

## FL-512 St. Johns County Continuum of Care Strategic Plan 2020 – June 30, 2022

### Executive Summary

In a county that takes pride in chart-topping rankings - best schools, lowest taxes, above-average incomes, healthiest residents; the issue of homelessness is often overlooked but is debatably more worthy of a headline. Every year hundreds of people experience an episode of homelessness in St. Johns County.

In 2019, the Continuum of Care recorded 1,652 clients served by housing focused programs. In 2020, during a one-night snapshot - called the Point-in-Time count – 368 individuals were identified and surveyed during one January night. The stark reality, as identified in these numbers, is that the homeless in our community are living outside. The majority, over half, are unsheltered. For families with children or youth, the very limited opportunity for shelter creates an even greater challenge. During the 2020 count, 26 percent of our homeless were under the age of 24. Believing that each of these individuals has a basic human right to safe, secure and affordable housing, the Continuum of Care is committed to ending homelessness.

For some, homelessness may only last a few days or weeks, but for many it will last a year or longer. In the January count, although nearly one-third of the unsheltered identified as newly homeless, over half identified as continually homeless for more than one year.

Understanding this issue requires us to consider how close many in our community are to eviction. In St. Johns County, nearly 7,000 or about 7 percent of households live in poverty. In addition, 27 percent or nearly 25,000 households exist on a total household income gained through employment that is more than the Federal Poverty Level, but still is not enough to cover the basic cost of living. Data provided in the United Way ALICE Report, shows that many families in St. Johns County are one paycheck away from disaster. They are often forced to make a difficult choice between paying for needed car repair or medical care, groceries or paying rent.

Unlike many other communities, numbers are on our side. It is possible for St. Johns County to achieve this goal. The strategic plan adopted by the Continuum and updated in 2020, identifies and aligns the following priorities: Homelessness is rare. Homelessness is brief. Homelessness is one time. And finally, that we are able to sustain an end to homelessness.

To tackle these problems we must aggressively work to prevent people from becoming homeless, expand affordable housing, offer critical interventions that ensure the safety and dignity of people living without housing, and urgently reduce homelessness in our most impacted and vulnerable communities.

Homes end homelessness, and while the strategies outline in our plan support improvements to our systems, our first priority is to increase permanent housing options. Doing so ends homelessness by preventing it before it starts. It also provides a rapid solution to those that are experiencing homelessness.

Ending homeless sounds ambitious. It is, but it is also something that can be achieved. Without action, our homeless population will continue to grow, and this opportunity will slip through our fingers. Understanding that every homeless individual in our community has a name and a unique history along with their basic human right to housing, should inspire us to commit to this challenge. We must act with compassion, collaboration and significant investment. In a community that racks up awards, Ending Homelessness is an accolade we should seek. We seek to do more than Imagine reading the headline, Homelessness Ends in St. Johns County.

**Mission:** The Continuum of Care leads the effort to prevent and end homelessness, bringing together resources and partnerships to make homelessness rare, brief, and one time.

**Vision:** Believing housing is a human right, we envision a community where all people have access to safe, stable, and affordable housing.

## Narrative

Established in 2002, the St. Johns County Continuum of Care (COC) is a collaborative of homeless stakeholders from across St. Johns County who are committed to ending homelessness through sharing expertise, using data to inform practice, monitoring system performance, using our collective voice to advocate for our homeless neighbors and aligning with federal priorities to ensure homelessness is rare, brief and a one-time occurrence.

This Strategic Plan was drafted to clearly identify actions, assignments and dates to guide results relating to the goal of ending homelessness. The objectives of this strategic plan are to utilize the Housing First Philosophy which offers permanent, affordable housing quickly for those experiencing homelessness and to provide supportive services to stay housed and avoid homelessness. As part of this plan, the COC Board, staff and agencies will advocate for local, state and federal policies that increase affordable housing

and prioritize funding applications that offer housing opportunities. The COC will make it a priority to enlist 100% of homeless providers in the community and enhance the coordinated entry systems to better serve those experiencing homelessness. To further enhance the coordinated entry system and the Homeless Management Information system, the COC will work to improve processes and performance by making data driven decisions and increase non-profit capacity. To further strengthen the crisis response system, the COC will also work to identify and address gaps in services, increase the capacity of the lead agency and board as well as implement marketing and education plans.

### Accomplishments

Our continuum saw many accomplishments from our 2018 strategic plan. Our four main goals were:

1. Operate as a Housing First community.
2. Assess and prioritize all those experiencing a housing crisis for appropriate intervention.
3. Increase access to safe, affordable sustainable housing for all those experiencing homelessness.
4. Increase HMIS utilization and improve data quality.

#### **Accomplishments Goal 1:** Operate as a Housing First community.

- CoC Lead Agency continued to prioritize funding projects that implemented a Housing First philosophy
- Increased effort to educate the community about Housing First

#### **Accomplishments Goal 2:** Assess and prioritize all those experiencing a housing crisis for appropriate intervention.

- CoC Lead Agency has expanded the Coordinated Entry System and helped expand access to Coordinated Entry by having strategic access points
- The community has had increased participation in Coordinated Entry

#### **Accomplishments Goal 3:** Increase access to safe, affordable sustainable housing for all those experiencing homelessness.

- Utilized a housing locator position to help develop relationships with landlords and quickly place households
- Continued work to build partnerships with local government and housing developers to try and increase stock of affordable housing

#### **Accomplishments Goal 4:** Increase HMIS utilization and improve data quality.

- HMIS has improved reporting to better look at system performance measures, data quality reports, and DCF reports
- HMIS is developing new dashboards to enhance understanding of provider performance and overall CoC performance

- Monthly dashboards are available for providers to pull their own scorecards

### Gaps Analysis

The Lead Agency will conduct an annual gaps analysis/needs assessment of the homeless needs and services available within the geographic area. The gaps analysis/needs assessment will be used to determine local needs and establish community priorities each fiscal year. The findings will be published annually on October 15.

### Community Collaboration

The St. Johns Continuum of Care membership and Governance Board came together on February 12, 2020 for a one-day strategic planning session facilitated by the Florida Housing Coalition. Throughout the day the group had the opportunity to increase their education on best practices for CoCs, complete a Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis, and review the 2018 plan. A new mission and vision were established to better define the efforts of the Continuum.

The plan represents a collaborative effort from many stakeholders. There was robust representation at the session including providers, local government, veterans representation, United Way, community volunteers, the school district, behavioral health providers, and other community stakeholders who all have a vested interest in ending homelessness. The day ended with a firm commitment, resolve, and concrete strategies for preventing and ending homelessness in St. Johns county.

### Our Priorities

Aligning with the federal priorities, the St. Johns County Continuum of Care is working on the following priorities:

1. Ensure homelessness is rare.
2. Ensure homelessness is brief.
3. Ensure homelessness is one time.
4. Sustain an end to homelessness.

We will implement these priorities using the following strategies, goals, and action steps.

Strategy 1: Increase Permanent Housing Opportunities		
Goal 1.1: Utilize a Housing First philosophy		
Action Step 1.1a	Action Step 1.1b	Action Step 1.1c

Each CoC funded agency will fully employ the policies and practices that are compliant with the Housing First philosophy to include non-discriminatory practices	Lower barriers for entry to Rapid Re-Housing by prioritizing project applicants who implement low barrier programs according to the Housing First model	CoC Lead Agency to monitor CoC funded agencies to ensure compliance with the Housing First philosophy
<b>Goal 1.2: Advocate for local, state, and federal policies which increase affordable housing</b>		
<b>Action Step 1.2a</b>	<b>Action Step 1.2b</b>	<b>Action Step 1.2c</b>
Build partnerships with the local government to ensure affordable housing for homeless households is being prioritized	CoC Lead Agency will educate the community about important issues and policies impacting persons experiencing homelessness	Build stronger relationships with elected officials. Share developed materials with those who have the ability to legislate and advocate for funding on our behalf. Have a CoC Board Member present at affordable housing meetings.
<b>Goal 1.3: Prioritize funding applications that offer permanent housing opportunities</b>		
<b>Action Step 1.3a</b>	<b>Action Step 1.3b</b>	<b>Action Step 1.3c</b>
Publish RFAs that prioritize permanent housing opportunities such as Rapid Re-Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing	Develop a rank and review process to include higher scoring for applicants prioritizing permanent housing	Identify new project funding opportunities and increase applicant pool.
<b>Strategy 2: Strengthen the Coordinated Entry System (CES)</b>		
<b>Goal 2.1: 100% participation by homeless service providers in Coordinated Entry</b>		
<b>Action Step 2.1a</b>	<b>Action Step 2.1b</b>	<b>Action Step 2.1c</b>
Ensure 100% participation in the CES of federally mandated agencies	Develop a rank and review process to include higher scoring for applicants who participate in the CES	Outreach to non-mandated agencies to educate and encourage participation in the CES
<b>Goal 2.2: Enhance Coordinated Entry to better serve households experiencing homelessness</b>		
<b>Action Step 2.2a</b>	<b>Action Step 2.2b</b>	<b>Action Step 2.2c</b>
Close “side doors” to ensure agencies are accepting referrals only through the CES	Engage VA and DV to include on CES weekly by name list meetings	Develop a dynamic prioritization system to enhance the VI-SPDAT
<b>Action 2.2d</b>		

Identify ways to strengthen Housing Navigator and Housing Locator roles.		
<b>Goal 2.3: Improve processes and performance of the CES</b>		
Action Step 2.3a	Action Step 2.3b	Action Step 2.3c
Educate and monitor agencies to ensure they understand and are correctly utilizing the CES	Explore creating a single access point to control the quality of the assessments and prioritization	Evaluate the CES annually
Action Step 2.3d		
Update policies and procedures to reflect guidance from Built for Zero.		
<b>Strategy 3: Improve Overall Performance of the Continuum of Care</b>		
<b>Goal 3.1: Strengthen the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)</b>		
Action Step 3.1a	Action Step 3.1b	Action Step 3.1c
Create a dashboard of critical data elements for the CoC Lead Agency (and relevant committee) to track	Increase agency participation to ensure agencies serving homeless households are entering data	Engage the VA and Duval as partners to share data and coordinate veteran services
<b>Goal 3.2: Make data-driven decisions</b>		
Action Step 3.2a	Action Step 3.2b	Action Step 3.2c
Review HMIS reports, Longitudinal System Analysis (LSA), and System Performance Measures to identify and address poor performance	Monitor CoC funded agencies and develop a corrective action plan policy, reallocation policy, and a technical assistance policy	Form a Performance Committee to regularly review data and make recommendations for funding
<b>Goal 3.3: Increase nonprofit capacity for agencies serving households experiencing homelessness</b>		
Action Step 3.3a	Action Step 3.3b	Action Step 3.3c
Host regular meetings for the CoC membership where educational opportunities are provided by the Lead Agency, outside providers, and other community agencies	Offer regular technical assistance to CoC funded agencies to improve performance on existing contracts and grant awards	Host special meetings for non-CoC funded agencies interested in obtaining CoC funding to teach the process

Goal 3.4: Identify and address gaps in service to strengthen crisis response system		
Action Step 3.4a	Action Step 3.4b	Action Step 3.4c
Conduct annual gaps analysis		
Strategy 4: Strengthen the Leadership of the Crisis Response System		
Goal 4.1: Increase capacity of the CoC Lead Agency		
Action Step 4.1a	Action Step 4.1b	Action Step 4.1c
Monitor the CoC Lead Agency and provide recommendations for improvement	Identify funding opportunities that align with the mission and vision of the CoC to prevent and end homelessness	Identify what's causing staff turnover and fill gaps quicker when there is turnover; Identify roles and responsibilities of Lead Agency staff
Goal 4.2: Increase capacity of the CoC Governance Board		
Action Step 4.2a	Action Step 4.2b	Action Step 4.2c
Form a Nominating Committee to solicit and review board member applications	Provide new board member orientation to include CoC program interim rule requirements, the homeless crisis response system, and HUD priorities	Grow committee involvement with both General Membership and Board.
Goal 4.3: Implement Marketing and Education plan		
Action Step 4.3a	Action Step 4.3b	Action Step 4.3c
Provide ongoing community education for prioritized topics	Market Coordinated Entry by developing a catch phrase	Form a community task force to oversee education opportunities and develop marketing materials

Could insert any number of strategies following this.