



2018/2019 ACTION PLAN FOR HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE



CITY OF COLORADO SPRINGS

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Homelessness Response Action plan

Introduction

Homelessness related issues are among the most frequent complaints that the City receives. Our community is concerned about the health and safety of those surviving outside as well as the substantial impact illegal camping has on our environment. Although not a homeless service provider, the City of Colorado Springs remains committed to championing strategies that prevent and reduce homelessness in our community by assessing gaps across landscapes, planning, building awareness, convening stakeholder groups, identifying public-private partnerships, and leveraging resources.

According to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, ending homelessness does not mean individuals and families will never again experience homelessness. Changing economic realities, the unpredictability of life and unsafe or unwelcoming family environments may create situations where individuals or families could experience, re-experience or be at risk of homelessness.

Instead, ending homelessness means that we as a community have a systematic response that can address immediate needs, quickly connect people to housing and provide services to ensure long-term stability. It means that homelessness is a rare, brief and non-recurring.

As our general population continues to grow in Colorado Springs, the number of people experiencing homelessness has also increased. In January 2018 our Continuum of Care recruited over 180 volunteers to facilitate the “Point in Time” count. The 2018 Point in Time count showed that there were at least 1,551 people experiencing homelessness in El Paso County on night of January 28th, 2018. This number includes people in shelters, transitional housing, and those unsheltered. The total unsheltered count was 513.



The Point in Time count, although considered a conservative estimate, is the best objective data we have available to help us understand the issue of homelessness.

GOALS

1. Continue educating the public via the HelpCOS Campaign

The HelpCOS website is a central hub for homelessness issues in our community. The HelpCOS Campaign aims to educate the public in how to most effectively give assistance to those in need by directing donations, resources and volunteerism to impactful local service providers. People can access the website to learn how they can help by donating their money, time, or even goods. The website also provides a directory of services aimed at those who are seeking assistance. We will continue to promote this campaign via road signage, billboards, and social media.

2. Add an additional 370 low barrier shelter beds

**contingent on special appropriation approval*

The 2018 Point in Time Count revealed a deficit in low barrier shelter in our community. In order to respond to this community need and ensure that no one in our community is forced to sleep outside, the City will collaborate with service providers to add more than 300 additional low barrier shelter beds. This will more than double our community's low barrier shelter bed capacity. Having adequate shelter bed capacity will also enable CSPD officers to enforce the camping ban and aid in protecting our environment.



GOALS - Cont'd

3. Implement a Homeless Outreach Court

Many people experiencing homelessness in our community have multiple pending cases, usually nuisance-type crimes. Many of these cases go unresolved as most do not have the necessary resources to close them.

These cases not only tie up our Municipal Court system, but also act as a barrier to employment and housing for those ready to escape homelessness. Homeless Outreach Courts, like other problem-solving courts, are an evidence-based practice being used across the country to successfully address these issues. The goal of our Homeless Outreach Court is to help those experiencing homelessness move forward from life on the streets.

In lieu of assessing fines and costs, our Homeless Outreach Court connects individuals with case managers who can help guide them to the services they need. By doing so, our Homeless Outreach Court will address the root causes of the offending behavior and empower individuals to take concrete steps to move out of homelessness.

Homeless Outreach Court is a unique community-centric approach to criminal justice. By bringing government and nonprofit stakeholders across the entire services spectrum into the court to work collaboratively to address the needs of each homeless person, Homeless Outreach Court is able to marshal the expertise and resources of the broader community to both reduce homelessness and reduce the strain on Colorado Springs City services.

4. Establish a Veteran Incentive Fund

Since the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness was launched in 2014, 63 communities across 33 different states have achieved functional zero.

Even though our community has made great strides towards the goal of functional zero, we still have military veterans experiencing homelessness. Our community's sole remaining unmet criteria for reaching functional zero is housing more veterans per quarter than those veterans that are newly identified as experiencing homelessness. The Veteran Mitigation Fund will be used by service providers to incentivize landlords to house veterans experiencing homelessness and help our community reach the goal of functional zero in veteran homelessness.

GOALS - Cont'd

5. Develop a Comprehensive Affordable Housing Plan

Many people experiencing homelessness in our community are homeless because of the gap between their income and housing costs. Certainly, the people most at risk of homelessness are those with no income and those with very low income – earning less than 30% of the area median income. Poverty rates tend to be higher amongst populations with specialized housing needs, such as citizens with disabilities and female-headed households with children. The current supply of affordable and accessible housing is inadequate to meet our current community demand. To further understand the issue and set smart goals for our City's housing future; the City of Colorado Springs will begin the process of developing a comprehensive housing plan in 2019. This plan will guide the way towards ensuring that there is sufficient housing for all in Colorado Springs.

6. Support funding for homeless work program with area non-profit

The City will investigate the feasibility of a “homeless to work” program via a competitive RFP process. This program will provide both needed services to our community and gainful employment to those experiencing homelessness in our community. People working in this program will pick up trash in our parks, along our trail system and clean up illegal campsites. An ideal location for this program would be within an existing local non-profit.

7. Add Neighborhood Services staff to aid in cleaning up illegal camps.

****contingent on budget approval***

Neighborhood Services will assign two full-time maintenance technicians to work with CSPD's Homeless Outreach Team. These maintenance technicians will be solely responsible for immediate remediation of vacated homeless camps as identified by CSPD. Additionally, Neighborhood Services will have one additional full-time senior maintenance technician available to assist with larger clean-ups or facilitate needs identified by the Homeless Outreach Team. This will improve (shorten) the cleanup response time as illegal camps are tagged for removal by CSPD.

GOALS - Cont'd

8. Develop concept for a “HelpCOS Ambassador Team” for Downtown and Old Colorado City areas

Having adequate shelter bed capacity, although imperative, is just the first step in getting people off of the streets, into shelter and into housing. Persistent, coordinated, and creative outreach efforts are vitally important to the ability to not only identify, but engage those experiencing homelessness and to link them to the housing and services interventions available in our community. The HelpCOS Ambassadors will provide outreach to those experiencing homelessness in our community and connect them to needed services.

The presence of HelpCOS Ambassadors will also help tourists and shoppers feel more comfortable Downtown and in Old Colorado City. The HelpCOS Ambassador Program will place friendly, identifiable, knowledgeable and trained ambassadors in public spaces to greet visitors, answer questions, provide maps and assist people as needed. Our HelpCOS Ambassador Program will learn from other programs like the San Antonio Centro Ambassador Program, that provide not only outreach to those experiencing homelessness, but also act as a concierge for tourists.

The San Antonio Centro Ambassadors are 85 strong, including 19 hospitality, 65 maintenance ambassadors and “pan and broom” cleaning ambassadors servicing a .8 square mile area in the heart of downtown called the Public Improvement District. Thanks to the support from the property owners within this district, the Ambassadors work every day to keep the vibe alive and make San Antonio “The Friendliest City in America.”

The City’s Homelessness Prevention and Response Coordinator will partner with The Downtown Partnership, Colorado Springs Convention and Visitor’s Bureau, and other community partners to fund and organize this program.

GOALS - Cont'd

9. The City will collaborate with local service providers to add shelter options for families experiencing homelessness.

Homeless families often hide from counts like Point in Time for fear of having their children removed from their care. The more accurate measurement is performed by school districts which are required by the McKinney-Vento Act to perform annual counts of homeless students. The most recent of these counts in Colorado Springs identified over 1,000 school age students experiencing homelessness (defined as living in cars, camps and shelters as well as “doubled up” with multiple families or precariously housed in motels).

Colorado Springs has no low barrier family shelter and has limited options that allow families to stay together. In 2018, between August and October, 118 families were turned away from emergency shelter. Similarly, transitional housing providers lack the housing inventory to meet the need. Last year, at least 938 adults and 1,818 children were waitlisted due to lack of space.

According to the Urban Institute, “...ignoring family homelessness today will make single adult homelessness worse in the future, as children who experience long-term homelessness are five times more likely than their peers to become homeless as adults.”

The City will collaborate with service providers with a goal of adding an additional 20 single-occupancy family emergency shelter units in 2019 and 40 new Transitional Housing units in 2020, bringing relief for this vulnerable and hidden homeless population.

GOALS - Cont'd

10. The Colorado Springs Police Department will increase response to issues involving homelessness.

The Colorado Springs Police Department (CSPD) is committed to partnering with other City department's as well as the many active public and private sector organizations to help reduce the number of those experiencing homelessness in Colorado Springs. CSPD's Homeless Outreach Team (HOT), consisting of four full-time officers and one sergeant, is a highly trained unit that is dedicated to working on the challenging and complex issues that are associated with Colorado Springs' homeless population.

Additionally, the Downtown Area Response Team (DART) which is comprised of 10 officers, and two officers from each patrol division have received specialized training and are proficient at responding to homeless associated calls for service. For 2019, CSPD plans to train more officers to assist the HOT officers as well as increase the number of hours dedicated to responding to issues involving the homeless. While CSPD understands that criminal enforcement is not always the best method for a long-term solution for homelessness, the HOT officers and the other specially trained officers will continue to enforce City ordinance and State laws when appropriate. The HOT officers will also continue to conduct outreach and provide service referrals as much as possible to those in need.

