



**Downtown Chronic Homelessness
Street Outreach Initiative**

BACKGROUND

Despite a 36% decrease in homelessness since 2014, downtown homelessness has reemerged as a community issue. There is a serious disconnect between the downtown homeless population and available services. No existing homeless service providers are attempting to solve this problem and meet the needs of the downtown community, housed or unhoused. GRACE has extensive experience and demonstrated success tackling the most complex homeless services problems in our community, and a track record of delivering contracted services in a respectful, effective, and efficient way.

This proposal will create a housing-focused street outreach team with four key objectives:

1. Connect unhoused people downtown to existing resources, with an emphasis on facilitating access to housing through the Continuum of Care Coordinated Entry System.
2. Engage and build trust-based relationships with individuals currently outside the traditional service system.
3. Function as an intervention - intentional, deliberately interfering with the circumstance of homelessness, and use respectful persistence to get the person on the street to consider alternatives to outdoor homelessness.
4. Work cooperatively with the Gainesville Police Dept. to replace homeless law enforcement contacts with social service contacts and housing engagement.

The overarching goal of this team will be to **reduce and end unsheltered homelessness** in the downtown area.

POPULATION OVERVIEW

The Gainesville Police Dept. estimates about 40 people live unhoused in the streets, alleys, and parks of the downtown area. These individuals either reject, or have been rejected by, existing shelter services. Iain de Jong of OrgCode Consulting, based on a longitudinal survey of street homeless individuals, puts unsheltered individuals into one of three categories: "One and done," "tumbleweeds," and "anchors."

The downtown homeless population substantially comprises individuals who are "anchors." Their resiliency is built on being able to thrive within homelessness. With the appropriate outreach services, our community can re-engage with these individuals, build trust, and work toward getting them to consider alternatives to outdoor homelessness.

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One and Dones	Tumbleweeds	Anchors
Individuals seen on the streets once or twice, then never seen again. Includes people passing through, someone kicked out of shelter for the night, people “sleeping it off,” or someone who was kicked out of their home for the night. These individuals make up between 30%-50% of the street population.	Individuals seen more than once, but almost always in different geographic areas.	Individuals fixed to one location, with some quasi-permanence to where they stay. Almost always had housing at some point in the community. Have used shelters, but choose not to. Profound trauma histories. Prone to building community with other anchors and/or businesses and residents in the area, and this helps them meet their daily survival needs.

Current street outreach is siloed, disorganized, and based around making contact with individuals on the street and helping them survive. When outreach is contact-focused, teams spend much of their time with the one-and-done category, engaging people who may not require an intensive service response, or may not be there tomorrow. Much like we prioritize permanent housing services to the most vulnerable people in the community, we must begin to prioritize street outreach to the “anchors,” those who can’t, or won’t, connect with available services and exist outside of the traditional service system.

GRACE has led other shifts in the housing crisis response system, including the establishment of low-barrier shelter services and the shift to a Housing First philosophy, all critical components leading to local reductions in homelessness. This proposal imagines a shift toward “impactful outreach” in the community - outreach and housing engagement prioritized for those most vulnerable, and most visible, individuals who present with multiple barriers to housing.

Goals of Impactful Outreach

- I. Be discerning regarding who they want to engage with and why, relative to the community’s priorities
- II. Know people by name
- III. Establish rapport
- IV. Meet immediate needs without creating dependency and without enabling
- V. Focus on connecting people to housing through or outside of Coordinated Entry, and engaging in all processes associated with this (e.g., getting people document ready)
- VI. Develop strategies to effectively engage with people who do not wish to engage or struggle to engage
- VII. Leverage strengths of various service providers beyond street outreach, within a systems context
- VIII. Drive decision-making through the use of data

“Impactful Outreach is a professional intervention that is structured, documented and strategic, to meet people where they are at - literally and circumstantially. **Impactful Outreach** is respectfully persistent in helping people achieve housing and exit homelessness through a process of assessing, understanding and addressing both immediate and housing needs.”

Source: OrgCode Consulting

PROJECT SCOPE

1. Project will provide prioritized, housing-focused outreach (3 FTE) 6 days a week in the downtown area roughly encompassing the area between NW Sixth Street, NE Ninth Street, Depot Ave. and NW 16th Ave. Shifts will cover:
 - a. M-F (early morning, evening shifts for initial engagement; shifts during business hours for housing engagement)
 - b. Weekend engagement shifts
2. General time assignment:
 - a. Locating new people to serve - 10%
 - b. Continuing to engage with service resistance people - 20%
 - c. Progressing toward housing with those already connected and actively engaged - 70%
3. Outreach staff will conduct initial assessments to identify housing and service needs of unsheltered individuals, work to build rapport, establish document readiness, and facilitate ongoing communication between individuals on the street and other homeless and social service providers.
4. Outreach staff will respond within one business day to local requests for assistance or wellness checks within the downtown area.
5. Outreach staff will attempt to provide diversion services on all individuals targeted for engagement.
6. As needed, if participants are willing to seek shelter, program staff will provide transportation for them and their belongings to GRACE or other appropriate shelter locations.
7. GRACE will work cooperatively with the Gainesville Police Dept. to establish a process through which law enforcement can refer non-criminal issues to the outreach team for initial followup.

KEY DELIVERABLES

OUTCOMES (Oct 2021 - Sept 2022)

1. Minimum six permanent housing placements into appropriate programs
2. Minimum six successful placements through diversion/rapid resolution services
3. Complete initial assessments (VI-SPDAT) and connection to Coordinated Entry system for at least 24 individuals
4. Assist minimum 10 individuals become document ready for housing move-in
5. GRACE team responds within one business day to a minimum of 50 calls for service related to homelessness (sleeping/trespass, public urination, wellness checks) by referral from the Gainesville Police Department.

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PROJECT COSTS

Item	Detail	
Staffing	3 FTE Street Outreach Staff @ \$18/hr + burden/benefits	\$148,262
	.4 FTE Project Supervision	\$26,202
Travel/Phone	Travel costs (staff travel, Lyfts/Ubers for participants) + staff phones	\$8,600
Admin	Project administration @ 10%	\$17,946
	Estimated Project Cost	\$201,010
Note: Best practice would include psychiatric care (est. .2 FTE @ ~\$65,000 annual cost)		

NEXT STEPS

1. GRACE Board of Directors approval (November 4, 2020)
2. GRACE will dedicate existing staff to 1 day/week (2 staff) of downtown outreach and connection to existing services. Includes emphasis on high-visibility gathering spots, panhandling hotspots, and surveys of panhandlers to identify homeless status, service needs, existing agency relationships, barriers to housing, and other information as needed. Staff will attempt diversion on any individuals contacted.
3. Based on the data collected, GRACE will submit a more robust, data-driven proposal in 3-4 months.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. For immediate outcomes, the Commission could direct staff to facilitate the dedication of 5-10 housing vouchers to this program. This would allow GRACE to leverage existing federal resources to make space available in existing permanent supportive housing programs.
2. Targeted downtown outreach should be considered the housing component of a three-legged stool of solutions to downtown homelessness. Together, those “legs” are housing, opportunity, and enforcement of new and existing ordinances related to panhandling.
3. GRACE is committed to working collaboratively with existing outreach staff and service providers to operate this program in concert with existing policies and goals of the North Central Florida Continuum of Care, and to enter program data into the community HMIS system.