

**CITY OF
GAINESVILLE**

**INTER-OFFICE
COMMUNICATION**
Legislative Item No. 060167

Date: November 14, 2006

To: Members of the Community Development Committee

From: Jim Hencin
Block Grant Manager

Subject: New Cities Project – Homelessness Recommendations

At the July 6, 2006, Community Development Committee meeting, staff provided an initial report on ideas that Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan brought back from the New Cities Project meeting that was held in Las Vegas, NV in June. Presenters from the City of San Francisco and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness had reported on several initiatives that had been successfully implemented in San Francisco and elsewhere, and staff had been asked to further investigate those initiatives to determine whether they could or should be replicated here in Gainesville. The following initiatives were considered:

“Homeward Bound” Family Reunification Program

This program is designed to help homeless persons locate family members who would be willing to take the homeless persons in and help them get back on their feet. The primary costs are staff time needed to track down family members and money to purchase bus tickets to transport the homeless persons back to their family members. The City Commission has budgeted \$10,000 in FY 2006-07 for a pilot program, which staff recommends using as a resource for the proposed one-stop homeless assistance center.

Advocacy for Social Security Benefits

San Francisco was one of several cities across the country that were awarded grants under the Social Security Administration’s “HOPE” (Homeless Outreach Projects and Evaluation) Program. This program, first funded in FY 2003, was designed to provide outreach and assistance to homeless and other under-served populations who were not accessing Social Security (SSA) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits that they would otherwise be eligible for.

Locally, the Volunteers of America – Florida (VOA) has received a grant under the same program, which will continue through April 2007. The VOA program has been successful in that it has assisted homeless persons and others who came in contact with the agency to apply for SSA and SSI benefits in a focused manner. The Gainesville VOA office, which serves a multi-county area, currently has an active caseload of 25 just from Gainesville and Alachua County. Note that other local homeless providers, such as St.

Francis House and VETSPACE, routinely help their clients apply for SSA, SSI, Veterans Administration (VA), and other public assistance programs.

Food Stamp Employment and Training Program (FSET)

Unlike Florida, where the Food Stamp Program is administered by a state agency (the Department of Children & Families – DCF), the City and County of San Francisco administers Food Stamps through its Human Services Agency. Due to its having the ability to administer the Food Stamp Program directly, as well as employment and training programs, the City and County of San Francisco is able to utilize its local cash match to support a wide variety of non-work forms of assistance for able-bodied homeless and other individuals, including purchasing eyeglasses, transit passes, educational expenses, and housing.

In Florida, however, employment and training programs are administered through a separate network of regional workforce boards (in our case, the Alachua-Bradford Regional Workforce Board – now called “Alachua-Bradford FloridaWorks”); thus, an FSET-type program would not be available to us. On the other hand, Alachua-Bradford FloridaWorks has begun to fund projects that go beyond just the provision of job training and employment to include other components. Recently, for example, the Alachua County Coalition for the Homeless and Hungry, in partnership with the Alachua County Housing Authority and St. Francis House, applied for a grant through Alachua-Bradford FloridaWorks that included a housing component for homeless individuals seeking job skills training and employment.

Recommendations

In light of the above information, staff recommends the following:

- Proceed with the Homeward Bound initiative by making the funds allocated by the City Commission available as a resource for the proposed one-stop homeless assistance center once it becomes operational.
- Take no further action concerning Advocacy for Social Security Benefits as this is already being handled by various local providers.
- Encourage Alachua-Bradford FloridaWorks to continue to fund projects that include more than just job training and employment for the homeless as the opportunities arise through its various funding sources. In addition, continue to support the efforts of local providers to collaborate on proposals to access those funds as they become available.

/jh

Cc: Tom Saunders, Community Development Director