

**City of Rockford**  
**2014 CAPER**

**Homeless and Other Special Needs**

**Outreach to Homeless Persons and Assessing Individual Needs**

In 2014, members of the Rock River Homeless Coalition (RRHC) performed an outreach program to some known homeless camps. By doing this, agencies hoped to make a better connection with these hard-to-house individuals so that they could work toward getting them into housing. Also in conjunction with the Rockford Fire Department, Community Action staff began conducting outreach to those homeless individuals who were “frequent utilizers” of the paramedic/emergency room system. Housing options along with addiction and mental health services were offered to the individuals. A definite barrier to this program is a lack of housing for people who have current addiction issues and criminal histories. There are few options for drug detoxification programs, resulting in problems for the homeless individuals who want to get help but are not able to get into programs.

A Single Point of Entry (SPOE) Site was created to implement a standardized process of access, assessment and referral for diversion/prevention, rapid rehousing, transitional housing, permanent housing, and other housing services. It operates consistently throughout all areas of the Rock River Housing Coalition and matches clients to the most appropriate housing.

During 2014, the number of homeless agencies participating in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) increased dramatically. More agencies received training and increased their utilization of the system. This system allows for more agencies to share information in order to help clients receive the most appropriate help in a more-timely manner.

**Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing Needs of Homeless Persons**

The community is beginning to have discussions around the Housing First model and determining how this model will work in our community. One of the biggest barriers to meeting all of the housing needs of the homeless has been that the area’s largest homeless shelter is privately funded and therefore does not necessarily adhere and follow HUD guidelines regarding care for the homeless. A big achievement is that the social service agencies have pulled together in an effort to better serve the homeless through the single point of entry. The objective of the Single Point of Entry program is to more quickly assess the needs the homeless individuals and their families in the community and get them housed in the most appropriate location. This is the single most significant achievement in addressing the needs of the homeless in our community. However, they are continuing to engage with other homeless service providers through the RRHC to work towards common goals.

The Rockford Rescue Mission shelter is planning to expand their services and move the women’s shelter to a more centrally located facility. Remedies, the local domestic violence shelter, also has plans to newly construct a facility and move to its new location. Several of the transitional housing providers are evaluating their programs to see how they can better serve the clients.

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### **Transition of Homeless Persons to Permanent and Independent Living**

In October-December 2014, a Homeless Pilot Program was initiated with 27 homeless individuals who were living under a bridge. The individuals received rapid rehousing, including case management, and were also assisted in finding housing. Of these 27 individuals, 22 people were initially housed, and 20 remain housed.

As part of the Coordinated Intake System, the RRHC has chosen to use the VI-SPDAT (Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool) as an assessment tool. It is crucial to accurately assess the needs of the homeless individual so that he/she gets assigned to the most appropriate housing and/or treatment. The Coalition is also working toward creating coordinated termination policies for permanent housing programs and a policy that will help determine when individuals/families are no longer in need of supportive housing and should move to private housing.

There continues to be a challenge in the community with finding landlords who are willing to provide housing for homeless individuals, especially those who have criminal records, mental health issues or addictions.

### **Helping Low-Income Individuals and Families Avoid Becoming Homeless**

There are several Homeless Prevention/Shelter diversion programs that low-income people who are at risk of homelessness are referred to for services. The Community Action Agency has a state-funded prevention program as well as the HESG funds for Rapid Rehousing and Prevention for the general population. MELD also runs a Rapid Rehousing program for pregnant or parenting individuals up to the age of 24. Rockford Township will provide a one-time homeless prevention payment for families and an on-going subsidy for individuals. The City Human Services staff works closely with clients to apply with both of the local housing authorities and also assist with those who can complete appeals to overturn denials of housing assistance.

There are discharge plans in place for youth aging out of foster care (through a contract with DCFS for Youth Housing Advocacy, with the local mental health provider (Rosecrance), and Winnebago County Probation.

The RRHC plans to again start working on discharge policies in 2015. The main issue has been the local hospitals. They were given drafts of discharge policies several years ago. They were stalled and never made it past their respective legal departments. Hospitals are still releasing people to homeless situations; however, hospital staff was involved in the informational sessions provided on the Single Point of Entry. This could lead to the hospital staff having more information and sending these homeless patients to the Single Point of Entry rather than simply discharging them back into homelessness.