

# **Heading Home Implementation Plan**

Implementation of the Heading Home Report  
on Preventing Homelessness and Expanding Affordable Housing

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Funded by  
Enterprise Community Partners

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## Introduction

Homelessness is as immediate as today's headlines: where to site a corrections facility for non-violent offenders, whether to “close” Public Square after midnight, President threatens to veto HUD appropriations bill...

Homelessness is the field on which the communities all across the US fight these social battles over safety, dignity, charity, economy, and identity. Who are we as a people if we can willfully neglect the needs of our neighbors who do not have permanent independent shelter? Will the historians of the future write of us that we neglected even to enact draconian “Poor Laws” to address the needs of the least of us?

In 2005, the Mayor and City Council President and the County Commissioners sponsored the Heading Home Initiative to create a 10 year plan to end homelessness in Cleveland/Cuyahoga County. The report was completed in the winter of 2006, but the planning group that oversaw the report sought some additional work in the form of an Implementation Plan. This implementation plan submitted to the community for approval and action by the Elected Leaders, the Foundations, and by the community which they represent.

## Recommendations

### 1. Create a Comprehensive Homelessness Prevention Project (CHPP) in Cuyahoga County

- (a) County Commissioners and Administrator: Authorize and Implement new comprehensive case management system based on an enhanced HMIS system to manage service plans operated by the County for households at risk or in the shelter/service systems.
  
- (b) County Commissioners: In 2008, allocate County resources (from DJFS/TANF, OHS) to provide financial assistance (shallow subsidies, security and utility deposit assistance, and support for moving expenses) to households at risk or in the shelter/service systems thru the CHPP initiative

- re-programming of County resources to creating emergency financial support for at risk households should avoid jeopardizing existing prevention service program.
- (c) County Commissioners: In 2008, seek an increase in the Health and Human Services Levy to provide financial assistance and housing related services to households at risk and/or in shelters to find and/or keep permanent independent housing.
  - (d) Foundations: Provide additional funding for prevention efforts, especially for direct financial assistance to individuals and households at risk of becoming homeless.
  - (e) County: Identify existing services that support households to avoid displacement, ease transitions or move from shelters or informal housing and make arrangements with those service providers to do mutual referrals. Examples include Cleveland Tenants Organization eviction diversion project and Cleveland Mediation Center's eviction mediation program.
  - (f) County: Identify service gaps in the housing support system and make funding available through an RFP process for specific prevention/re housing services. County: Direct DJFS to establish, as policy, transition planning standards that prevent homelessness for youth exiting the foster care programs.
  - (g) County Commissioners: Working with representatives of local hospitals, homeless service providers, homeless advocates, and patient advocates, create a task force on hospital discharge policies to prepare a report of best practices in hospital discharge policies within 6 months.
  - (h) County: Integrate domestic violence programs into the CHPP to assure that victims of domestic violence are diverted from homeless shelter system or that they are quickly resettled into safe permanent housing.

- (i) County: Conduct outreach efforts through existing housing and social service organizations to identify households at risk of homelessness and invite them into preventive service settings before they lose stable housing.
- (j) County OHS: Establish a protocol for shelters/services to move program participants from less permanent to more permanent housing settings. Using a model like that developed at 2100 Lakeside which develops levels of support appropriate to the goals of the shelter residents.

**2. Remove non financial barriers to existing affordable housing for homeless and at risk households.**

- (a) Mayor, Council and Commissioners: Call on the Cleveland HUD office to undertake a review of the tenant selection plan, the affirmative marketing plan and the certifications of compliance with “55 and over” regulations (where applicable) for every property in Cuyahoga County which has a project-based HAP.
- (b) Create a program which facilitates placement of homeless and at risk households into permanent affordable housing by matching (and conciliating) the needs of the household and the needs of housing providers. This new program will proactively engage in activities which remove social, regulatory, or customary barriers faced by homeless and at risk households on both an individual basis and systemic basis.
- (c) Foundations: provide support for a program which will remove non-financial barriers to households seeking permanent affordable housing through need matching/conciliation and systemic barrier removal.
- (d) Mayor, Council and Commissioners: Endorse the recommendations and programs to emerge from the Community ReEntry Housing Plan.
- (e) County OHS: provide support for BtG barrier removal work.

- (f) County Department of Development: provide support from the Fair Housing RFP process for efforts to reduce barriers to homeless and at risk households including support for reasonable modifications/accommodations of admission rules and procedures, challenges to “senior only” policies which are used for discriminatory purposes, and admission rules that are “unreasonable” under HUD standards.
- (g) BtG: Establish a stable organizational base, apply for funding for an expanded role in barrier removal activities, hire and train staff necessary to address new scope of work. Establish good working relationships with CHPP and shelter staffs to permit coordination of effort.

**3. Create an Assisted Housing Preservation Program (AHPP) that has the capacity to identify unused resources, development opportunities, and buildings that are “at-risk”.**

- (a) Heading Home Steering Committee: Identify one or more housing advocacy organizations in the community to apply for funding to carry out this mission.
- (b) Foundations: Provide funding to an organization or consortium to create and operate the Assisted Housing Preservation Program.
- (c) AHPP: identify assisted housing developments that are at risk or underutilized.
- (d) AHPP: Create specific preservation/re-development strategies for assets that are at risk or underutilized. Current examples: Community Circle I, Lupica Tower (AKA Federation Tower), Willson Apartments.

**4. Create Cuyahoga Affordable Housing Advocacy Network (CAHAN) to lobby state and federal governments for resources and policies that address affordable housing preservation and development needs locally.**

- (a) City and County: Endorse the formation of the CAHAN network and put existing assets of intergovernmental cooperation at the service of CAHAN in developing and promoting issues and concerns that will protect and expand resources to the community to address affordable housing needs.
- (b) Heading Home Steering Committee: Identify one or more housing advocacy organizations in the community to apply for funding to carry out this mission.
- (c) Foundations: Provide funding to an organization or consortium of organizations to create CAHAN.
- (d) CAHAN: Prepare an agenda to issues and concerns to become the focus for advocacy efforts over the coming year.

**5. Create Cuyahoga Housing Trust Advocacy Committee to guide the establishment of a City-County Housing Trust Fund with a dedicated public revenue source.**

- (a) City and County: Make a clear statement of support for the need to create a City- County Housing Trust Fund that would generate at least \$10M annually from one or more dedicated revenue sources and appoint a representative to participate/coordinate in the planning process.
- (b) Ad hoc committee on the Housing Trust Fund: Formalize a structure to permit the group to explore revenue sources and political support and to plan a campaign to establish the City County Housing Trust fund in 2007.
- (c) Foundations: Provide start up funding for the Cuyahoga Housing Trust Fund Advocacy Committee in 2007.

**6. Create New Public Housing Units by providing capital development funds to the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) to maximize the number of public housing units possible under the 1999 cap.**

- (a) City and County: Commit \$4M from existing funds (Cleveland Housing Trust Fund, HOME, CDBG, private sources) to CMHA to bring 200 public housing units on line in 2008 and 2009 from the existing stock of units that are currently waiting for modernization.
- (b) Cuyahoga Housing Trust Fund: Commit \$25M (\$5M/year 2008-2012) to CMHA to create 500 additional public housing units by 2012. CMHA would partner with non-profit service providers to manage and provide social services to tenants of these new units.

**7. Create or preserve additional assisted housing units using the City-County Housing Trust Fund.**

- (a) City-County Housing Trust Fund: Allocate \$5M/year of capital improvement and low income housing related assistance funds in 2008-2012 to create new assisted units or to preserve existing units at risk of loss.
- (b) City-County Housing Trust Fund: Allocate \$10M/year of capital improvement and low income housing assistance funds in 2013-2015 to create new assisted units or to preserve existing units at risk of loss.

**8. Re-constitute the Heading Home Steering Committee (HHSC) with representatives from City, County, Service providers, non-profit housing developers, housing and homeless advocates.**

- (a) HHSC: Monitor implementation of the HH Plan recommendations, sponsor human resource development activities for staff and volunteers working in the fields of homelessness and housing advocacy, sponsor action-oriented research into specific practice areas, and preserve and expand the civil rights

of persons in the shelter/services system.

(b) City and County: Make a clear statement of support for on-going efforts to monitor and plan for the elimination of homelessness by 2015.

(c) City and County: Appoint representatives to serve as members of the Heading Home Steering committee.

## **Additional Descriptions, Notes and Insight into the Implementation Recommendations**

### **1. Comprehensive Homelessness Prevention Project (CHPP) (Recommendation #1)**

CHPP is an effort to integrate the services that are currently funded by OHS and other County Departments (and many private non-profits which do not receive direct support from the County or the City).

Comprehensive Case Management: Here's the problem. It appears that no one is managing all the services that being provided to an individual/household in order to determine if the services are acceptable, compatible and appropriate to the goal of putting/keeping the household in an independent living situation. Some individuals and households are not getting services at critical times; others may be getting too many services; others are getting services that perpetuate dependency. Giving the responsibility for managing the menu of services to a single governmental entity helps to assure that services are being delivered in an efficient manner in the interest of the client and with respect for the overall cost of the intervention. There's some pretty good evidence to show that a relatively small number of clients take an inordinate share of the service expenditures. In recommending comprehensive case management, this report does not suggest reducing those high expenditures where they are needed, but does suggest rationalizing (ie. spending for a rational purpose, rather than "justifying") those expenditures. For example, excessive use of emergency rooms may be reshaped by a case management team by creating a comprehensive non-emergency clinical service program. At the same time, a comprehensive case management system

can identify situations where providers and or clients are at a dead end and need to have a neutral third party reshape the service plan. The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) could provide a tool for moving into comprehensive case management. As an aside, comprehensive case management system when fully implemented will be a terrific planning tool for identifying the types and quantities of services which the County should be 'buying' and whether it's better to buy them from provider A or provider B. Certainly this report does not suggest that creating comprehensive case management is a small undertaking. This report recognizes that a way to start moving into the direction of comprehensive case management may be to initially implement the concepts and procedures in the context of a new prevention initiative.

If the first element of the CHPP is case management, the second element is investing money in preventing homelessness. The key here is money. This report recommends spending significant amounts of public and private funds on preventing individuals and households from entering the shelter system. On the public side, this means some reallocation of funds from custodial functions to prevention functions. On the private side this means more foundation funding particularly for direct financial assistance. In creating this safety net to prevent households from falling out of housing, the CHPP will build on the existing network of private social service providers to use their expertise and their funding base to complement the work of the new effort. It would be foolish to displace existing efforts with County or new private funding. However, seeking support from the existing private sector providers means that the CHPP will need to open its doors to full participation by non-County providers. Practically speaking this means that if the county agencies are making referrals to the church serving meals on a Wednesday night in the basement, then the County needs to be open to the needs of church staff and volunteers when they encounter a situation beyond the scope of their expertise. Managing the whole scope of services is almost as daunting as managing the whole scope of clients, but it is equally necessary. Most often a family at risk will show up in a church basement long before they show up on the doorstep of the Department of Job and Family Services. A model for a comprehensive prevention strategy is outlined in [Preventing Homelessness and Promoting Housing Stability: A Comparative Analysis](#).

A third key element of a CHPP is to identify point at which individuals and households are most vulnerable to becoming homeless. There are four key “special need” situations that can be managed to reduce the risk of homelessness through the CHPP: community re entry from corrections, transitioning from Foster Care, hospital discharge planning and displacement due to domestic violence. Each of these is a special set of concerns that must be integrated into the CHPP “system” for putting/keeping individuals and households in the most independent housing setting that they can manage. There's recommendations from the Community ReEntry Task Force and groups working on Foster Care transition policies and displacement due to domestic violence. All of these efforts can inform the CHPP through continuing dialogue between County planners and private section service providers and advocates. One area that seems to be less well developed is the problem of discharge of patients from health care facilities. Here the County can take a leadership role in convening a Task Force of health care providers, homeless services providers and advocates and social policy folks (Center for Community Solutions?) to develop a voluntary plan for managing hospital discharge planning. As a side benefit to the community, perhaps the County can give support to efforts to divert chronic use of emergency rooms by homeless and at risk households.

To reiterate, the County, being the level of government which is the payer of last resort in most of the situations of social dysfunction, is ideally suited to take the lead in crafting a solution that keeps people in housing or moves them to housing so that they have a base from which they can build toward greater self sufficiency.

## **2. Remove the non-financial barriers to affordable housing (Recommendation #2)**

Anecdotally, advocates believe there's a significant number of vacant subsidized units in Cuyahoga County that could be used to address the needs of homeless and at risk households. A major barrier facing homeless and at risk households in seeking this housing is that housing providers have established policies that create barriers for many homeless and at risk households. Examples of these barrier policies are: “zero tolerance” for felony policies and “55 and over” policies. Since private owners with subsidized units are in a position of “self-certifying” their compliance with HUD regulations on these topics and since HUD does virtually no scrutiny of these policies,

this report calls on the Mayor, the Council and the Commissioners to ask HUD to review these admission policies to assess if they create unreasonable barriers to homeless and at risk families.

This report envisions creation of a new program to match and conciliate the non-financial needs of homeless and at risk households and affordable housing providers. Right now Bridging the Gap (BtG) acts as an intermediary between the shelters and landlords in the community. BtG staff work with individuals and families to assist with the housing search and can assist with working through the bureaucracy of applying for subsidized housing in our community including assisting with appeals if the household is denied housing. BTG signs agreements with social service providers to assist the family for one year after placement in housing, and with landlords to provide a small number of units to homeless people successfully graduating from shelters or treatment centers with a goal of 50 households successfully placed into non-subsidized housing.

The key elements of an expanded program will be:

- Identifying vacant units in the existing rental stock.
- Using the fair housing tools of reasonable accommodation and modification to make units available to individuals and households that might not otherwise qualify.
- Challenging “senior only” or “over 55” and “zero tolerance” policies where owners have not met the HUD criteria for such policies or where such policies are used to steer otherwise eligible households from available units.
- Promoting inclusionary admission policies like those recommended by the Community Re-entry Task Force.
- Assuring that households placed by BtG will receive a social services which the household needs to maintain stable housing and be good tenants and neighbors.

### **3. Assisted Housing Preservation Program (AHPP) (Recommendation #3)**

Preservation of existing assisted housing stock is key element in addressing homelessness. Threats to the assisted housing inventory in NE Ohio come chiefly from “enforcement” efforts by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, unlike in more prosperous rental markets where owners have been enticed to opt-out of Housing

Assistance Payments (HAP) contracts. Key tools in the preservation work in NE Ohio will include Mark to Market restructuring through HUD, State Receivership laws, Low Income Housing Tax Credit and Mortgage Revenue Bond financing through the County and the State, and foreclosure transfers from HUD to the local jurisdiction. Making some of these programs more effective will be the focus of the CAHAN (see recommendation #4 and description below).

The key to preservation of assisted properties in NE Ohio is a strong early warning system and a set of preservation tools to use with owners and/or buyers of distressed properties. For many years, the City of Cleveland was a model of a pro active municipality in preservation of existing assisted housing stock with efforts like the conversion of Longwood to Arbor Park being nationally recognized efforts.

This report recommends creating an Assisted Housing Preservation Program (AHHP) to be a focus for housing preservation efforts in NE Ohio. The key program element for the AHHP is an early warning system which can identify assisted properties at risk and work with tenants, stakeholders and governmental officials (city, county, and HUD) to create a preservation plan. This approach is similar to the work of the Urban Homesteading Board in New York City and the Chicago Rehab Network in Chicago. Each of these non-profit entities has strong working relationships with the non-profit development community and local government to develop preservation plans, although in New York and Chicago, the groups face the pressures of gentrification as well as deterioration.

#### **4. Cuyahoga Affordable Housing Advocacy Network (CAHAN) (Recommendation #4)**

For many years, the affordable housing advocacy for Cleveland/NE Ohio has been focused on specific “votes” or “issues” rather than a comprehensive, year round effort to build relationships with legislators so that the elected representatives in Columbus and DC fully understand both the needs and the programs BEFORE they are called upon to make decisions about a specific bill or issue.

Affordable Housing advocates can follow the lead of other social issue groups in becoming more adept and professional in being advocates for public resources for their constituents. Advocates for children's health supports and for mental health

<http://www.mentalhealthadvocacy.org/about.html>) have had success in creating models for coordinating the efforts of individual and organizational advocates with service providers and public officials to increase awareness of the needs in the local community. In the area of affordable housing, local advocates look to the National Low Income Housing Coalition (<http://nlihc.org>) and the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (<http://www.cohhio.org>) for guidance in dealing with Federal and State affordable housing issues.

This report recommends that City, County and Foundations endorse the formation of an advocacy network around affordable housing issues focused on Federal and State programs. Mission of CAHAN would be to increase resources for the development and preservation of affordable housing in NE Ohio (or to prevent the loss of resources) and to adoption of federal and state agencies policies and programs that will increase the supply of affordable housing in the region. Likely topics for advocacy activities will include: HUD appropriations, HUD disposition and M2M policies, the proposed National Housing Trust Fund, the about to be proposed Housing Preservation Act, the State's Qualified Allocation Plan for Low Income Housing Tax Credit program, and advocacy around a revenue source for the City-County Housing Trust Fund. This report does not envision having the CAHAN take the lead on homeless services programs, except where those issues coincide with affordable housing development or preservation. This report anticipates that the existing networks around OHS are addressing homeless services resources advocacy.

This report envisions a small staff (1-2 people) working under the auspices of an existing organization with an network of advocates to influence federal and state legislation, policies and programs. The CAHAN would explicitly be barred from working issues at the local government level, since local governments would themselves be a part of the advocacy network and would not be involved in grassroots campaigning or electoral politics. The Heading Home Steering Committee (HHSC) would design the governance (who decides the issues and the positions), legal status (501 c 3 or c4 or some other organizational variant), and management (day to day operations) of the CAHAN. HSCC would sponsor a proposal to the Foundations during the by the first quarter of 2008.

## **5. City-County Housing Trust Fund (Recommendation #5)**

### Cuyahoga Housing Trust Fund Advocacy Committee

Under the auspices of Cleveland Tenants Organization (CTO) and the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless (NEOCH), the Bridge Builders (a program of Leadership Cleveland) and prepared a report of the creation of a City-County Housing Trust fund. On the heels of the issuance of that report, CTO, NEOCH, the Bridge Builders, and others have begun engaging in dialogue with City, County and State officials to identify a permanent funding source for a fund and a model for governance of the fund. While these meetings have been productive, this report recommends that the planning process be recognized and formalized by the City, the County and the Foundations as a key component of the plan to end homelessness by 2015. Further, this report asks the City and the County to appoint representatives to the Cuyahoga Housing Trust Fund Advisory Committee and that the Foundations entertain a proposal from the CHTFAC to support their work in 2008 as it moves forward in the planning process.

The City County Housing Trust Fund is a relatively simple concept: a pool of funds secured from one or more public sources to be used for affordable housing purposes (eg. creation or preservation of affordable housing and direct assistance and housing related services to owners and tenants to make existing housing affordable to households at risk or in shelters.) In the planning for the City-County Housing Trust Fund, Bridge Builders has set a target of \$10,000,000 annually to address the outstanding needs in the community. This report goes further in suggesting that \$5,000,000 of that amount be designated to the CMHA in 2008-2012 to create 100 new units of conventional public housing a year. (See recommendation # 6 and program description Create new Public Housing Units.)

## **6. Create New Public Housing Units (Recommendation #6)**

In 1999, HUD established a baseline of public housing units (roughly 10,900) that CMHA was authorized to provide under its Annual Contributions Contract. Currently, CMHA has plans to add some additional housing units in 2008 and 2009, but still has roughly 200 “down” units in existing public housing developments and has authority to create 400-500 more units (purchase and rehab or new construction) that will become

conventional public housing units IF CAPITAL INVESTMENT FUNDS WERE AVAILABLE. This report recommends that the City and County make a commitment to raise \$4M in 2008 and 2009 in order to bring the 200 “down” units on line. Then the report recommends that the (yet to be created) City County Housing Trust Fund earmark \$5M per year from 2008-2012 to create 100 new units per year. This units would be designed to address the needs of homeless and at risk households in two ways: by increasing the overall stock of housing that's available and by creating opportunities to partner with social service providers to integrate services specifically designed to ease the transition to permanent housing for homeless and at risk families.

### **7. Create/Preserve additional assisted units (Recommendation #7)**

The 700 or so “new” affordable units created by the CMHA under recommendation #6 will still be far short of the need. Therefore this report recommends that the City-County Housing Trust Fund use its resources to create additional affordable units in two ways.

- Programs to support non-profit developers (pre development loans; gap financing; and technical assistance grants) would give the existing non-profit development community new tools to undertake projects that would preserve critical affordable housing units. Recent examples of local non profit preservation work includes Cleveland Housing Network's acquisition of Erie Square and Famicos Foundation's rehab and acquisition of Emeritus House and University Tower.
- One or more pilot projects in tenant and owner assistance that could be used to stabilize existing housing by providing a “shallow subsidy” that would permit a homeless or at risk household to pay an affordable price with incentives to owners to invest/reinvest their properties. A strategy like this would stabilize the housing and economic infrastructure of local neighborhoods especially in the wake of the foreclosure crisis currently working its way through the NE Ohio economy. A recent report from the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University identifies this strategy as one of its recommendations.

A number of initiatives to help preserve small properties deserve

testing. The federal government could encourage this by providing a small amount of funding for well-designed experiments. Once proven, several would likely be self-sustaining. Strategies to consider evaluating include:

- programs to organize small landlords to obtain group benefits (e.g. insurance) at lower cost (this would improve their bottom line without putting upward pressure on rents);
- programs to encourage small owners to take landlord education classes (much like the first-time homebuyer training programs offered by lenders), perhaps by making graduation a requirement for financing or reward graduates with more favorable terms;
- adoption of a more flexible code for older properties; and
- creating programs that provide a mix of public funds and conventional bank loans for rehabilitation, and changing the Section 8 program to reward long-term ownership (New York City provides a good model for study for the last two).

## **8. Reconstitute the Heading Home Steering Committee (HHSC) (Recommendation #8)**

Finally, this report recommends that the Heading Home Steering Committee be reconstituted with a new mission to monitor implementation of the HH Plan recommendations, to sponsor human resource development activities for staff and volunteers working in the fields of homelessness and housing advocacy, sponsor action-oriented research into specific practice areas, and preserve and expand the civil rights of persons in the shelter/services system.

The reconstituted HHSC should include representatives of city and county governments, homeless service providers, housing and homelessness advocates, the private sector, and non-profit housing development organizations.

## Closing thoughts on the Implementation Plan

This report benefited greatly from the contributions of some specific individuals who's work needs to be acknowledged here.

The Heading Home Steering Committee:

Diana Cyganovich	Cogswell Hall
Mike Foley	Ohio House of Representatives
Ruth Gillett	Cuyahoga County Office of Homeless Services
Peter Iskin	Cleveland Legal Aid Society
Mike Piepsny	Cleveland Tenants Organization
Joe Titran	Representative of Cleveland City Council President Martin Sweeney
Natoya Walker	Representative of Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson
Bill Whitney	Enterprise Foundation

Others:

Shawn Sweet and Mike LaRiccia, US Department of HUD  
Dorothy Noga and Scott Pollack CMHA  
Phil Star, CSU, Center for Neighborhood Development  
Bruce Melville  
John Corlett, Center for Community Solutions  
The Bridge Builders  
Brian Davis, NEOCH  
Gene Moreno, Chicago Rehab Network  
Bill Faith, COHHIO  
Paula Jenkins, COHHIO

*If I have carelessly neglected someone's contribution, my sincere apology.*

*Spencer*

The report comes in three formats:

1. on CD ROM with links to supporting documents and studies,
2. a standalone .pdf with internal and external links, and
3. a hard copy.

#### Additional info on the CD ROM

- there are some samples of 10 year plans/implementation studies from other communities.
- there is a folder for each recommendation that includes some of the supportive/source material used in developing the recommendation.
- there are some additional supporting studies that were not cited in the text but have come along later and support the overall recommendation of the report.

#### **Some unifying principles in creating this report are:**

Role of the elected leaders: Give leadership to the recommendations outlined in the report Don't shrink from either the challenges or the intractability of homelessness and housing need in the community. Resist the urge to focus on egregious incidents and ignore the scope of the need.

“The Foundations” is a generic reference to the private philanthropic community which generously supported the original Heading Home study and provides financial and technical assistance to many of the programs and services which are described in this report. This report challenges “the foundations” to both promote a collaborative effort among City, County, providers and advocates to address these concerns in way that is both comprehensive and coordinated. To that end, this report urges The Foundations to support the initiatives called for in this report and to ask grantseekers how their proposals fit into a larger community strategy to end homelessness.

This report does not address the employment and income support needs of homeless and at risk households. These are critical areas for other sectors of the community to address. It's an oft repeated “fact” that many of the people living in shelters have earned income and that many of the families “at risk” come to their circumstances through the loss of employment or the burden of medical expenditures. Recommendation #1 focuses on temporary financial assistance as a primary focus because lack of income is the single most important precipitating factor in bringing a household into the shelter system. This report acknowledges that temporary financial assistance is both a critical intervention and a terrible permanent social policy. More

equitable distribution of wealth is a far more effective means of ending homelessness. [See Pivan and Cloward, \*Regulating the Poor\*.](#)

These recommendations are rooted in the “Housing First” principles. The focus is on keeping at risk households out of the shelter system and moving sheltered households into the most independent level of housing that their situations permit. The Housing First model recognizes a wide range of housing options with the understanding that housing must never be dependent upon acceptance or participation in services. Service delivery in or close to the homeplace may be desirable, but must not become a form of “reinstitutionalization.” Inevitably the quality of either housing or services is sacrificed to the needs of the other when they are inartfully combined. Permanent housing is the base on which services are most effectively delivered. At the same time, housing without an appropriate level of services may be an along the way stop between one event of homelessness and another.

These recommendations are focused on initiatives, not maintenance of effort. This report focuses on what additional steps must be taken by the City, the County and the Community in order to move from the current state of homeless households to the state of 0 homeless households by 2015. Evaluation of existing efforts may be facilitated by the establishment of the Comprehensive Homelessness Prevention Project (CHPP) outlined in Recommendation #1.

These recommendations view homelessness as a point on a continuum, not a destination or a pathology. Homelessness arises from entangled social policies like deinstitutionalization of mental health services and welfare reform and personal characteristics, such as alcohol and drug addiction, criminal behavior and domestic violence. Homelessness is a snap shot of one end of a continuum from absence of permanent independent shelter to possession of permanent independent housing. To households at risk of homelessness, the term itself is terrifying and can discourage at risk households from seeking services from an organization or program with 'homeless' in the name. When it came into currency in the 1980's, “homelessness” was used by housing advocates to promote the need for more affordable housing, as it evolved in the 1990's the term became synonymous with mental illness, alcoholism and panhandling. To social policy makers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the phenomena of homeless shelters and services are opportunities to address fundamental social needs.

## **About the Author:**

This report was prepared by Spencer Wells for the Enterprise Community Partners as a part of their contribution to the Heading Home process. Spencer is currently the Tenant Outreach Coordinator for the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) but the work of preparing the implementation plan is outside of his work assignments with COHHIO, which bears no responsibility for the report. Prior to joining COHHIO, Spencer was the Special Projects Coordinator (1980-1985) and Executive Director (1985-1999) of the Cleveland Tenants Organization. Before joining CTO, Spencer was a social worker at Garden Valley Neighborhood House and Vocational Guidance and Rehabilitation Services in Cleveland. He has a Masters Degree in Social Administration from Case Western Reserve University and has participated in field training with social work students. Spencer may be contacted at [stwells@adelphia.net](mailto:stwells@adelphia.net).