Ending Family Homelessness
Indianapolis Action Plan

In 2010, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) introduced Opening Doors, the first federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. The plan set key goals that included ending homelessness among families by 2020. In Indianapolis, the Family Homelessness Resource Group has been convening since 2013 after a recognized surge of overcrowding at shelters sending families to hotels on the outskirts of the city and/or being broken apart in order to avoid involvement with DCS. As homeless service providers, we knew we could do better. We began by trying to understand how many families are actually homeless in Indianapolis. We quickly realized that other than our point in time count we did not have a good system for tracking an unduplicated count of those families seeking shelter every day. We recognized an overburdened shelter system that was timing families out in order to help newly desperate families at the door. We realized our uncoordinated system of getting families housing was based on showing up at the right door and at the right time. Our system was chaotic and based on luck, causing all of us to work harder, but more importantly putting those most in need at higher risk of sustained trauma with little understanding of how to get help, increasing stress rather than wiping it out. We vowed to work together to change our system.

We know that homelessness has a profound impact on children's health creating twice the rate of emotional and behavioral issues for children experiencing homelessness as compared to those that do not. Homelessness also impacts children's ability to obtain a solid education, creating a higher risk of an unstable future. Homeless parents have a more difficult time obtaining and maintaining employment. The jobs that are available often don't pay a living wage, let alone cover the higher cost of caring for a family.

We continue to emphasize *housing first* rather than *housing ready* practices, where services are offered in non-time limited permanent housing with a keen focus on housing stability. Indianapolis service providers are dedicated to creating a coordinated entry system with well-informed, well-resourced, well-coordinated exits into permanent housing. We will create a system that makes family homeless rare, brief and non-recurring. We vow to reduce the trauma experienced by families who find themselves homeless by directly addressing needs of each family member once they are rapidly re-housed.

Homeless Families and Children:

The chart below highlights the data on homeless families documented through our Point in Time count:

Year	Total Number of Families	Number of Children in Families	Number of children in chronically homeless families	Number of adults in chronically homeless families	Total number of people in chronically homeless families
2016	156	305	20	14	34
2015	136	285	20	11	31
2014	161	346	11	9	20
2013	151	328	6	12	18
2012	177	315	15	42	57

During the last five years family homelessness is declining, but that is not representative of unmet needs. Service providers indicate there is still a lack of capacity in shelters as families continue to experience long shelter stays.

Family Homelessness Resource Group Assessment Results

Since the Family Homelessness Resource Group began meeting in 2013, we have been assessing our system's strengths and challenges in relation to family homelessness. Our key findings are listed below.

Current system strengths:
- Strong interagency collaboration
- High level of integrity and passion to provide the most respectful services
- Increasing communication among service providers, City officials, local funders and foundations
- Increasing coordination with additional supportive services for families such as faith-based providers and community centers
- Full continuum of program and service needs present

Current system challenges:
- Access to services is unorganized and families must make multiple phone calls to access shelter and then served based on luck rather than level of need
- Overcrowding in shelters often leaving no options for families in need
- No clear picture of need due to processes of duplication and no coordination
- Available services don't always meet the need
- Limited linkages with mainstream resource for families like TANF, child care vouchers, and Section 8 housing
- No clear system to identify resource need in order offer the right level of service to end family homelessness
- No clear standard for prevention services to stop families from falling into homelessness

Identified areas of need:
- Educate community on rapid re-housing and intensity of service provision attached
- Reconfigure case management practices to deliver site based or in home services
- Focus case management services on obtaining and maintaining housing: reducing housing barriers; identifying housing needs; obtaining permanent housing as quickly as possible; goals based on housing stability
- Increased ability for family re-engagement if housing crisis occurs
- Develop housing stability action plans
- Increase collaborations with mainstream systems
- Training on use of prevention resources

What are our goals?

Primary goal:
- Every identified family living on the streets or in emergency shelter is provided permanent housing within 30 days of identification, unless they choose to enter a longer term program.

Additional goals:
- Focus on housing stability
- Create appropriate assessment in order to identify appropriate housing stability services needed to meet level, intensity, and immediacy of need.
- Assure a collaborative and coordinated response system to prevent and end homelessness among families in Indianapolis.
- Assure enough emergency shelter space and housing so families don't need to be broken up in order to be safe in their time of highest crisis while permanent housing is being identified
- Support client empowerment and choice, while fostering client accountability
- Develop case management skills focused on needs of children
- Focus on linking families to mainstream services and community supports in order to build a safety net to avoid recurring homelessness and increase economic security.
- Base our actions on evidence based strategies while continuing to analyze our community data to ensure efficient, effective service with high performing programs and services.
- Evaluate and report our successes and challenges regularly to inform the community and to engage stakeholders to remove barriers or to leverage needed resources.

What do we mean by ending family homelessness?

In this plan, ending homelessness is defined as having a system in place that prevents homelessness whenever possible and, when it cannot, implements strategies to assure that

homelessness is brief, recoverable and non-recurring. The need for a coordinated homeless response system will continue to exist as families will face ongoing housing crises. We define and end to family homelessness as, "Every identified family living on the streets or in emergency shelter is offered permanent housing within 30 days of identification, unless they choose to enter longer term services."

Our community has an inclusive definition of "family" as it relates to family homelessness, and is defined as "A group of persons with or without children including a child who is temporarily away from home."

Who will manage this process?

The Family Homelessness Resource Group (FHRG) will act as the steering committee, developing and managing an action plan to reach the federal benchmarks. This group is a taskforce of the Housing and Services Committee of the Indianapolis CoC. This group has created and endorsed a definition for ending homelessness among families that will be used as a basis for measuring our success. For the purposes of this plan, we will define an end to family homelessness as:

"Every identified family living on the streets or in emergency shelter is offered permanent housing within 30 days of identification, unless they choose to enter longer term services."

This definition will allow us to serve all families currently homeless and provide us with guidance as we move forward.

Who is part of the Family Homelessness Resource Group?

The Family Homelessness Resource Group is a team of nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and others whose goal is to end family homelessness, as defined by the community, by 2020. The efforts of the taskforce are coordinated through monthly meetings, regular phone and email coordination, and the development and utilization of a Master List to identify and serve all homeless families in Indianapolis. The following entities are part of the Family Homelessness Resource Group:

Children's Bureau
Coalition for Homelessness Intervention and Prevention (CHIP)
Coburn Place
Dayspring Shelter
Family Promise Shelter
Gennesaret Free Clinic

HealthNet, Inc./Homeless Initiative Program (HIP)
Holy Family Shelter
The Julian Center
McKinney Vento Liaisons
Midtown Community Mental Health
Outreach Inc.
Salvation Army Shelter
Trusted Mentors
Wheeler Shelter for Women and Children

Organizations and agencies that can be engaged on the Resource Group:

accessABILITY
Adult & child Mental Health
BDDS
Center for Working Family Community Center sites
Childcare Voucher Program
CICOA
Community Centers
Department of Children's Services
Employment Services/WorkOne/Supported Employment/VR
Faith-based Group
Funders/Foundations
IHA
Immigrant Welcome Center
Language Services
Professional Blended Street Outreach
School on Wheels
SNAP
TANF

The chart below highlights some key action steps to end family homelessness for Indianapolis:

Ending Family Homelessness Action Plan

Goal	Action Step	Primary Responsible Organization	Status or Deadline
Establish a Steering Committee	Establish the Family Homelessness Resource Group (FHRG) as the Steering Committee to oversee the end to family homelessness	CoC – Housing and Services Committee	Complete
	Identify chairs of the FHRG	Steering Committee	Complete

	Define the end of family homelessness in Indianapolis	Steering Committee	
Create a Master List of homeless families	Establish HMIS protocols to allow for Master List creation	Steering Committee/CHIP	
	Establish ROI to be used by all family service providers to be entered into HMIS to generate comprehensive list	Steering Committee/CHIP/Coordinated Entry	
	Increase shelter participation to create a more comprehensive list	Wheeler/CHIP	
	Assess other gaps in HMIS data and develop a plan to ensure information for all homeless families who sign ROI is entered on Master List	Steering Committee/CHIP	
Create coordinated entry and assessment	Create a centralized process for families seeking immediate housing support	Coordinated Entry Workgroup	
	Develop assessment tool identifying family need for housing and services resources that best fit their circumstance and preference	Coordinated Entry Workgroup	
	Create accurate reporting to assess gaps in service	Coordinated Entry Workgroup/CHIP/ CoC	
	Shelter Coordination Response for Crisis Housing	Coordinate Entry Workgroup/CHIP/Steering Committee	
Establish protocol to prioritize households for housing resources	Develop and introduce housing resource tool for community referrals	PSH Housing Committee Chair/Steering Committee	completed7/25/16
	Establish regular meeting times for case conferencing	Steering Committee/PSH Housing Committee	completed
	Determine prioritization process for family evaluation and intervention	Steering Committee/PSH Housing Committee	7/25/16

	Evaluate success of conferencing process at monthly FHRG meetings	Steering Committee/CHIP	ongoing
Focus support services on housing stability	Ensure services in emergency shelter and transitional housing are focused on reducing housing barriers and identifying permanent housing as quickly as possible	Steering Committee/CoC	
	Ensure level and intensity of services are available for families to maintain housing	Steering Committee/CoC	
	Ensure case management practices focus on reducing housing barriers and housing stability	Steering Committee/CoC	
	Ensure linkage to community resources for economic and educational opportunities to increase financial security and ongoing support	Steering Committee/CoC	
Rapidly re-house families into permanent housing	Analyze existing permanent housing resources against anticipated inflow to check for resource gaps	Steering Committee/CHIP/CoC	
	Monitor number of families housed each month with the goal of housing more families than enter homelessness each month	Steering Committee/CHIP/CoC	
Identify and prevent at risk families who are in danger of losing their housing from falling into homelessness	Coordinate effort to respond to housing crises	Steering Committee/CHIP/Community Centers/CoC	