move quickly toward implementation.

The committees began meeting in June of 2005 and have met at least monthly since then.

The committee meetings provided a forum for broad community input. Several of the committees created subgroups to focus on specific issues.

The committees created strategies to address homelessness for each of their respective areas and reported to the Steering Committee on a bi-monthly basis.

A tremendous amount of talent and energy went into the development of the 10-Year Plan.

In addition to the ongoing dialog, committee members and staff conducted research on 10-year plans from other communities and visited several programs in Pinellas and Broward Counties.

Volunteers on the committees included representatives from local businesses; city and county governments; social service agencies; the School Board of Alachua County; higher education; law enforcement, courts and criminal justice agencies; health care centers; the veterans administration; homeless service providers; neighborhood associations, libraries; realtors; faith-based and community-based organizations, and members of the homeless community.

The committees developed strategies and specific action steps based on our existing needs and model programs that hold promise for our community.

Our program goals include:

- Providing an additional 350 beds for homeless persons;
- Expanding the local inventory of, and access to, affordable housing;
- Increasing access to services through a first entry/one stop center;
- Increasing access to free medical care;
- Providing supportive services (such as life skills, budgeting, job training, mentoring, etc.);
- Increasing faith-based initiatives;
- Increasing homelessness awareness among public safety providers and the community;
- Reducing the number of homeless arrests;
- Implementing an effective discharge planning system;
- Homeless prevention through education, job training, and supportive services.

The plan also calls for the creation of an Office of Homelessness to coordinate services, implement the Homeless Management Information System; seek funding, and facilitate the implementation of the 10-year plan.

Housing & Homelessness

There are nearly 350 beds (emergency, transitional, and permanent supportive) for homeless persons in Gainesville, Alachua County (see Appendix III).⁹

With a homeless population of 1,000, that leaves 650 people unsheltered each night.

Gainesville Community Ministry receives over 700 calls per month from local residents who cannot afford to pay next month's rent.

Local emergency shelters turn down more than 100 requests for shelter on a monthly basis because they are at capacity. Other housing programs have waiting lists that range from 8 months to several years.¹⁰

The Problem:

Gainesville does not have a housing shortage but a lack of housing that is *affordable* for the people who live and work in our community. It is sadly ironic that there are people sleeping on the streets, in woods and in parking lots amid a sea of "for rent" signs.

According to the federal Fair Market Rent (FMR) a two bedroom apartment should rent for \$626 in Alachua County.¹¹

Cost to provide one year of housing, shelter and supportive services to a homeless individual in emergency shelter:
\$8,700

Cost to provide a family of four with a \$300 monthly housing subsidy to ensure the family remains in existing housing:
\$3,600¹²

In order to afford this rent a person would need to make at least \$11.81 an hour.

A minimum-wage worker would need to work 77 hours a week to afford the same 2-bedroom apartment.

There are some apartments in Gainesville that rent for less than the FMR.

However, first and last month's rent as well as security deposits make these apartments cost-prohibitive for many working poor.

Many homeless persons face additional barriers to securing housing such as poor rental histories, poor credit, and in some cases criminal histories.

The lack of affordable housing affects at-risk citizens, many of whom live paycheck to paycheck.

There are an estimated 10,000 citizens earning 30% or less of the area median income (\$20,357).

Another 5,000 citizens whose earnings are 30-50% of the area median income are spending more than 30% of their income on housing.¹³

Alachua County has more than 1,000 people on waiting lists for public housing. Currently, the city and county have a combined total of 1,700 Section 8 vouchers (U.S. HUD federally subsidized housing) and nearly 1,000 units of public housing.