

West Metro Homeless Youth Steering Committee

Meeting #2 – March 28, 2007

Present: Kerry Holtmeier Hallee, Katie Lee, Connie Apple, Rick Birno, Carol Bergenstahl, Jaime Kambiri, Madeline Kastler, Craig Swedburg, Theresa Ledermann Morey, Lydia Kihm, Anne Mavity, Nadia Facey, Monica Nilsson, Pat Hughes, Sarah Taylor-Nanista, Monica Nilsson,

Meeting minutes (submitted by Anne Mavity):

Welcome and Overview

Lydia Kihm, Executive Director of Teens Alone and the host for this process, called the meeting to order at 2pm and welcomed the participants. This is the second of five community meetings, with the goal of creating concrete recommendations for addressing the challenges that homeless youth in the suburban West Metro area face. Tasks for the March meeting included revisiting estimates of the number of homeless youth, and a discussion of the housing and services that are available to them at this point in time.

Estimates of number of West Metro homeless youth

The group revisited the question of how many homeless youth are in the West Metro community in any year. This issue is seen as a critical issue for establishing credibility with community leaders and decision-makers throughout the West Metro. The group's goal is to understand the demand and need for housing and shelter sufficiently to ensure that a recommended response is appropriate and defensible.

A discussion ensued about the different estimates provided by sources as varied as the Minnesota State Department of Human Services, the Heading Home Hennepin Report, Wilder Research, the McKinney-Vento reports from designated school liaisons for homelessness, total census numbers of students in each of the seven targeted school districts, and the conclusions that would be based on national research methodology that estimate two percent of all youth. The estimates for the seven school district area focus of this community process, ranged from less than 75 per year to more than 1,543 per year.

The discussions surfaced several difficulties with evaluating the estimates of homeless youth. These include (but were not limited to):

- Definition of homelessness used can be different for each reporting entity
- Differences in time period for reporting (point in time, monthly, annual, school year calendar, etc.)
- Duplication in numbers and across organizations (schools report, Teens Alone report, police report, etc)
- Recognition that youth rarely self-report themselves as homeless, and have fear around being identified as homeless
- Age factors, i.e., while 18-21 year olds are defined in the affordable housing community as "youth", in need of housing targeted to homeless youth, this age group isn't uniformly identified by schools, police, etc as "youth"
- Geographic borders, including school district parameters, not recognized by youth who may travel across these "communities" seamlessly, and be counted by entities within one district even while identifying themselves as from another district.

After significant discussion, there was general recognition that an exact number would not be reached, that a range would be needed. A group discussion resulted in a list of several factors that should be considered when narrowing our estimates to a range. These factors include:

- Flexibility in numbers means flexibility in solutions
- We need a “range”, not an exact number and the range needs to be justifiable
- We’re still learning and so our estimate will necessarily be a moving target
- More than numbers, we need faces and stories
- Our estimates need to have credibility with school social workers
- We need to recognize that our sources will be reporting duplicative numbers in some instances
- Our community leaders need to buy-in to the estimates
- We recognize that our estimate has the potential to be “a *better* number, not an exact number”

One participant cautioned about spending too much time on trying to find an exact number, which may be impossible to determine or agree upon, especially at the cost of not enough time spent on crafting responses and solutions. It was agreed that the facilitator, Anne Mavity, would attempt to draft language that might appear in the eventual final report, to discuss this issue and would bring that back to the group for the next meeting.

Review housing and services continuum in West Metro

As a step in understanding the gap in the housing and services continuum for homeless youth, the Steering Committee discussed housing options, and services, currently in existence and potentially available to our target youth. It was noted during the group brainstorming, that while these housing and services may exist, availability because of lack of vacancies, transportation barriers, etc, remains a problem.

Housing continuum

Shelter

- St. Joseph’s
- Avenues for Youth
- Bridge for Youth
- Hotel vouchers (provided by food shelves, police dept, etc)
- Sleep at police department
- Host homes (?) (not yet in West Metro?)

Transitional housing (time limits, usually 3-24 months)

- Scattered site - Project solo, Bridge, Point NW
- Single site – Bridge, Archdale

Permanent housing (no time limits, usually independent apartments)

- Single site - Archdale, Barnabas, Lindquist
- Scattered site (flexible rental subsidies) – Bridge, Hearth

It was noted that all the single site housing options on the list (and known to the Steering Committee members) are located outside of the geographic area of the West Metro focus of this community effort. The only options available that would permit West Metro youth to remain in their home communities are high demand rental subsidies for permanent scattered site housing or short term limited shelter options such as sleeping at a hotel or police department.

The second part of the discussion was to look at the services continuum and potential gaps. This discussion was a greater challenge as the range of services needed and available are potentially so wide-reaching and variable, that a group brainstorm could not adequately represent or summarize it. The Steering Committee did create applicable categories of services and discussed the most obvious and widely used/available options.

Services continuum

Prevention

- Systems approaches – including County Child Protective Services, Family reunification, foster care, etc.
- Food shelves (although often with restricted eligibility)

Outreach

- Community Action and Planning in Suburban Hennepin (CAPSH)
- Streetworks Collaborative outreach team (new)

Case management

- Schools (I.E.P.'s , etc)
- Teens Alone
- Streetworks collaborative
- Interfaith
- YouthLink
- Project Solo
- Freeport West
- Point Northwest

Other comments

A number of suggestions and insights were provided by participants throughout the meeting that deserved greater reflection. These included (paraphrased):

- *“So much of this problem is a systems problem. Our work is limited to addressing youth homelessness and creating housing options but the systems themselves have a huge impact on the severity of the problem.”*
- *“We need to go “upstream” to really solve the problem. E.g., Address the issues in foster care to ensure that it can adequately support teens so that these teens do not become homeless. (This was in response to the statistics indicating that 30-60% of homeless adults and youth spent time in the foster care system).”*
- We need flexible emergency money for things like rent, when teens come to us in crisis.
- Our goal is to keep youth in their home school.
- We need to know the duration of homelessness of our youth to better craft a response.

Next steps

The focus of the April meeting was revised from the original outline in order to learn more about who the youth are that might be in need of housing. The April meeting will be used as a listening session to hear stories of homeless youth in the West Metro.

A draft of the first sections of the final report, including statements on values and mission, as well as the estimates of the number of homeless youth, will be available for review prior to the April Steering Committee meeting.