

RURAL HOMELESS  
INITIATIVE OF  
SOUTHEAST AND  
CENTRAL OHIO:



*A National Model  
for Planning to End  
Rural Homelessness*

JANUARY 2008

# RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO

## OSTEOPATHIC HERITAGE FOUNDATIONS

The mission of the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations is to improve the health and quality of life in the community through education, research and service consistent with the osteopathic philosophy of medical care. The Foundations advance the mission through three primary areas of funding interest: *osteopathic medical education*, *osteopathic biomedical research*, and *community health and quality of life*. The community health and quality of life investments are concentrated in eighteen Ohio counties, with targeted osteopathic medical education and research investments throughout the United States.

Given the prominence of the Foundations with regard to osteopathic medical care and community health and quality of life, the local, state and national responsibilities that accompany advancing the mission are significant. The Foundations will maintain and enhance local and national partnerships designed to perpetuate the heritage as the pre-eminent foundations supporting the principles of osteopathic medicine – its health delivery philosophy, educational processes and research.



## THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a nonpartisan, mission-driven organization committed to preventing and ending homelessness in the United States. The Alliance works collaboratively with the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to build state and local capacity, leading to stronger programs and policies that help communities achieve their goal of ending homelessness. Guiding our work is *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*. This plan identifies our nation's challenges in addressing the problem and lays out practical steps our nation can take to change its present course and truly end homelessness within ten years.

# RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO



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# RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO



## LETTER FROM NAN ROMAN

*PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS*

Although homelessness is typically associated with large urban centers, sadly it is a problem that plagues small towns and rural communities as well. Rural homelessness, though also driven by the lack of affordable housing and inadequate service infrastructures, is less understood than its urban counterpart and presents a unique set of challenges. Two years ago the National Alliance to End Homelessness and the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations joined together to explore the nature of homelessness, and its solutions, in seventeen counties in rural Ohio. The goal of the partnership, called RHISCO (Rural Homeless Initiative of Southeast and Central Ohio), was twofold: to help the counties create plans to end homelessness, and to deepen our own understanding of solutions to the problem.

As this report will show, both of these goals have been met. The seventeen counties in the RHISCO region, by developing ten year plans, bringing new stakeholders to the table, and collaborating with neighboring communities, are better equipped to end homelessness in Southeast and Central Ohio. And the RHISCO Project is serving as a national model, leading to new insights about the nature of and solutions to rural homelessness. The impact of the RHISCO Project has already begun to extend far beyond Southeast and Central Ohio.

The hard work of the RHISCO Project was accomplished by hundreds of individuals from the seventeen counties who added countless hours to their already busy days to contribute, plan, confer, and ultimately commit to new strategies and partnerships. Their hard work, always supported and encouraged by the dedicated leadership and staff of the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations, is reflected in the following report. Those of us at the National Alliance to End Homelessness are honored to have worked closely with them, and our many other state and national partners, in this unique and innovative endeavor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nan Roman", positioned above the printed name.

Nan Roman



## LETTER FROM RICK VINCENT

*PRESIDENT/CEO OF THE OSTEOPATHIC HERITAGE FOUNDATIONS*

In 2006, the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations and the National Alliance to End Homelessness launched the planning phase of the Rural Homeless Initiative in Southeast and Central Ohio (RHISCO). Over the past two years, countless RHISCO partners, including local housing coalitions, service providers, funders and advocacy groups have contributed to the initial success of this multi-year, multi-phase Foundation funding priority. RHISCO partners are commended for their efforts to coordinate local planning and develop strategies designed to prevent homelessness in central and southeastern Ohio.

Under leadership from the Alliance, the planning process identified four overarching themes critical to successful plans to end homelessness in rural communities, including prevention, affordable housing, data systems and provider coordination. As a result, beginning in 2008, the Foundations will provide additional funding to local coalitions as they implement local strategies promoting homeless prevention and self-sufficiency of at-risk individuals and families to maintain quality, stable housing.

The Foundations welcome your review of "RHISCO: A National Model for Planning to End Homelessness" and we encourage replication of successful strategies to prevent homelessness in other rural communities across the country. As work continues on the RHISCO Initiative, the Foundations will continue to disseminate outcomes and learnings to benefit advocacy and public policy efforts to prevent and end homelessness in rural communities.

The Foundations extend sincere appreciation and gratitude to the National Alliance to End Homelessness and each participating RHISCO coalition for their leadership, contributions and dedication to preventing rural homelessness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Rick Vincent". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard A. Vincent



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

Beginning in 2005, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations, and 17 rural counties in Southeast and Central Ohio have worked together on the Rural Homeless Initiative of Southeast and Central Ohio, known as the RHISCO Project. This report documents the first two years of the project.

The goals of RHISCO are to improve the lives of low-income, poorly housed people in the region covered by the project, by reducing the incidence of homelessness; to demonstrate the feasibility of developing and implementing plans to end homelessness in a rural region marked by poverty; and to develop models that will be useful in other rural areas around the country. Over the past two years the counties have, with financial support from the Foundations and technical assistance from the Alliance, organized themselves to develop local plans to end homelessness.

Rural areas generally have not been quick to follow the national trend of developing local plans to end homelessness. This report provides insight into the reasons this might be true. It also shows, however, that progress is indeed possible with the right kinds of supports.

This report includes an overview of the issue of homelessness as it applies to rural communities generally, and to the rural portions of Southeast and Central Ohio in particular. It includes demographic descriptions of each of the seventeen counties that participated, allowing the reader to understand the diversity within the region, and to identify areas that are similar in various characteristics to other rural areas that are considering replication. The report briefly describes the progress that was made over the two-year planning period in each community. Finally, this report identifies overall lessons from the experience, including important models that were addressed by many of the communities, barriers that all the communities faced, promising developments, and key findings.

### RURAL HOMELESSNESS

Perhaps contrary to various stereotypes, rural areas in the United States are diverse in a number of ways: economically, racially, and demographically. Poverty, however, remains extant in rural America – children in rural areas are substantially more likely to be poor than in urban areas. As such, they and their families are likely to be at risk of homelessness.

Rural homelessness, however, is little researched and poorly understood. The most severe forms of homelessness, involving people sleeping outdoors, are more likely to be hidden than in cities – people sleep in the woods instead of on



doorsteps. Because the number of homeless people is small (although it may be a relatively large percentage of the population), communities often have difficulty recognizing the problem for what it is.

### *THE RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO*

*Origins and goals* – The RHISCO Project arose from the coalescing of two important national movements. The first is a new approach to the problem of homelessness. Since 2000, over 300 cities, counties and states have begun to develop concrete plans to solve the problem of homelessness by preventing people from becoming homeless, and rapidly rehousing those who do become homeless.

The second is the growing trend toward more active philanthropy. Increasingly, foundations and other charitable giving programs have become key participants in planning and implementation efforts to address vexing issues in communities they serve, taking an active hand in project design, implementation, and evaluation.

The Osteopathic Heritage Foundations primary service area includes 17 counties of in Southeast and Central Ohio. In 2005, the Foundations undertook an environmental scan of the region,

and found that homelessness was an issue of growing concern among knowledgeable leaders, who were frustrated by lack of resources, barriers, and lack of recognition by the general population.

In response, the Foundations undertook the RHISCO Project, with three specific goals:

- Catalyze local plans to end homelessness;
- Foster regional coordination and collaboration across the counties;
- Eventually culminate in a regional plan to end homelessness.

The Foundations engaged the National Alliance to End Homelessness to assist the counties with the development of their plans and to help them and the Foundations prepare for implementation of the local plans. The Alliance brought to the RHISCO Project a concern for rural homelessness on a national scale, and a desire to undertake a model for planning to end rural homelessness. The RHISCO region was well suited for this, due to the range of economic circumstances and the varied levels of capacity present in the 17-county region.

*The RHISCO region* – The 17 RHISCO counties cover about 20% of Ohio's geographic area. Nine of the counties are in Appalachia, the other eight



are in the plains and some include suburbs of Columbus. The population of the individual counties varies from a high of 130,000 residents to a low of fewer than 15,000 residents.

The economic differences between the counties can be measured in a number of ways. In terms of major industries, while farming is important in many of the communities, none of these counties have a farm-dependent economy, as measured by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Eleven are dependent on manufacturing, one each is dependent on mining, government, and services, and the remaining three have enough economic diversity to not be dependent on any one industry.

Median incomes range from a high of over \$67,000 annually, to a low of \$13,352. Unemployment rates range from 4% to 10.8%. Poverty rates range from 3.9% to 20%. There are high rates of housing cost burden in a majority of these counties. Finally, rates of high school and post-secondary degree completion fall well below those of the state as a whole in a majority of counties in the RHISCO Project.

*Structure and process of RHISCO* – The RHISCO Project got under way with an agreement among the Foundations, the Alliance, and the 17 counties. The Foundations provided initial grants

to each of the counties to offset costs of planning, such as travel, meeting expenses and staff.

The partners agreed that the RHISCO Project would proceed in five phases:

- *Assessment* – Information gathering about local circumstances related to homelessness.
- *Summits* – Bringing stakeholders together for networking, collaboration and training.
- *Planning* – Developing local ten year plans for each of the counties.
- *Implementation* – Putting the plans into effect locally, with increasing levels of regional collaboration.
- *Evaluation, Knowledge Building, and Dissemination* – Evaluation of process and results, consolidation of learnings, and national dissemination of findings.

*Alliance and Foundation Activities* – The Foundations provided the Alliance with funding to hire staff and consultants under the direction of the Alliance's Center for Capacity Building. In consultation with Foundations staff, this team provided three important services to the counties:

- *Data gathering and assessment capacity.* The Alliance gathered information about the



region and the individual counties, to provide background and a starting point for each county's efforts. Among the findings were that most of the counties had some sort of planning body dealing with housing and/or homelessness; that most of the counties had undertaken some effort to quantify the problem of homelessness; and that while there was a range of capacity to address homelessness, for the most part, programs and resources for homeless people were scarce.

- *On the ground one-on-one consultation.* Alliance staff and contractors helped counties individually with a range of tasks, including coalition building; cultivation of local stakeholders including their recruitment to be part of the effort; identification of best practices in planning and service delivery from around the country that could be considered for replication; development and writing of the actual ten year plan document; identification of and building relationships with potential funding sources.
- *Alliance Conference.* A team of people from the RHISCO counties attended the Alliance's annual national conference on ending homelessness in July, 2007. For the first time, the Alliance's conference included a track on rural homelessness. This provided an opportunity for those

working on RHISCO to share information with rural areas around the country.

- *Regional convenings and trainings.* The Alliance staff and consultants organized three regional meetings, two of them in the first six months of 2006, and another in early 2007. These meetings included training for county staff; discussions of common problems and solutions; networking and consensus building around the Project's overall goals; and collaboration building. An explicit purpose was to solidify a sense of the project's regional nature. In addition to these regional convenings, there were other training and information-sharing opportunities provided through conference call and the internet.

In addition, the Foundations committed to supporting the planning efforts and the first year of implementation. As noted above, the Foundations provided capacity building grants of \$15,000 to each county. In 2007, the Foundations began a process of requesting proposals for additional funding to begin implementation of the counties' plans. The two-year planning period of the RHISCO Project concluded with the award of \$744,000 to the counties, \$594,000 provided by the Foundations and \$150,000 provided by Fannie Mae.



## FINDINGS

This report includes cross cutting findings related to capacity and other issues; specific promising practices that counties included in their plans; and a discussion of remaining challenges and how they have been addressed to this point.

*Cross Cutting Findings* – Over the course of the first two years of the RHISCO project, five important lessons became apparent:

- Rural communities participating in this project were willing to make a sustained commitment of time and energy, showing that they viewed homelessness as a serious problem and its solution worth pursuing.
- Communities vary in their capacity to develop and implement plans to end homelessness.
- Regional themes emerged across communities: affordable housing, prevention of homelessness through intervention in individual and family crises, prevention of homelessness as an outcome of publicly funded systems, data systems and provider coordination.
- The issues that emerged for the RHISCO counties mirrored issues that are identified by communities around the country, and the solutions are similar although they must be scaled to the size of the community.

- The need for stable permanent housing is key.

*Promising Approaches in County Plans* – The counties included in their plans specific strategies that are recognized as effective practices nationwide. These include:

- Improve point-in-time counts. To make progress it is important to monitor results. Specific steps can improve the reliability of these counts of homeless people.
- Engage mainstream programs that assist low-income people. A range of government programs exist to help low-income families and individuals. Often these programs have not concentrated on the relationship between housing and the programs' goals. Their participation in planning and implementation makes success more likely.
- Work on finding people housing. The “real estate function” is important. Building relationships with landlords and helping individuals overcome barriers to housing have proven effective and relatively inexpensive.
- Coordinate resources within the community. The range of services needed by homeless people are seldom available in any one agency in these communities. Agencies need to communicate with the goal of “no wrong door” – homeless people



who seek help anywhere in a community will end up getting the help they need.

- Develop supportive housing for those with severe disabilities. In urban areas, supportive housing has proven cost-effective for those who are homeless the longest and have the most severe disabilities. While this part of the homeless population is small, it is necessary to address it, and supportive housing models adapted to the smaller scale of rural communities appear to have promise.
- Improve access to information. People in the community, homeless or not, need to know how to get the kinds of help they need. Public information campaigns can address this need.
- Improve prevention of homelessness. Because of the lack of shelter and other emergency resources for people once they become homeless, prevention is especially important. This involves crisis intervention and work with mainstream programs to monitor housing status and plan for housing as part of discharge from institutions.
- Promote intraregional collaboration. Different kinds of resources exist in different counties within the region. People move within the region to work, shop, receive services and find housing. A number of cooperative ventures began

between counties, and more will be necessary as implementation proceeds.

*Challenges and Opportunities* – The RHISCO Project has faced certain challenges and will continue to do so moving forward. This report focuses on five of these, together with what steps have already been taken to address them:

- Community awareness, misconceptions and moral judgments about homelessness. As is true elsewhere in the country, in the RHISCO region there is a certain amount of negative attitude about homeless people, that they bring their situation upon themselves. There is a lack of awareness about the high rate of disability among the homeless population. There is also a lack of awareness that homelessness exists at all on the part of the general public, despite the awareness within the human services community. Some of the counties have made progress by including opinion leaders to be part of the process of developing plans, including religious leaders, elected officials and journalists.
- Data gathering and its relation to federal homelessness funding. It is widely recognized by people involved in RHISCO that quantifying the problem is important to ensuring progress. The difficulties, however, are many. To some extent they have been exacerbated by the fact that the



main motivator around the country for collecting data about homeless people is the homeless program administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Further, some of the RHISCO counties do not receive HUD funding, and therefore do not collect data required by HUD. In other counties, the data collected to meet HUD requirements is not the same as the data the community needs to plan and make decisions. Many of the communities involved in RHISCO prioritized improving their capacity to monitor the number of homeless people as well as those at risk of homelessness. Continue progress will be important, and resources are in place to help with this.

- Resource constraints. Staffing for developing a plan is difficult. Especially in the smaller population counties, people involved in social services wear multiple hats, and long-term planning often takes a back seat to addressing emergency needs. The counties nevertheless prioritized RHISCO and sixteen of the seventeen counties completed their plans, through a clear vision of the important benefits that will accrue.
- Lack of affordable housing. Major federal programs to support housing for low-income people have not been funded adequately in recent years even to remain at their existing levels of service, much less

to expand to meet a growing need. While this may be changing somewhat, affordable housing will continue to be in short supply. Many of the county plans focused on staffing to help homeless people and those at risk to make the best use of existing resources, and some of the counties are beginning to access state-level housing resources.

- Difficulty of promoting regional approaches. There is not a history of the 17 counties undertaking major activities as a region as a collaborative. Public sector officials are accountable to people in their respective counties, as are groups that provide services with county or state resources, channeled through the counties. The region-level work carried out as part of RHISCO has begun to foster a better understanding of the benefits to be gained by undertaking efforts beyond county lines, and a regional approach will no doubt expand in the future if proactively pursued.

### *RHISCO MOVING FORWARD*

There is an ongoing commitment to this Project by all involved. The Foundations have committed additional investments to support implementation of county plans. While the intensive role of the Alliance has come to an end, it will continue to provide assistance



through its regular activities to help communities address homelessness. Finally, the counties representatives have expressed an appreciation for the RHISCO planning process and will continue work to end homelessness in their communities.

## *CONCLUSION*

The RHISCO region has made a significant start toward a new approach to homelessness, concentrating on organizing and deploying resources to more effectively prevent homelessness and move people as quickly as possible into housing when homelessness does occur. The county plans that have been developed, and the intra- and inter-county coordination that has already taken place, map the way forward. Focused attention on implementing these plans in the coming years appears likely to bring about significant reductions in homelessness in these communities, and to allow these communities to continue to serve as models for other similar regions throughout rural America.

## *COUNTY PLANS AND SNAPSHOTS*

This Report includes a brief summary per county, from the point of view of the county and its leadership on this project, of the work the county has undertaken as part of RHISCO. There is also a snapshot of demographic information about each county, the basic elements that each county included in its ten year plan, and any work that each county plans in collaboration with other counties in the region, so that readers may determine which counties most closely match other communities with which they are concerned.

## *ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AVAILABLE*

An appendix to this report includes an extensive list of additional documents that can be consulted online [http://www.endhomelessness.org/section/tools/rhisco/\\_appendix](http://www.endhomelessness.org/section/tools/rhisco/_appendix) to obtain more detailed information about how the project has been carried out over the first two years, what the county plans contained, technical assistance documents and other material.



## INTRODUCTION

For the past 25 years, the problem of widespread homelessness has plagued and dispirited our country. On any given night nearly three quarters of a million men, women and children sleep in shelters, in abandoned buildings, in campgrounds, in cars and on the streets.<sup>1</sup> The problem, which arose during the deep recession of the early 1980s but has its roots in longer-term social and economic changes, has continued through good and bad economic times, and has proven stubbornly immune to good intentions.

Since the year 2000, however, there has been a marked change in approach in many of the communities around the country. Over 300 jurisdictions are working on concrete, practical plans to end homelessness, going beyond emergency responses and consciously working to more rapidly move people out of homelessness and into housing, and to prevent its occurrence in the first place.<sup>2</sup> In the process, a range of proven practices, approaches and attitudes have become apparent. Communities that have adopted these changes have seen striking results, with substantial reductions in the number of homeless people.

At the same time, more and more people living and working in rural areas have become aware

that homelessness is not solely an urban problem, but exists in their communities as well. Yet there is little documentation that rural communities have organized themselves to markedly reduce or end homelessness, despite the fact that the smaller scale of the problem in rural areas makes this seem a readily achievable goal. Various reasons have been suggested for this: in rural communities the scale is not large enough for a “homeless system” to develop among the nonprofit human services community, so no one is focused on homelessness as a distinct issue; there may be a lack of capacity in rural communities; and the models that have evolved in larger communities may not be workable in rural areas.

Beginning in 2005, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations, and leaders in seventeen counties created the Rural Homeless Initiative of Southeast and Central Ohio, or RHISCO. The purpose of the RHISCO Project is ultimately to improve the health and quality of life of homeless individuals, families and those at risk of homelessness through comprehensive, coordinated planning and implementation. To assist in accomplishing this objective, the Foundations developed a long-term, multi-phased approach including planning, implementation, facilitated technical assistance and evaluation. The National Alliance to End

<sup>1</sup> *National Alliance to End Homelessness (2007). Homelessness Counts.*  
<http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1440>.

<sup>2</sup> *U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. Jurisdictional 10 Year Plans to End Chronic Homelessness. August 2007.* <http://www.ich.gov/slocal/index.html>.



Homelessness was engaged by the Foundations to help facilitate the planning process, develop the project as a national model for rural homelessness and provide assistance in identifying steps toward implementation. Rural communities in Southeast and Central Ohio have begun to implement those plans and have put in place structures for continued implementation.

This report documents what these communities have done. It includes an overview of the issue of homelessness as it applies to rural communities generally, and to the rural portions of Southeast and Central Ohio in particular. It includes demographic descriptions of each of the seventeen counties that participated, allowing the reader to understand the diversity within the region, and to identify areas that are similar in various characteristics to other rural areas that are considering replication. The report briefly describes the progress that was made

over the two-year planning period in each community. Finally, this report identifies overall lessons from the experience, including important models that were addressed by many of the communities, barriers that all the communities faced, promising developments, and key findings. Links are available to more detailed documentation, such as the individual county plans as they exist at the time of this report.

The RHISCO project is, of course, a beginning. Ten years has emerged as an accepted time frame for ending homelessness in a community, given the extent of change that is often necessary. The two years of planning for the RHISCO project allowed communities to make a solid beginning toward reaching that goal. The next step for the rural communities in Southeast and Central Ohio will be strategic implementation of their plans developed during the RHISCO planning phase.



## RURAL HOMELESSNESS

The rural Midwest – our nation’s heartland – conjures images of picturesque landscapes with rolling green pastures, fields of corn and wheat, and farms with grazing livestock dotting the countryside; small towns steeped in family tradition and old-fashioned values where everyone knows and looks out for each other; and honest, hardworking farmers providing the economic base for communities. It is this traditional vision of rural life that pervades America’s collective consciousness.

Yet rural communities, which comprise 75 percent of the U.S. land mass and 17 percent of its population, are remarkably diverse, and most have undergone significant change over the past century, particularly during its latter half. Far fewer communities are dependent upon agriculture for their economic livelihood than was once the case and overall only 6.5 percent of the rural labor force is engaged in farming.<sup>3</sup> Other extractive industries such as coal mining and foresting have also decreased, with retail, service, and manufacturing industries now the dominant economic and employment structures in rural communities.<sup>4</sup>

The population of rural communities has shifted as well. For much of the 20th century, rural communities have been losing population as millions of residents, young adults in particular, have left to seek greater economic opportunities in urban areas. Rural communities that have experienced some population growth in the past four decades are those close to urban centers and those that boast natural recreational and retirement amenities based on climate, topography and proximity to bodies of water. The racial diversity of rural communities has increased as well, with the greatest growth resulting from Hispanic immigration, although overall rural communities remain much less ethnically and racially diverse than those in metropolitan areas.

One condition that has remained a constant in rural America, however, is poverty. Children in rural communities are significantly more likely to be poor than their urban counterparts. In 2005, the rural child poverty rate was 22.5 percent as compared to 18.5 percent for urban children, and 48 of the 50 counties with the highest child poverty rates are in rural areas.<sup>5,6</sup> While poor parents in rural communities are more likely to be working, they are also more

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, K. (2006). *Demographic trends in rural and small town America. Reports on Rural America, 1(1)*. Durham, New Hampshire: Carsey Institute, University of New Hampshire.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> O’Hare, W. & Savage, S. (2006). *Child poverty in rural America: New data shows increases in 41 states. Fact Sheet No. 1, Summer 2006*. Durham, New Hampshire: Carsey Institute, University of New Hampshire.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, K. (2006). *Demographic trends in rural and small town America. Reports on Rural America, 1(1)*. Durham, New Hampshire: Carsey Institute, University of New Hampshire.



likely to be undereducated and underemployed than parents in metropolitan areas. Also, relative to metropolitan households, rural households experience more limited access to healthcare, greater transportation and childcare barriers to employment, and greater physical and social isolation. They are also more likely to be housing cost burdened – to spend a greater portion of their income on housing expenses.

These circumstances place many rural households at considerable risk of homelessness. Yet the phenomenon of rural homelessness is little understood, in part because scant attention has been paid to it, despite an ever-burgeoning literature on homelessness that has emerged in the past quarter century. A search of publications using PsycLit (a reference tool developed by the American Psychological Associations) identified 1,204 peer-reviewed journal articles on homelessness published in the past 25 years. When the search was narrowed to rural homelessness that number dropped to 13 articles, and half of those concerned homelessness in other countries.

Several reasons have been posited for this inattention, not the least of which are the idyllic vision of rural America most Americans hold and a broader lack of research on rural poverty.<sup>7</sup> Cited as well is the relative invisibility of homelessness in rural communities. Because there is much greater geographic dispersion of residents living in rural communities and resources and services to address homelessness are scarce, those who experience homelessness have been termed the “hidden homeless.” In fact, invisibility is said to be one of the features that differentiates rural homelessness from its more studied urban counterpart.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, residents in rural communities share the prevailing stigmatizing perceptions of homelessness that derive from media images of urban street homelessness. Thus, they are less likely to define themselves or their neighbors as homeless.

<sup>7</sup> Milbourne, P. (2004). *Rural poverty: Marginalisation and exclusion in Britain and the United States*. London: Routledge.

<sup>8</sup> Aron, L. & Fitchen, J. (1996). *Rural homelessness: A synopsis*. In *Homelessness in America*. J. Baumohl (Ed.). Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.



## THE RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO

In the past seven years a movement to end homelessness has taken hold in the United States, sparked by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (the Alliance) with the unveiling of *A Plan, Not A Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*.<sup>9</sup> Across the country stakeholders in cities, counties, and states have been galvanized to come together to craft bold and far-reaching plans aimed at ending homelessness.

Simultaneous with this movement has been a growing trend toward more active philanthropy on the part of charitable foundations and corporate giving programs. Increasingly, the philanthropic community is a key participant in planning and implementation efforts to address a broad spectrum of conditions in the communities they serve. Philanthropies are not only seeking out organizations and projects to meet needs aligned with their funding priorities. They are also driving the creation of new projects and often taking an active hand in all phases of project design, implementation, and evaluation.

The RHISCO project is a result of the coalescing of these two movements. In 2005 the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations (Foundations) identified homelessness as a long-term, multi-million dollar investment priority, which includes

the seventeen (17) rural counties in the Foundations service area. The Project, subsequently named the Rural Homeless Initiative in Southeast and Central Ohio (RHISCO), included Foundations investments to support planning/capacity building, implementation, and facilitated technical assistance for planning to prevent and end homelessness in the region. The impetus for a rural homeless project came from a broad-scale environmental scan that the Foundations had commissioned in 2005 and an assessment of community readiness to participate.

The Foundations' environmental scan had revealed that homelessness was a problem increasingly impacting residents in the Foundations' service area. Key informants and focus group participants who participated in the scan indicated that:

- 1) Homelessness was a growing albeit relatively invisible problem across rural counties, fueled by declines in affordable housing, long public housing waitlists, and increased poverty which was, in part, considered a result of shifts in the local economy from manufacturing to service sector jobs.
- 2) Resources specifically targeted to address the problem were limited (with many counties lacking any at all) and appeared to be shrinking further.

<sup>9</sup> *National Alliance to End Homelessness (2000). A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years.*  
<http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/585>



- 3) Individuals and families who became homeless faced numerous obstacles to regaining stable housing and self-sufficiency, which were exacerbated by their geographic dispersion and isolation, and the absence of reliable transportation for accessing services and employment.
- 4) Homelessness was a largely unrecognized problem in rural communities and thus there was little will to address it.<sup>10</sup>

Participants also stressed the critical importance of cross-agency and cross-county collaboration, planning, and coalition building for raising awareness, maximizing resources, and developing creative, effective solutions. These issues as well as the importance of developing strategic plans to end homelessness were incorporated into the Foundations' investment strategy.

The RHISCO Project was established to begin to address these concerns. Its specific goals were to:

- 1) Catalyze local rural homeless planning efforts;
- 2) Foster regional coordination and collaboration across the counties; and
- 3) Culminate in the development of a regional plan to end homelessness (see p. 50 on how this goal changed over the course of the project).

As a first step, the Foundations' staff met with key stakeholders in each county to gauge interest in the project. All county representatives expressed an interest in participating. The Foundations then approached the Alliance about forming a partnership in the endeavor.

At the time the Alliance was approached by the Foundations, its Center for Capacity Building was in the process of evaluating several possible rural areas in which to pilot local and regional planning to end homelessness. Thus, the Foundations' timing was fortuitous and the project was undertaken.

There is a great deal of diversity within the 17-county region. This was recognized from the beginning as important, in order to allow the project to lead to conclusions that apply to a range of circumstances that exist in rural America. The counties are diverse economically. They range from some of the poorest Appalachian communities at the state's southern end to some of its wealthiest further north. More specific to the work at hand, the Foundations described the counties as being in various states of readiness to undertake the project, with some having long-established affordable housing coalitions and resources for addressing homelessness and others still lacking both services and a vehicle for planning. The counties

<sup>10</sup> *Osteopathic Heritage Foundation (2004). Environmental Scan 2004: An Analysis of Emerging Issues, Critical Needs and Best Practices in central and southeastern Ohio.*



would begin from different places with regard to the resources, experience, and constraints they would bring to bear in the process.

Thus, the Alliance was engaged by the Foundations to undertake the project with the understanding that Alliance staff and consultants would facilitate the development of the nation's first coordinated region-wide planning effort to end rural homelessness, through technical

assistance and training. Furthermore, the Alliance would be sharing its collective knowledge and expertise on homelessness, and planning and acting to end it. Finally, the Alliance staff and consultants would be “students of the process” – taking the opportunity to learn as much as possible about rural homelessness and strategies for addressing it. The Foundations investment in the Alliance and RHISCO-related activities spanned two years, January 2006 – December 2007.



## THE RHISCO REGION

The 17 counties chosen to participate in the project are located within the Foundations' service area. They include: Athens, Delaware, Fairfield, Fayette, Hocking, Jackson, Knox, Licking, Madison, Meigs, Morgan, Perry, Pickaway, Ross, Union, Vinton, and Washington Counties (a profile of each county is provided later in this report). Together these 17 Ohio counties cover 8,317.5 square miles, approximately 20% of the state. Nine of the counties are located in Appalachia. The southeastern Appalachian counties are hilly, densely wooded, and sparsely populated. In contrast, the central counties are characterized by flatter terrain conducive to farming and several are more suburban in composition.

As this description suggests, although contiguous, there is significant diversity among the counties. While most are between 400 and 700 square miles in land mass, the size of their populations varies greatly from counties like Licking, Delaware and Fairfield, which have over 130,000 residents to counties like Vinton and Morgan, which have fewer than 15,000.<sup>11</sup> The county with the largest population, Licking, has more than 10 times the number of residents of the smallest, Vinton. Similarly, despite being within 25 square miles of each other in size, the population of Delaware is more than ten times that of Morgan.

Tremendous economic diversity exists as well. While portions of the landscape are still sprinkled with small farms, none of the counties is considered to have a farm-dependent economy. Instead, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Typology Codes, 11 are dependent on manufacturing, meaning that at least 25% of average annual labor and proprietors' earnings derive from manufacturing (or did so between 1998 – 2000, the most recent years for which data is available). One county each is dependent on mining (i.e., at least 15% of average annual labor and proprietors' earnings derive from mining), government (i.e., at least 15% of average annual labor and proprietors' earnings derive from federal and state government), and services (i.e., at least 45% of average annual labor and proprietors' earnings derive from retail, finance, insurance, real estate and other services). The remaining three counties have such diversified economies that they do not meet the dependence threshold for any specific industry.<sup>12</sup> Unemployment rates vary greatly from county to county, as in 2006 the average unemployment rate in Morgan County (9.1%) and Meigs County (8.5%) was more than twice the county unemployment rate in Delaware County (3.9%).

As noted, nine of the 17 counties are located in Appalachia and, according to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) in fiscal year 2007,

<sup>11</sup> Unless otherwise noted, county demographic data reported in this section is taken from the 2000 U.S. Census.

<sup>12</sup> USDA Economic Research Service (2004). 2004 County Typology Codes. Accessed at: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/rurality/typology/> on August 3, 2007.



three of these counties (Athens, Meigs, and Vinton) qualify for distressed county status on the basis of low per capita income and high rates of poverty and unemployment. Eleven of the counties have median incomes that fall below that of the state as a whole (\$40,956), five of them by more than \$10,000. The remaining six counties have incomes that exceed the state's median, two of them by more than \$10,000. Thus, the median income of residents in Delaware (\$67,258), for instance, is five times that of residents in Vinton (\$13,352). Rates of poverty vary almost in tandem with median income, from Delaware where only 3.9% of residents have incomes that fall at or below 100% of the federal poverty index to Vinton, where 20% do so. Overall, nine counties fall below the state's poverty level (10.6%), with five of these having rates higher than 15%.

Given this, it is not surprising that in many of the counties a significant portion of residents experience housing cost burden. According to 2000 U.S. Census data, 11 of the project counties are considered to be highly or very highly cost burdened in terms of their rental market, meaning that between 15% and 34% of renting households have housing costs that exceed 30% of their income. Five of these counties are considered to have a high or very high rate of severe rental housing cost burden, meaning that in 15% to 34% of renting households the cost of housing exceeds 50% of

their income. Similarly, nine counties are considered to be highly or very highly cost burdened with regard to homeownership — 17% to 22.8% of homeowners must pay more than 30% of their income for their housing.<sup>15</sup> And, seven of these are considered to have high or very high rates of severe housing cost burden — 6.2% to 8.6% of homeowners are paying more than 50% of their income for housing.

Rates of high school and post-secondary degree completion also fall well below those of the state as a whole in a majority of the project counties. In 12 counties the portion of residents without a high school diploma is greater than the state's (17%). In eight it exceeds 20%. Similarly, in 15 counties the proportion of residents with a bachelors degree or greater is lower than in Ohio as a whole (21.1%), in several cases strikingly so. In Vinton, Perry, Morgan, Meigs, and Hocking Counties, it is less than 10%. Yet here again there is great diversity among the project counties. While almost 30% of Vinton residents lack a high school diploma only 7% of Delaware residents do, and a full 41% of Delaware's population has a bachelors degree or better, while only 6% of Vinton's population does so.

The counties also differ substantially in the number of people who are homeless, and the amount and type of services available to address the problem. See the following pages for more detailed discussion of these issues.

<sup>15</sup> *Ohio Department of Development (2005). Final Report and Recommendations: The Ohio Department of Development Affordable Housing Task Force.*



## STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

The Foundations rural homeless investment strategy called for multiple phases, including planning/capacity building, implementation, technical assistance and evaluation. With the engagement of the Alliance to facilitate the planning phase, two tasks had to be undertaken simultaneously to get the project underway. First, stakeholders in each county had to be recruited and engaged in the project. Second, an assessment of the needs, resources, and status of planning and services to address homelessness within each county had to be conducted. The Foundations provided a \$15,000 Capacity Building funding award to each participating county at the outset of the planning phase, to offset community planning costs, including travel, meeting expenses and staff, related to the development of a county-level plan.

The Alliance's role in working with the Foundations was to act as a liaison between the counties and the Foundations, keeping the Foundations abreast of progress and challenges and working with Foundations staff to determine strategies for supporting each county's efforts.

The Alliance also had a role with the RHISCO county partners. This was to provide help in gathering information and formulating plans that were appropriate to each counties' circumstances.

The RHISCO Project was designed to proceed in five phases:

1. *Assessment* – The Alliance and its consultants would work with local stakeholders to gather information to develop an understanding of the prevalence and characteristics of homelessness in each county, existing services and resources, and planning efforts.
2. *Summits* – Three summits would be held, two in the first year and one in the second, to bring stakeholders within the 17 counties together for purposes of networking and collaboration where appropriate.
3. *Planning* – Counties, working individually or in groups, would develop ten year plans to end homelessness, with assistance from Alliance staff and consultants.
4. *Implementation* – Once plans had been finalized, the counties began to work on identified priorities. While the Alliance's formal role with the project concluded prior to the implementation phase, technical assistance was provided to prepare counties for implementation.
5. *Evaluation, Knowledge-Building, and Dissemination* – As the project drew to a close, the Alliance would work through its usual public education and knowledge-building processes to disseminate lessons learned, model practices, and innovations so that others engaging in homeless planning in rural areas might benefit from the RHISCO experience.



## **ALLIANCE AND FOUNDATIONS ACTIVITIES**

To support RHISCO counties in their homeless planning process, the Foundations provided resources to the Alliance to engage full-time staff and consultants to coordinate and implement the project. The Alliance hired a full-time Project Coordinator, based in Ohio, and two Alliance staff, with expertise in strategic planning, were allocated to the project. In addition, consultants were engaged, as needed, to assist with technical assistance, training and report development. With this staffing, over the course of the Project, the Foundations and the Alliance brought a range of help and resources to support counties and promote the Project's success. The kinds of help included:

- 1) Data gathering and assessment capacity
- 2) On the ground one-on-one consultation
- 3) Regional convenings and training
- 4) Foundations investments in planning and implementation

## **DATA GATHERING AND ASSESSMENT CAPACITY**

To gain a sense of the region and develop a better understanding of the scope of homeless needs, the resources available to address them, and the current status of planning efforts within each county, Alliance staff and consultants

undertook a number of assessment activities. First, staff conducted a series of site visits and interviews with service providers and homeless planning representatives in each county and requested any existing data on the scope of homelessness and resources available. They then compiled a roster of representatives in each county who were interested in participating in the project, and developed and administered a Stakeholder Survey to gather perspectives of stakeholders on the issues and challenges each county faced in attempting to end homelessness.

Through these efforts, staff learned that 14 counties had existing affordable housing or homelessness planning bodies, although they varied greatly in size, diversity of representatives, and length of time in operation. Knox and Licking Counties, for instance, had emergency coalitions or housing task forces addressing homelessness since the early 1990s. The remaining 12 counties had convened a planning entity to address homelessness within the past five years, often in order to apply for grant funding through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Homeless Assistance programs (also known as HUD's Continuum of Care programs), to establish additional services/programming for their homeless residents. The number of actively participating members of these planning bodies ranged from as few as two or three in some counties to more



than 20 in others. Participating stakeholders often included housing authorities, faith-based organizations, schools, both mainstream and homeless human service providers, media representatives, the United Way, legal assistance organizations, Community Action Agencies, Family and Children First Councils, county commissioners, community members, and people who had experienced homelessness.

One specific question for data gathering was the number of homeless people in each community.

Prior to the Project's inception, all but three of the counties had conducted one or more point-in-time counts of their homeless population, often in response to the application requirements for HUD Continuum of Care funding for homeless services. A point-in-time count is intended to ascertain the number of persons who are homeless on a given day. Often, the methodology involves an effort to count two groups of people — those persons residing in shelters and those who are unsheltered “on the streets.” Street counts tend to under-represent the true number of unsheltered persons for a variety of reasons, not the least of which are that it can be difficult to anticipate all the places in which people who are homeless might seek cover and to amass the person power to conduct a

comprehensive search. As a result, a multiplier is frequently applied to raw count numbers to extrapolate a total that accounts in some way for areas not searched and other methodological shortcomings.

The challenges in attempting to get an accurate estimate of point-in-time homelessness are magnified in rural areas, given their great population dispersion, and the absence of an urban hub that tends to draw people in need of services to a more central location. Point-in-time counts for the 14 counties who had originally conducted them reported a range from 16 to over 100 persons counted as homeless on a given night. Yet the RHISCO Stakeholder Survey showed that the majority of stakeholders across project counties estimated the true number of homeless residents in their counties to be significantly higher. To a large extent this was due to the fact that most homeless people counted were in shelters, but stakeholders speculated that only a very small segment (less than 20%) of their homeless population was residing in shelters.

Overall, the assessment indicated that resources and services to address homelessness were scarce and largely focused toward prevention activities such as one-time emergency assistance. Stakeholders reported fewer than 600 shelter,



transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing beds available across the entire region, and seven counties that had none at all. The counties with the most and greatest range of services, including substance use and mental health services, job readiness programs, emergency shelter and transitional housing, domestic violence services, and assistance with housing search and placement services, were Licking, Fairfield, Washington, Pickaway and Athens. Counties without shelter resources indicated that homeless residents were routinely referred to shelter and housing programs in other counties. Most counties lacked designated services such as case management for homeless residents, and meeting their service needs often fell within the broader purview of the local Community Action Agency.

## *ON THE GROUND CONSULTATION*

As expected, the nature of the consultation provided by the Alliance staff and consultants varied county to county as well as over time as the project unfolded. In the main, this consultation focused on providing support and guidance in four key areas:

- Coalition building and stakeholder cultivation
- Best practice models of planning and service delivery from other communities
- Ten Year Plan development and writing
- Resource identification and liaison

The Ohio-based Project Coordinator was responsible for providing on-the-ground, day-to-day support to each county's planning coalition as it undertook the work of developing ten year plans. In several counties such as Perry, Vinton, and Morgan the first step in this process entailed assisting them to establish a planning coalition. In others, it meant providing technical assistance on issues ranging from how to outline achievable plan goals and objectives to how to engage additional stakeholders in the planning process. In addition to meeting regularly, most county coalitions established a smaller plan development work group. These work groups met biweekly or monthly to accomplish plan development tasks.

All counties were encouraged to convene one or more meetings with community representatives to explain the project, solicit input and support for development of a county-level ten year plan, and enlist participation in the planning process. Coalitions in 14 counties hosted such stakeholder meetings. The intended stakeholders and format of these meetings were tailored by each county coalition, and thus varied widely. In some counties, such as Vinton and Jackson/Meigs, meetings involved small groups (20 – 25) of stakeholders representing relevant community sectors like healthcare, education, and law enforcement. In others, like Knox and Licking, they took the shape of



community forums to which more than a hundred stakeholders were invited. Still others, like Ross County, chose to meet with a local mayor and county commissioners. And, in one county, Fairfield, the coalition opted to host a series of focus groups with homeless and low-income adults, youth, and families.

In both one-on-one consultation and the regional meetings described below, Alliance staff shared resources regarding planning and intervention practices. They provided examples of other ten year plans, communities' planning structures and strategies, and intervention approaches that communities across the country were adopting to end homelessness (including prevention and Housing First strategies). They brainstormed ways in which these could be adapted to meet the unique needs of RHISCO communities. As part of the plan development process, Alliance staff and consultants from the Ohio University Voinovich School for Leadership and Public Affairs facilitated county coalition meetings in which stakeholders walked through their systems of care, identifying and prioritizing strengths and gaps, and the resources and strategies needed to fill the latter.

When counties were finally ready to begin drafting their plans, Alliance staff offered a

template that could be used to simplify plan writing and ensure that core plan components were addressed. Then, as requested, the Alliance provided feedback and editorial assistance. Once plans were finalized, staff worked with county coalitions to set priorities for the first year of the plans' implementation and develop feasible actions steps and a timeline for moving forward.

An important way the Alliance worked with RHISCO partners was through the Alliance's national conferences on ending homelessness, which bring together over 1,000 partners from around the country to share solutions and focus on moving forward with the strategies needed to end homelessness. In July 2006, representatives from several RHISCO counties attended the national conference, and a number of them presented at workshops. In 2007, the Alliance provided even more extensive involvement for RHISCO partners, as the Alliance included a rural homelessness track of workshops, many of which featured RHISCO presenters, and a half-day institute on the RHISCO project. This involvement not only provided an invaluable learning opportunity for RHISCO county partners, but also allowed them to share their experiences and expertise with others working on rural homelessness around the country.



Finally, throughout the course of the project, the Alliance staff worked closely with counties, the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) and others to identify and foster relationships with additional potential federal and local funding sources for addressing communities' homelessness needs. These resources were then charted and made available to all project stakeholders. Further, Alliance staff worked to build relationships among county representatives and potential funders. To this end, the Alliance staff engaged representatives from HUD, Fannie Mae, the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and myriad state offices in regional RHISCO summits (described below), facilitated introductions, and worked to match each county's goals and priorities with potential funding strategies and sources.

As a result of this assistance, counties have begun to access a range of additional resources to support both assessment and intervention. For instance, a team of providers from Athens and Hocking Counties attended a CSH Institute that focused on the development of permanent supportive housing (PSH). They then applied to the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) for a grant to conduct a PSH needs assessment. Armed with the information this assessment yielded, they applied to CSH for a grant to conduct a similar assessment in Ross and

Jackson Counties and created the Blue Sky Alliance, a non-profit housing development organization. These efforts positioned the Hocking Athens Perry Community Action Agency to apply for and receive approximately \$160,000 in Ohio Trust Fund and Ohio Department of Mental Health funding to expand both transitional and permanent housing in their communities. Most recently, Blue Sky Alliance has applied for \$362,000 from the state-funded Family Prevention Pilot Project. Communities are in the process of securing additional funding as a result of the RHISCO Project, either through direct involvement of the Project or through increased capacity of the counties.

### *REGIONAL CONVENINGS AND TRAINING*

To foster investment in a regional approach to ending homelessness, the Project undertook a number of regional activities, including hosting regional summits, trainings, and teleconferences. At key points in the course of the Project three regional summits were convened. These summits were intended to bring Project stakeholders from Project counties together to solidify a sense of the project's regional nature, provide an opportunity for networking and consensus building concerning the project's overall goals, share information and strategies, and foster cross-county collaboration. The first Project summit was convened in April 2006.



Representatives from all 17 counties, the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations, the Alliance, the Ohio Department of Development, the Coalition on Housing and Homelessness in Ohio, Fannie Mae, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs came together to focus on moving forward with the Project. At the summit, Alliance staff reported back on information that had been collected over the past few months, including an opinion survey, and, importantly, a discussion of both the mainstream and targeted resources that were available to the counties. Further, RHISCO county representatives were exposed to ten year plans from across the country and other Alliance tools which served as guides as the RHISCO counties began to develop their own plans.

The second summit took place in June 2006. Again, project stakeholders from all 17 counties attended this half-day meeting as did representatives from the Foundations, the Alliance, the Ohio Department of Development, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Fannie Mae, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. County stakeholders discussed their planning goals, and past challenges and future strategies for collecting local data and creating a planning process focused on measurable outcomes. Alliance staff

presented a national overview of ten year plans, including trends and recent data on best practices and planning barriers. They also profiled plan development processes from communities across the country. Finally, Alliance staff clarified roles and responsibilities among project participants and provided additional resources to support counties' planning efforts, including technical assistance regarding data collection, meeting facilitation, plan development, and working with state and federal partners and elected officials.

The third regional RHISCO summit was a two-day meeting held in April 2007, following the drafting of most county ten year plans. This summit focused on the identification of themes and priorities that were common to most plans and could serve as the basis for counties working together on joint projects. It also outlined future federal and state funding opportunities and provided opportunities to receive technical assistance for capacity building and networking with local, state, and federal partners. To this end, representatives from the Corporation for Supportive Housing, Fannie Mae, the Ohio Departments of Development and Mental Health, the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, the Housing Assistance Council, and the Ohio Housing Finance Agency were in attendance.



In addition to these summits, the Alliance conducted periodic regional trainings and technical assistance sessions in different geographic areas of the RHISCO region. For instance, staff conducted several technical assistance sessions focused specifically on the plan writing process. Conducting multiple sessions in different sites was an important strategy for promoting cross-county networking and collaboration within the travel and time constraints that county representatives faced. To accommodate these constraints further, Alliance staff hosted occasional teleconferences to bring partners together to address key issues. And the Alliance hosted a RHISCO Project meeting space on its national website to post project documents including meeting minutes, county plans, and technical assistance materials; afford opportunities to share ideas and information updates; and promote dialogue and collaboration among project partners.

### *FOUNDATION INVESTMENTS IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION*

Recognizing the importance of providing a measure of financial assistance to underwrite participation in planning efforts of this nature and the significant constraints that under-resourced rural communities face, the Foundations provided each participating county with a \$15,000 Capacity Building grant at the Project's outset to be used to promote active

participation and success of the endeavor. Counties used these resources to meet their planning needs. Some hired part-time staff to coordinate the Continuum of Care and the plan writing process; others offset staff time spent on the project; and others used the resources to attend conferences and host stakeholders' meetings.

In April 2007, the Foundations issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to participating counties to support initial implementation of the plans developed during the planning phase of the Project. As indicated, participating counties entered the project with varying levels of readiness, resources and capacity; as a result, the plans developed vary in terms of priorities, strategies, coalition development and leadership. Therefore, a capacity category structure was devised to reflect the varying local conditions and experiences within the region. Each participating county, in collaboration with Alliance staff and consultants, identified their capacity and readiness to proceed with the plan implementation. The capacity category structure includes:

- 1) Planning and Implementation
- 2) Growth and Sustainability
- 3) Community Development



## *PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION*

This includes county plans that are ready to move forward with implementation, and includes coalitions with existing local capacity, experiences and resources.

## *GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY*

Included in this category are counties that have levels of existing local capacity, experiences and resources, and require additional technical assistance with plan writing, establishing priorities and coalition development.

## *COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT*

This includes those counties that have recently begun coalition building and can benefit from additional technical assistance with plan writing, establishing priorities and coalition development.

Based upon this assessment, counties were eligible to apply for a set level of funding ranging from \$10,000 for those in Community Development, \$30,000 for those in Growth and Sustainability and, \$50,000 for counties in Planning and Implementation - poised to undertake plan implementation.

In response to the RFP, the Foundations received twelve proposals representing sixteen of the participating counties. Each proposal was designed to address one or more of the overarching themes identified by the Alliance (described later under Cross Cutting Findings). Through the RFP process, the Alliance staff and consultants provided guidance and assistance to both project counties and Foundations staff, assisting in counties' self assessment, prioritization of needs and proposal preparation and editing, and the Foundations proposal assessment and review.

In December 2007, the Foundations, along with a grant from Fannie Mae, approved \$744,000 (\$594,000 from the Foundations and \$150,000 from Fannie Mae) in support of the twelve proposals received through the RFP process. This initial investment further demonstrates philanthropic and corporate giving programs commitment to preventing and ending homelessness in rural Ohio.



## KEY FINDINGS FROM RHISCO: ENDING HOMELESSNESS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

The lessons to date from the RHISCO project fall into three categories: cross-cutting findings about capacity, common themes, and the relation with planning efforts throughout the country; promising approaches that appeared in many of the county plans and mirror similar approaches elsewhere; and challenges and opportunities that exist with implications for completion of this effort and similar efforts in rural areas elsewhere.

### CROSS CUTTING FINDINGS

The planning phase of the RHISCO Project provides a two-year broad overview of how a rural community plans and begins implementation of a regional effort to end and prevent homelessness in ten years. The overarching learnings from this first phase of the project builds on the environmental scan undertaken earlier by the Foundations. Five of the Project's cross cutting findings are listed below:

- 1) Homelessness is a serious concern in these communities
- 2) Communities vary in their ability to plan and implement
- 3) Regional themes emerge from a county planning process

- 4) Issues that emerged in RHISCO mirror national issues
- 5) A need for stable permanent housing

### *HOMELESSNESS IS A SERIOUS CONCERN IN THESE COMMUNITIES*

Community leaders in the 17 RHISCO counties were willing to devote substantial time and energy to completing this process. They recognized that their communities had a problem with homelessness and how their communities would be improved by solving that problem. Commitment to follow through with the process is still evident after two years of working on it.

### *COMMUNITIES VARY IN THEIR ABILITY TO PLAN AND IMPLEMENT*

Communities participating in the planning phase of the RHISCO project were each charged with developing a county-level plan during 2006. Due to variation in available staff, capacity of participating agencies, willingness to prioritize coalition work, interest in developing a plan to end homelessness, and a host of other local factors, the counties did not respond equally to the challenge.



In most communities, there were no organizations or government agencies specifically charged with addressing homelessness. In those communities, entities with a more general charge undertook to lead the planning process. This created a myriad challenges.

In the process of planning, counties identified possibilities for additional resources specifically devoted to homelessness. Again, however, counties varied in their ability to pursue and secure these resources.

Further, upon completion of the plans, Alliance staff and consultants assessed communities for their ability to implement the goals and objectives they had outlined. Just as communities varied in their capacity to create workable plans, they varied in their capacity to implement plans.

## *REGIONAL THEMES EMERGE FROM A COUNTY PLANNING PROCESS*

The following overarching themes quickly emerged from the county level planning process. In many respects they mirror the findings of the Foundations' earlier environmental scan, as the counties worked to address those issues.

*Affordable Housing* – Housing instability for extremely low-income households will continue

until the supply of affordable housing increases substantially (or incomes increase). While federal funding for affordable housing has dramatically declined over the past decade, states and municipalities have developed a number of strategies to respond to the housing needs of extremely low-income households. The number of state and local housing trust funds has significantly increased since the 1990s, leveraging resources to increase the supply of affordable housing for low-income people. Some counties and cities have developed inclusionary zoning programs, requiring developers to include affordable housing units when building new developments. States and localities are also developing locally funded housing subsidy programs, including short-term subsidies that vary in terms of the percentage of rent paid.

*Prevention: Emergency Level* – Throughout the RHISCO region, limited prevention resources are available for interventions such as rent, mortgage, and utility assistance, case management, landlord or lender intervention, and other strategies to prevent eviction and homelessness. The most effective way to end homelessness is to prevent its occurrence. Financial assistance to prevent an eviction, mediation to address problems with a landlord or lender, or case management can all prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless.



Project innovations are developing nationally in the area of emergency prevention including: enhanced coordination and information sharing; time limited housing subsidies; coupling emergency assistance with time limited case management; targeting prevention to high risk communities; and, integrating prevention activities at neighborhood service centers.

*Prevention: Systems Level* – The need for appropriate discharge from mainstream programs is important nationally, with emphasis placed on communities that lack the most basic forms of shelter and housing assistance. The RHISCO region has both insufficient housing resources and emergency shelters for individuals and families, underscoring the need for mainstream programs and institutions (hospitals, prisons, jails and mental health facilities) to provide appropriate care and referrals to low-income people in their charge or care.

*Provider Coordination* – Collaboration and coordination within the project region have been clearly expressed as ongoing needs by respondents. Local planning has begun, but must go beyond the effort to create a full spectrum homeless assistance system, which manages

people's experience of homelessness. Project partners should develop long-term plans whose goal is to preserve affordable housing, prevent homelessness, and immediately re-house anyone who becomes homeless. This will be the most effective model for the RHISCO Project area, and will involve agencies and programs far beyond the scope of the current partners and other homeless assistance providers. The counties will need to work with state and national government and others to raise awareness of the social and economic costs of homelessness in their communities and urge it to be a higher priority, mostly by finding ways to help these larger systems understand how reducing homeless among their clients helps these larger systems meet their goals. In addition to accomplishing these long-term goals through engaging the public sector at the national and state levels, the RHISCO counties should also work to leverage private resources through partnerships with local businesses and foundations. To accomplish the goals of preventing homelessness, rapidly re-housing those that become homeless, and preserving affordable housing, the counties need to ensure that all sectors of society understand how collaboration and coordination are necessary to end homelessness.



## *ISSUES THAT EMERGED IN RHISCO MIRROR NATIONAL TRENDS*

RHISCO counties proposed projects to implement their plans to end and prevent homelessness from a broad cross-section of issues and themes that mirror national trends in homelessness research and funding. Though the RHISCO counties each experienced specific challenges, the overarching issues they are seeking to address are the same ones faced by other communities around the country engaging in ten year plans. The RHISCO counties were able, in their plans, to adapt program models that have been proven around the country and adapt them to an appropriate scale for their communities. The regional themes reinforce this finding.

## *A NEED FOR STABLE PERMANENT HOUSING*

Dealing with the critical need for permanent affordable housing was clearly the single most important and consistent issue across all plans. Housing related activities proposed included: needs and gaps analysis; assessment of barriers to access; housing search and placement assistance; case management for housing stability; education for tenants and landlords; resources coordination; hotlines; and vehicular access for housing search.



## PROMISING PRACTICES

Looking across the full range of strategies proposed in ten year plans prepared by counties participating in the RHISCO Project, a number of specific strategies recurred. These strategies match those that other communities around the country have used to reduce homelessness. These include:

- 1) Improve point in time counts
- 2) Engage the mainstream in planning
- 3) Get serious about the real estate function
- 4) Coordination makes a difference in rural areas
- 5) Supportive housing is important
- 6) Improve access to information
- 7) Prevention works
- 8) Promote intraregional collaboration

## IMPROVE POINT IN TIME COUNTS

Point in time counts give a limited but important picture of a community's homelessness problem on a given night, and the demand for assistance in that same time frame. To maximize the utility of such counts, the following steps are suggested:

- Use a consistent methodology for conducting the count, including number of enumerators, identification of sites to be counted, people eligible to be counted, timing of count, and administration of count.

- Train and supervise enumerators and take steps to ensure quality of the count.
- Coordinate the nature and timing of the count both regionally and state-wide.

By ensuring good quality in the point in time count, data can be reliably utilized to measure local progress, create rates of homelessness, compare rates among communities, and compile aggregated homeless counts (regional, state, national).

## ENGAGE THE MAINSTREAM IN PLANNING

Rural areas have few homeless-specific service programs, and this is unlikely to change substantially in the near future. This situation is both a liability and an advantage. Obviously, it is a liability to the extent that there are inadequate services and assistance for homeless people. Yet the inability to shift responsibility to homeless-specific programs requires mainstream programs to be more engaged in the issue. Priorities resulting from the planning phase demonstrated the degree to which rural communities can engage mainstream programs in planning and providing services to homeless people. For example, both Hocking and Athens Counties plan to work with the local jail and prison system, as well as with hospitals and treatment centers, to ensure that individuals discharged from those institutions did not become homeless. In another county, Madison



County, service providers will work to secure more vouchers from the Metropolitan Housing Authority by identifying new sites for Section 8 housing and Shelter Plus Care vouchers. In Perry County, leaders are exploring the use of TANF funds for people threatened with evictions and foreclosures. These mainstream services and assistance hold the promise of sustainability and high quality.

Further, the presence of a statewide advocacy organization, like the Coalition on Housing and Homelessness in Ohio, helped establish the importance of mainstream programs in addressing homelessness through linking decision-makers at the state level with those working on homelessness at the county level. Key mainstream partners in efforts to end homelessness include:

- Departments of mental health
- Departments of child welfare
- Departments of housing
- Housing Authorities
- State Housing Finance Agencies
- Departments of employment
- Health Departments
- Welfare Departments
- Departments of substance abuse treatment
- Community Action Agencies
- Local law enforcement agencies

- State law enforcement agencies
- Departments of community development
- Departments of economic development

## *GET SERIOUS ABOUT THE REAL ESTATE FUNCTION*

People who are homeless in rural areas frequently do not have the resources to find or obtain any affordable housing that might be available. Their challenges include:

- Identifying landlords with affordable and available properties.
- Identifying properties with special features including multiple bedrooms for large families, handicapped accessibility, and access to transportation.
- Negotiating with landlords.
- Finding transportation to inspect available units.
- Identifying units that would meet quality standards for subsidy eligibility.
- Clearing credit and tenant history issues.
- Paying for deposits and down payments.

Inability to overcome these challenges may, in effect, be the cause of rural people's homelessness. Certainly, overcoming such challenges may be the solution to it. Accordingly,



six of the RHISCO counties placed a high priority on hiring a Housing Coordinator, submitting proposals to fund this staff person. The Housing Coordinator could:

- Build relationships with area landlords, large and small.
- Maintain a database of available housing, including housing with special features.
- Negotiate with landlords on behalf of tenants.
- Provide landlords with an intermediary in the event of tenant issues.
- Hold the lease.
- Ensure occupancy.
- Transport tenants to potential properties for inspection.
- Identify conforming properties.
- Deal with tenant paperwork and history issues.
- Link tenants to community services once housed.
- Provide flexible funds for deposits and down payments.

### *COORDINATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN RURAL AREAS*

Increased coordination is generally a positive development in the human services field.

However, it may be less critical in urban areas in which many homeless programs are “one-stop shops,” providing everything homeless people need from a roof over their head to case management, child care, health care, and job training. This is less common in rural areas. Many RHISCO Project plans contain complex coordination and cooperation structures that may at first seem overly burdensome, especially given the very small number of homeless people residing in each of the counties. However, such an impression would be incorrect. Rather, these coordination structures are efforts to create a seamless homeless system by tapping the resources of a host of local agencies, both nonprofit and government. Typically, such coordination systems include agencies that can provide the following assistance to homeless people:

- Temporary housing (shelter)
- Permanent housing
- Job training
- Job placement
- Child care
- Medical care
- Mental health care
- Substance abuse treatment
- Case management
- Budgeting training/assistance



- Mentoring
- Veterans services
- Youth services
- Child welfare services
- Emergency assistance (food, clothing)

Given this list (the services of which might be provided by a single agency in urban areas), it is not surprising that a high degree of coordination is needed. While urban programs tend to serve only one population type, such as mentally ill homeless adults without families, with a full range of services, rural programs tend to serve all people experiencing homelessness, including families, singles, youth, disabled and non-disabled people, together with other people who are not homeless but are experiencing housing problems, but with each program or agency providing only a small portion of what is needed. In this way, coordination allows rural areas to meet the needs.

### *SUPPORTIVE HOUSING IS IMPORTANT*

In rural areas as in urban areas, supportive housing is a key strategy for meeting the needs of chronically disabled people who require service assistance to stay in housing. The difference between rural and urban areas is one of scale. With relatively few people experiencing homelessness in each rural community, there is

unlikely to be a large number of people who require supportive housing, as there are in many cities. The models of supportive housing that are appropriate to rural areas have not been well described in the literature. However, the RHISCO experience indicates a few learnings:

- Scattered site or shared housing models are well thought of for supportive housing in rural areas.
- The fact that supportive housing is likely to be mixed with housing of those NOT requiring intensive services is a normalizing and positive feature of rural supportive housing.
- Services can be delivered by a single agency, or by multiple agencies with a coordinating case manager.
- Housing subsidy is likely to be necessary to cover operating costs of the housing.
- Partnering with housing providers and developers can make the provision of supportive housing easier.

### *IMPROVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION*

As can be seen from the above, resources for vulnerable people are likely to be widely scattered in rural areas. How can a homeless person, with unreliable communication and transportation, and no access to a computer or directories be expected to piece together



information on where he or she might find all the services needed to survive and find stable housing? Even the providers of such services are unlikely to know where a vulnerable person might access other needed resources.

While accessing available services is a challenge even in urban areas, it is even more of a barrier in rural communities. Accordingly, many of the RHISCO projects suggested methods for making such information more readily available, both to a broad cross section of organizations and to homeless people. Among the possible approaches to this situation are the following:

- Creation of a directory of services.
- Creation of advertisement and public service announcements about services.
- Centralized case managers with access to the information.
- Call-in numbers such as 211, or other direct lines.
- Increased informational meetings among providers to ensure broad education on available resources.
- Websites and other virtual means.

## *PREVENTION WORKS*

Prevention is a sensible approach in communities both large and small. However, it is

especially essential in rural areas in which there is very little shelter or other accommodation for people who become homeless. With few resources to provide to those who lose their housing, it becomes all the more important to keep people housed in the first place. Accordingly, the RHISCO counties consistently proposed prevention strategies in their plans. These included the following:

- Short term rent, mortgage or utility assistance to avoid eviction or foreclosure for extremely low income households.
- Legal assistance to avert eviction or foreclosure.
- Home repair to allow people to stay in their homes.
- Weatherization to reduce utility bills (utility cut-offs are often a precursor to eviction).
- Discharge planning from residential programs including:
  - o Prison
  - o Jail
  - o Substance abuse treatment
  - o Mental health hospitals
  - o Foster care
  - o Domestic violence programs



## *PROMOTE INTRAREGIONAL COLLABORATION*

In rural areas, counties are important political and geographic entities. They are not, however, self-contained, as people in rural areas move frequently back and forth across county lines to live, work, shop, and access services. Further, rural counties are also frequently the locus of government services, but such services may be poorly resourced or incomplete in any individual county. For both of these reasons – because people, including homeless and low-income people, move frequently among counties, and because there are advantages to be gained from coordination of services – intraregional partnerships can be productive.

In the RHISCO region, counties found opportunities to work with each other to make resources more broadly available. The ability to do this in other rural areas will of course depend on local circumstances, but the following examples indicate the kinds of issues that attracted interest in this approach.

*Athens and Hocking Counties* have partnered to address prevention, affordable housing, data, and provider coordination. This is accomplished through joint or overlapping management of the Continuum of Care, mental health, substance abuse and housing assistance available to homeless people. During the first year of implementing their plans to end and prevent

homelessness, Athens and Hocking Counties are collaborating to:

- Strengthen and operate their local housing coalition.
- Streamline and coordinate services for people experiencing, or at-risk of, homelessness.
- Facilitate and improve data collection.

*Delaware and Union Counties* have formed a coalition to identify and develop housing and programs for households at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. The partnership of Delaware and Union counties is:

- Increasing intraregional coordination to identify and target housing needs and increase affordable housing development for those at-risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.
- Raising awareness of the issues of homelessness and affordable housing. Committed human service and community organizations are participating in forums and joint trainings on housing and homelessness.
- Conducting joint point-in-time counts and trainings for homelessness enumeration. This joint effort greatly enhances existing data collection, analysis and utilization.



*Fayette and Pickaway Counties* are working with their local Community Action Agencies to assist families at imminent risk of homelessness. Families in both non-subsidized and subsidized rental housing receive short-term limited support with rent and utilities and assistance resolving landlord disputes. Eligible families are provided with intensive home-based case management, referrals and linkages to short term rental and utility assistance. The partnership of Fayette and Pickaway Counties is:

- Focusing on new and renewed participation of coalition partners, with special attention to the business community, landlords and educators.
- Increasing cross-county collaboration and coordination of services through memoranda of understanding between counties. These memoranda will increase access to housing options and other related services.
- Expanding each community's awareness and knowledge of local homelessness. Collectively, the communities will host "awareness events" for local families, educators, public officials, healthcare providers and landlords.

*Fairfield and Licking Counties* are providing dedicated staff to serve as the coordinators for housing search and case management services. The Counties are taking a regional approach to developing and coordinating local affordable housing by:

- Facilitating natural geographic linkage with developers, housing authorities and local providers in neighboring counties.
- Enhancing provider coordination through designated housing search and case management staff and resources.
- Improving utilization, coordination and sharing of Homeless Management Information Systems and other data collection activities to better analyze existing conditions and emerging needs.



## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As with any project of this scope, there were numerous challenges to be addressed along the way, as well as opportunities for improvement. This report goes into some detail about these, as solutions will be important to the counties moving forward, and others can learn from progress that has already been made. These challenges can be broadly captured in the following categories:

- 1) Community awareness, misconceptions, and moral judgments
- 2) Data gathering and federal homelessness funding
- 3) Resource constraints
- 4) Lack of affordable housing
- 5) Promoting regional approaches

### COMMUNITY AWARENESS, MISCONCEPTIONS, AND MORAL JUDGMENTS

Developing the political will to end homelessness requires both an acknowledgment of the problem and an ownership of it. This lack of awareness was a belief expressed by a range of stakeholders. Furthermore, some expressed that the development of services to address homelessness would function as a magnet to draw homeless people from outside the

community. Thus resources would not be spent on the needs of the community's "own." In fact, stakeholders in one county perceived that this was already the case.

In focus groups and surveys, conducted by the Alliance, residents who were themselves homeless sometimes voiced views about their peers, suggesting that many homeless people were "gaming the system," thereby giving those with legitimate needs a "bad name" and using resources that should go to others more deserving. This perception represents a significant challenge to overcome. Finally, historical portrayals of skid row homelessness and current media images of urban street homelessness often led community members to overestimate the prevalence of chronic substance abuse and mental illness in the population and to assume characterological rather than structural explanations for a person's homelessness. This is particularly problematic in rural communities where, research suggests, these issues play even less of a role in homelessness.<sup>14</sup>

While these issues are by no means limited to rural communities, they can create significant barriers to ending homelessness. Local data is a critical tool for combating a lack of awareness and misconceptions about homelessness, as is

<sup>14</sup> Burt, M.R., Aron, L.Y., Douglas, T., Valente, J., Lee, E., and Iwen, B. 1999. *Homelessness: Programs and the People they Serve, Findings of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients Technical Report*. Urban Institute. Washington, DC: Interagency Council on the Homeless.



putting a human face to the problem. Thus, as described in greater detail below, Alliance staff and consultants stressed to county coalitions the importance of gathering local data to develop a better understanding of both the scope of homelessness in each county and the circumstances and characteristics of people affected. And they encouraged counties to move toward common data gathering approaches that would lend themselves to data aggregation across the RHISCO region.

In addition, as previously noted, Alliance staff and consultants encouraged and assisted counties to engage a broad spectrum of community stakeholders in discussion and planning on the issue. Thus, over the course of the project, counties were successful at recruiting mental health associations, faith-based organizations, youth development and service organizations, and other representatives who had not previously been at the table. This increased the sharing of accurate information across a wide range of community leaders.

Some county coalitions were also successful at recruiting media representatives, such as local newspaper, television, and radio news reporters, to the planning process. They also made a point of keeping media representatives in the planning

loop by submitting regular written updates. Counties that successfully engaged the media reported an increase in media coverage that they felt both increased awareness and understanding of the issue among community residents and raised the profile of homelessness with local officials, generating increased pressure for officials to participate in the development of local solutions.

### *DATA GATHERING AND FEDERAL HOMELESSNESS FUNDING*

As noted above, accurate local data is vital to understanding the scope and particulars of homelessness in a given community, assessing the strategies and resources needed to address it, and countering beliefs and misconceptions that impede solutions. Although, as indicated, most of the counties had recently conducted a point-in-time count of homeless persons, the data, as a whole, was problematic and difficult to interpret. Nor could the data be aggregated across counties for a number of reasons. Key among them was the fact that counties did not use a common definition of homelessness or a common point in time methodology, and the counts were not coordinated and thus were conducted at different points in time. Hence, the data was not necessarily comparable.



Such problems are not limited to rural communities; however, as previously described, data gathering itself presents greater challenges in rural areas. Also, rural communities often lack a key incentive that motivates other jurisdictions to undertake the effort – HUD Continuum of Care funding. One of the primary motivations for local jurisdictions to gather data on homelessness is to secure HUD McKinney-Vento funding via the annual Continuum of Care SuperNOFA application. Jurisdictions that compete for funding are required to conduct biannual point in time census counts of their sheltered and unsheltered homeless residents. They are also required to have a majority of their homeless services programs submit client data into a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), intended to yield a wealth of demographic, service utilization, and outcome data about those served.

While HUD funding acts as a compelling incentive to gather data on homelessness in many communities, rural jurisdictions have been noticeably slower to apply for this funding, in part because the application process itself is quite laborious, and the level of funding is partially determined for each jurisdiction based upon a federal formula that often leaves underpopulated rural communities with nominal allocations. Additionally, rural communities

typically have fewer administrative resources to write the application. Finally, many rural communities have a problem with homelessness but do not have enough people who are literally homeless at any one time to justify the expenditure of resources necessary to secure HUD homeless funding. Those communities have a greater need for homelessness prevention funding, but only people who are already homeless are eligible for most of the HUD homelessness programs. Those so-called “couch surfers,” who move every few days from one friend’s house to another but never sleep in a shelter or a place not meant for human habitation, are regarded as homeless by many people but are not eligible for HUD-funded homeless services.

Some progress in assisting rural Ohio jurisdictions to access HUD homeless program funding has been made over the past several years, largely through state efforts to involve them in HUD Balance of State applications. Under these programs, jurisdictions are allowed to apply in whatever geographic arrangements they find convenient. In most states, large urban areas apply separately, and a state entity applies on behalf of all other geographic areas in the state, in what is known as a “balance of state” application. The Ohio Department of Development (ODOD) usually takes responsibility for the



balance of state application process and for bringing as many eligible jurisdictions to the table as possible. The majority of RHISCO counties have applied for Continuum funding through Ohio's Balance of State application at some point over the last several years, and their point in time data gathering efforts generally correspond with this application process. However, because most do not apply for new or renewal project funding each year, data is not routinely gathered.

Moreover, as noted, to date these data gathering efforts have not been coordinated. Fortunately, progress is being made on this front as well. COHHIO is currently working to standardize the point in time methodology and data gathering timeframe, and over the past five years the state has rolled out a comprehensive HMIS system to Balance of State jurisdictions. All RHISCO counties have identified one or more provider agencies that will submit data to this HMIS, and in many counties data entry has already begun. Through these efforts, it is hoped that local data gathering strategies will improve and that better point-in-time and HMIS data will permit RHISCO counties to marshal

additional resources and more reliably and accurately assess their progress toward achieving the specific goals and objectives outlined in their ten year plans to end homelessness.

Two specific problems in data gathering that arose in the RHISCO region as well as in rural areas across the country are conducting effective point-in-time counts, and participating in Homeless Management Information System efforts. These issues require a more detailed discussion.

### *RURAL POINT IN TIME COUNTS*

A question often asked is, "How many homeless people are there in our community?" Rural America often struggles to assess the number of homeless people who may not be living on streets, park benches and other visible locations. These "hidden homeless" in rural areas are more difficult to find.

Many rural communities conduct a point in time count of homeless people during the last week of January, as required by HUD. Further, rural communities often wish to know the number of



people who are doubled up or in substandard housing – either literally homeless or at-risk of homelessness.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, they not only utilize the HUD definition of homelessness, but also attempt to assess the size of these other populations.

As with the rest of the United States, rural Ohio and the RHISCO communities are attempting to increase capacity by establishing baseline homeless statistics. Such baselines are also needed to measure progress toward the goal of ending homelessness. Their performance in this regard is mixed. Some have never done a count, while other communities are refining their strategies to count homeless people, and others are utilizing their data to determine if their programs are actually meeting the needs.

Ohio's eighty rural counties participate in the Ohio Balance of State Continuum of Care. Each individual county that completed a point in time count for their locale submits that data to the Ohio Department of Development and the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, who in turn compile the Continuum of Care submission to HUD. An endeavor to enhance the accuracy of the data and the efficiency in which it is collected has been a goal of both local communities, Ohio Department of Development and the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO).

COHHIO, which is the technical assistance provider for the Ohio Balance of State, has provided numerous regional trainings on planning for and implementing data collection

<sup>15</sup> HUD Definition of homelessness in Federal law:

The term "homeless" or "homeless individual or homeless person" includes:

1. an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and
2. an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is –
  - a. a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill);
  - b. an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
  - c. a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

In its SuperNOFA, HUD interprets the definition of homelessness as follows:

A person is considered homeless if he or she is:

- sleeping in an emergency shelter;
- sleeping in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, or abandoned or condemned buildings;
- spending a short time (30 consecutive days or less) in a hospital or other institution, but ordinarily sleeping in the types of places mentioned above;
- living in transitional housing but having come from streets or emergency shelters;
- being evicted within a week from a private dwelling unit and having no subsequent residence identified and lacking the resources and support networks needed to obtain access to housing; or
- being discharged from an institution and having no subsequent residence identified and lacking the resources and support networks needed to access to housing.



and data analysis of point-in-time counts. COHHIO has also provided local technical assistance to communities that requested it. While communities continue to improve their strategies to collect and analyze this data, there is still work that is needed to include all rural Ohio counties.

COHHIO is beginning to reach out to communities that do not currently complete these counts in order to engage them in the process. The first effort to have a coordinated, statewide count is to begin in 2008 by having all communities designate the same day to collect the data. The Ohio Balance of State's 2007 point in time data collection revealed that there were 3,521 sheltered and unsheltered homeless people. COHHIO and the Ohio Department of Development are hopeful that this "first-step" will lead to a more consistent protocol of collecting data and provide better statistics in order to better prepare, plan and provide homeless services.

### *HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS (HMIS)*

A Congressional directive was given to HUD and local jurisdictions to collect a range of information on homelessness, use of homeless programs and services, and the effectiveness of the local homeless programs and services.

Through that directive, the concept of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) was developed to collect data at the local level. Local jurisdictions can utilize this rich source of information to create and implement plans to end homelessness. In turn, HUD reviews and analyzes the data to create a national picture of the problem.

The RHISCO Counties participate in the Ohio Balance of State Continuum of Care. The Ohio Balance of State Continuum of Care utilizes Service Point software for its HMIS. The Ohio Department of Development (ODOD) is the Continuum of Care administrator for HMIS. ODOD has instructed all Balance of State homeless providers that receive either HUD or ODOD homelessness funds to participate in HMIS.

Not all of the RHISCO Counties have provider agencies that are required to input data into HMIS. Currently there are eighteen individual agencies in the RHISCO Counties, representing fifteen counties, that are participating in HMIS. These include providers of emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing and homelessness prevention.

As with all new software and applications, there have been some struggles among some of the



RHISCO county providers. While having the technical know-how and staff to participate in HMIS is a challenge, training, staff, and financial resources will provide communities with a rich source of information via HMIS.

### *RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS*

Perhaps one of the most significant challenges the communities have to grapple with is the limited time and resources community stakeholders, particularly service providers, are able to dedicate to planning and coalition work. In most rural counties, social service resources are spread extremely thin. This means that providers are often wearing multiple hats and agencies are operating on significantly limited budgets. Thus in smaller agencies it is not uncommon for social service program administrators and direct service providers to be one and the same. Because of this, for some participating in planning and coalition work means time away from frontline service provision. In larger, multi-service agencies, participating in these activities means prioritizing homelessness over a host of other social issues the agency is responsible for addressing. These challenges and tensions were evident in the RHISCO Project, not only in participants' ability to attend regular meetings but also when the time came to begin drafting each county's ten year plan, a task requiring the dedication of significant time and effort.

These constraints must be addressed without compromising communities' ownership of the planning and coalition process. In the RHISCO Project, Alliance staff and consultants traveled throughout the region to partners rather than having partners come to them. They scheduled multiple trainings on a given topic in different areas of the region to reduce travel times. They tailored the amount and level of technical assistance they provided on all issues, but particularly with regard to the development of ten year plans and funding proposals to the Foundations, to accommodate these constraints.

As a result of these efforts and the fierce dedication of Project partners in most counties, 16 of the 17 RHISCO counties successfully drafted ten year plans to end homelessness and have begun to move toward their finalization and implementation. In a few counties, however, these constraints compromised commitment to and full involvement in the Project. For example, in one county, agency stakeholders reported that project involvement was difficult because it took time away from grant-funded projects critical to the agency's financial viability. In another, a transition in leadership derailed participation for a time. While varying degrees of commitment among partners are not uncommon in regional collaborations, it is critical to ensure that those who are less engaged do not discourage other partners over time. It



is also critical to build in sufficient staff support to enable coalition and planning activities.

### *LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

Unfortunately, homeless people who are searching for low-income housing face many barriers. One barrier is the lengthy waitlists for Public Housing and Housing Choice Vouchers. The Public Housing and the Housing Choice Voucher Program are federal programs that provide decent and safe rental housing for eligible low-income families, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. HUD provides funding to local communities and the Housing Authority or the state Housing Finance Agency is responsible for the management and operation of the programs.

In many RHISCO communities along with the rest of the country, the waitlists can be several months long or closed (meaning that a household could not even place names on the list). Several of the RHISCO counties do not have any public housing or housing choice voucher programs whatsoever. No matter whether the waitlist for public housing is ten households in Morgan County or 1,212 in Fairfield County, there is not enough low-income or subsidized housing to meet the needs within the communities. Many of the RHISCO counties have not received new vouchers for several years and the numbers on their waitlists are increasing month-by-month and year-by-year.

Other difficulties with Public Housing and Housing Choice Vouchers include: inability of the Housing Authority to contact people with no fixed address; restrictions on eligibility due to criminal background or poor tenant or credit history; prospective homeless tenants' lack of documentation and paperwork; and inability of homeless tenants to obtain funds for deposit.

The failure of these two federal programs to adequately meet low-income people's housing needs points to the fundamental cause of homelessness – the lack of affordable housing. In the RHISCO region, as in every other region across the country, homelessness is driven by people's inability to afford decent, safe, and permanent housing. In fact, there is not a single Congressional district in the United States that has enough rental housing that is available and affordable to families earning less than 30 percent of the area median income. Further, the RHISCO counties, like other rural counties, are plagued by poor housing quality. Residents in substandard housing are often forced to seek safer, more expensive housing that they are unable to afford, and, as a result, poor-quality housing can lead to periods of homelessness.

### *PROMOTING REGIONAL APPROACHES*

Many of the homelessness challenges facing rural communities are best addressed at a regional or state level. When the project began,



several counties, including Athens, Hocking, Perry, Jackson and Vinton, had existing cross-county collaborative relationships as a result of being served by a multi-county Community Action Agency. Similarly, Jackson and Meigs (along with neighboring Gallia) Counties had a joint Continuum planning process since 2004. Beyond such collaborations, however, little existed in the way of cross-county coordination, and there was no real sense of regional identity or cohesion. This is not surprising given the diversity of the counties and their geographic spread.

The Project undertook a number of activities to promote a regional framework for ending homelessness. Despite the resource constraints just described and the tremendous differences among the counties, what evolved over the course of these efforts was the foundation of an infrastructure for regional collaboration. This foundation is reflected in strategies for addressing homelessness that are common to most plans, including the RHISCO plans, such as prevention, affordable housing, coordination of provider services, and data collection. It is also reflected in the cross-county collaboration evident in the implementation proposals recently funded by the Foundations.

It is worth noting that the RHISCO Project evolved over time in its conception of what a

regional plan to end homelessness would entail. From the initial Summit in April 2006, the RHISCO partners started the project with the idea that a detailed written regional plan setting out action steps and time frames would be produced during the planning phase, before implementation began. It quickly became apparent that the counties did not view this as a priority, and that regional decision-making on priorities for implementation would require significantly more preparation. Instead, there was agreement that a regional plan at the end of two years would consist of the individual county plans, and identification of specific projects that would be undertaken jointly by some counties. The intention, however, is to continue, through regional interaction, to identify fruitful areas of implementation work with larger consortia of counties.

Thus the foundation of a regional approach, in the form of common strategies and newly established cross-county collaborative relationships, is in place to move forward in the RHISCO area. Perhaps the strongest evidence of this is the expressed intention of RHISCO partner counties to implement their plans to prevent and end homelessness. Similarly, by linking to COHHIO, state HMIS, Balance of State activities, and state agencies, RHISCO partners have begun greater integration into a state-wide approach to homelessness.



## THE RHISCO PROJECT MOVING FORWARD

The final challenge that planning projects face is the issue of sustainability. To this end, the planning phase was just the beginning of a multi-year effort to prevent and end homelessness in rural Ohio. This planning phase, led by the Alliance staff and consultants, has generated community momentum to move plan implementation forward. In order to do this successfully, ongoing support and oversight is required, in addition to adequate local, state and federal resources to sustain program delivery.

With the conclusion of the planning phase, dedicated oversight and technical assistance provided by the Alliance concluded in December 2007. The RHISCO counties are positioned to move forward with plan implementation. Furthermore, lessons learned during the planning phase will inform implementation strategies and opportunities. The Alliance will continue to serve as an advocate, champion and resource for rural homelessness in the RHISCO counties and across the country.

The Osteopathic Heritage Foundations remain committed to rural communities in Southeast and Central Ohio and will continue to invest in strategies that prevent homelessness for vulnerable populations.

## CONCLUSION

The RHISCO region has made a significant start toward a new approach to homelessness, concentrating on organizing and deploying resources to more effectively prevent homelessness and move people as quickly as possible into housing when homelessness does occur. The county plans that have been developed, and the intra- and inter-county coordination that has already taken place, map the way forward. Focused attention on implementing these plans in the coming years appears likely to bring about significant reductions in homelessness in these communities, and to allow these communities to continue to serve as models for other similar regions throughout rural America.

## COUNTY ACTIVITIES AND SNAPSHOTS

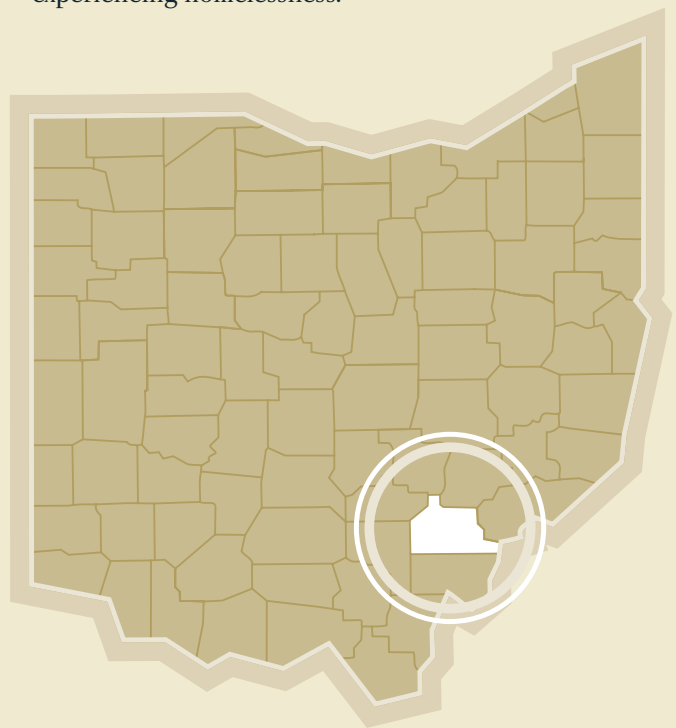
This section provides more detail about each of the counties. For each county, there is a brief summary, from the point of view of the county and its leadership on this project, of the work the county has undertaken as part of RHISCO. There is also a snapshot of demographic information about each county, the basic elements that each county included in its ten year plan, and any work that each county plans in collaboration with other counties in the region, so that readers may determine which counties most closely match other communities with which they are concerned.

# ATHENS *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

In 1998, a small group of service providers began meeting in Athens County as a Continuum of Care to support the submission of a Shelter Plus Care grant. This subsequently evolved into the Athens County Housing Coalition. The Coalition regained momentum in 2004 following a lull in activity, this time working toward eligibility for state funding and in pursuit of joint projects between county agencies. Throughout the RHISCO Project, quarterly meetings have continued with healthy participation and a steering committee has met monthly to focus on homelessness planning. This smaller gathering developed the County's ten year plan and its three goals: increasing affordable housing, economic development, and homelessness prevention. One of the objectives of the Athens plan is to develop a Housing Coordinator position to act as a point person for those in the community with housing needs. Athens selected this objective for development and submission to the Foundations for possible grant funding. The County has partnered with neighboring Hocking County for this proposal, as the two communities share the objective of funding a Coordinator. The Coordinator's tasks in Athens are likely to focus on "closing the front door" to homelessness, or homelessness prevention, as the County has an emergency shelter. Hocking County, which has no shelter services, is likely to require more "back door" services, or better access to housing opportunities (as well as emergency services) for people who are already

homeless. Athens and Hocking Counties have several longstanding partnerships, both formal and informal, for homeless and housing services. This collaborative history led to a natural linkage for the project proposal. Next steps for the County include further development of the Housing Coordinator position as well as the identification of other priorities for implementation. The group has cited a need for increased participation and leadership within the Coalition; the County is poised for such growth and will benefit from fresh voices as it contemplates its future. Athens County has also been participating in a new project with the Corporation for Supportive Housing. The Supportive Housing Institute provides technical assistance to development teams that are working on specific supportive housing projects for people experiencing homelessness.



# ATHENS *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### **ATHENS COUNTY IN BRIEF\***

Athens County, a part of Appalachian Ohio, is mostly rural and has a limited amount of highway infrastructure. The Ohio Department of Development's Office of Strategic Research (OSR) reports that Athens County ranked as the poorest county in Ohio in the year 2000 (The Ohio Poverty Report, 2007). The major employers in Athens County include the school systems, small to medium sized businesses and two institutions of higher education.

Athens is set apart from other RHISCO partners in that the County is the home to Hocking College and Ohio University. These two significantly sized educational institutions bring a number of jobs and a variety of skills and resources that might otherwise not be present in an impoverished rural county. The presence of these educational institutions benefits the community in many ways, but they also deplete the availability of affordable housing in the County. Due in part to a plentiful demand and a limited supply of housing, landlords focus heavily on recruiting students and create leases that are very expensive and short in duration (e.g. 10 week cycles).

### **ATHENS COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\***

*A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING  
THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION*

### **COORDINATION**

Athens County hopes to collaborate with hospitals, jails, and treatment centers for better coordination of discharge planning and to develop a staff position that would be responsible for stabilizing at-risk individuals in housing. This person would serve as a point person for both landlords and agencies. The County plans to seek increased coordination of service providers more generally by encouraging participation in quarterly meetings.

### **PREVENTION**

Athens County prevention goals include advocating for an increase in the amount of emergency assistance provided to those at-risk of homelessness and collaborating with institutions for better discharge planning. The County has not yet developed specific strategies needed to meet these objectives.

### **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Athens County has several objectives for increasing the housing stock in the county for people and families who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless. The Coalition plans to pursue the donation of land from Ohio University to develop permanent housing units. Other plans include increasing the number of housing vouchers available to low-income residents, exploring partnerships with the city to obtain additional properties for rehabilitation,

# ATHENS *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

increasing the number of landlords with units available for low-income or homeless individuals, and developing housing solutions for ex-offenders.

### *RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION*

Athens County's most recent point in time count was in January 2007. From these surveys, 37 respondents met HUD's definition of homeless, although 53 identified themselves as homeless (most often because they are doubled up with others or are otherwise marginally housed). As an additional component of the RHISCO planning process, the Athens County Housing Coalition (ACHC) has been working with a consultant from the Ohio University to conduct research on several topics, including: the workplace experiences of homeless individuals who have utilized services in Athens County; ways in which agencies envisage the creation of coordinated safety net of services to address the needs of homeless people in Athens County; and how to identify and recruit employment resources in a large swath of the economy to attain partners in the fight to end homelessness. There has also been graduate research conducted by a member of the ACHC which examined the strengths and weaknesses of the Athens County Continuum of Care. In addition to the research and data collection conducted by the ACHC, the Hocking-Athens-Perry

Community Action agency collected data on the demographic and housing needs of the City and County of Athens and researched ways in which those needs could be addressed as part of the Community Housing Improvement Strategy.

### *IN PARTNERSHIP WITH HOCKING COUNTY, IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF ATHENS' TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

Athens and Hocking County Housing Coalitions propose combining resources to hire a Housing Coordinator to assist the coalitions with capacity building and implementation of their ten year plans. Both groups plan to implement demonstration projects in each county to work with homeless and at-risk people and families for emergency prevention of homelessness, and to provide billable case management services for underserved persons who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless.

In Hocking County, the priority for the Housing Coordinator's services will be crisis intervention services for those in emergency homeless situations ("back door"). Athens County has identified a need for stabilization of persons and families precariously housed ("front door"). The Housing Coordinator position has been designed to serve both populations.

# ATHENS County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### HOMELESS PLANNING IN ATHENS COUNTY<sup>‡</sup>

In response to eligibility criteria set by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Athens County Housing Coalition first began meeting in 1998 as the Athens County Continuum of Care. The initial purpose of the group was to support the submission of a Shelter Plus Care grant for funding the development of a five-unit apartment building for people who are both homeless and experiencing a dual-diagnosis of substance abuse and mental illness. Following grant funding and the eventual completion of this project, several participating agencies continued to meet. Since then, the group has adopted by-laws, a mission statement, and a new name: the Athens County Housing Coalition (ACHC). In addition, the Coalition has been awarded over \$1.5 million for housing and homeless assistance projects.

Athens County is fortunate to have a number of agencies, programs, and individuals committed to serving homeless and at-risk people. Staff from area agencies providing each of these services have been active participants of the Continuum of Care. Several Coalition members met monthly as a planning group to identify the priorities of Athens County in addressing the housing needs of the homeless and those at-risk of homelessness. The larger group continues to meet on a quarterly basis and to recruit additional stakeholders from the larger community.

ATHENS COUNTY HOUSING COALITION  
CONTACT INFORMATION:

KELLY COOKE, [cooke.kelly@gmail.com](mailto:cooke.kelly@gmail.com)

### ATHENS COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	506.8	Without High School Diploma:	17.1%
2006 Population:	61,860	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	27.3%
Population Density in Square Miles:	122.06	Median Rent as % of Income:	36.5%
Median Household Income:	\$27,322	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	20.2%
Percent Minority:	7.3%	Average Year Housing Built:	1970
Poverty Rate:	27.4%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$84,300
Unemployment Rate:	5.9%		

<sup>‡</sup>Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

\*Taken from Athens County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, and interview with RHISCO contact.

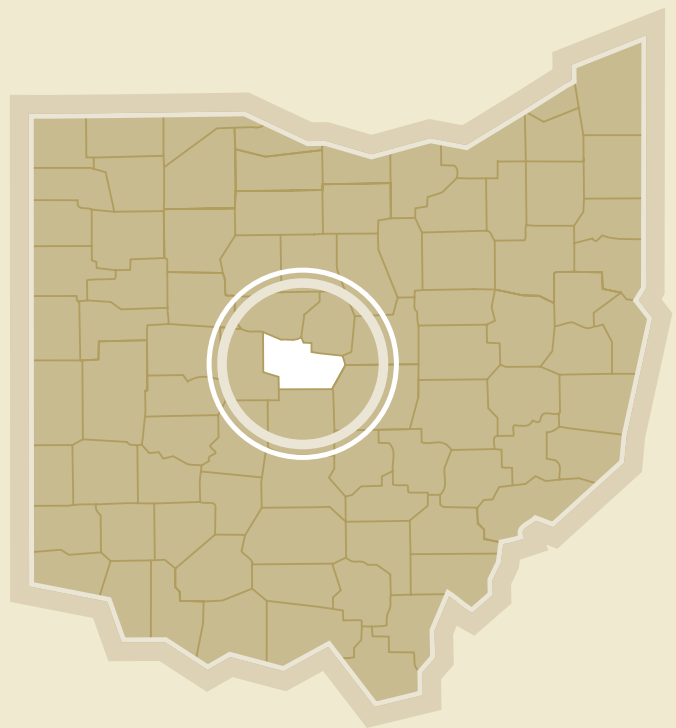
\*\*Taken from Athens County's proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations

# DELAWARE *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

Delaware County was participating in several activities to address homelessness prior to its engagement in the RHISCO Project. The County had an existing affordable housing task force for a few years before developing a subcommittee in 2003 to focus exclusively on the needs of homeless people. From this smaller group, a Balance of State application was submitted and the County gained ten units of permanent supportive housing for homeless families, a milestone for this Continuum of Care. The group sees a small but consistent group of members and point-in-time counts have been conducted for the past four years. Since the inception of the RHISCO Project, members of the Delaware Continuum have focused efforts more on homelessness planning and have been able to crystallize many of the projects that had existed prior to involvement in RHISCO. Delaware's ten year homelessness plan focused in part on the need for increased housing stability for homeless and at-risk persons and families. To achieve this goal, the County has developed a proposal for the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations to coordinate both housing development and mainstream resources in the community through a new staff position. Through a "No Wrong Door" approach, individuals and families with housing needs would be better served by existing agencies. Other objectives in the proposal include coordinated data collection efforts, mentoring services for formerly homeless

individuals and families, the development of new permanent supportive housing and Shelter Plus Care units for specific homeless populations, and increased awareness of homelessness. Based upon a pre-existing collaborative relationship with Union County, Delaware has submitted a joint proposal with this neighboring community. The two counties shared major goals in their respective plans and the proposed coordinator will address these directly. As an established Continuum with significant capacity, resources, and experience, the Delaware County Affordable Housing Task Force is poised to move forward.



# DELAWARE *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### DELAWARE COUNTY IN BRIEF\*

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005 American Community Survey, Delaware County's population of 147,601 made it the fastest growing county in Ohio, and the 11th fastest growing in the U.S. from 2000 to 2004. Many of Delaware County's residents work in relatively high paying jobs in Columbus. As a result, 44.7% of households living in Delaware County make between \$60,000 and \$150,000 per year. Due to prevalence of these high incomes, tremendous disparity exists between those with median incomes and the 3.8% of the population living below the poverty line. Due in part to its desirable location and the high percentage of affluent individuals living in the county, 64.6% of existing housing units are valued at between \$150,000 and \$500,000, which is high relative to other counties targeted by the RHISCO Project. Although many in Delaware County are firmly situated in the middle class, homelessness is still a problem.

### DELAWARE COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\*

#### A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION

#### COORDINATION

Delaware County plans to increase service coordination and awareness of available

resources. They will do this through incorporating faith-based organization services and planning processes into the current service system, as well as through other methods. Specific action steps include holding at least ten service provider meetings per year to discuss service coordination and available resources, identifying five new partners to join the Affordable Housing Task Force, development of a flow chart of homeless services and developing Continuum of Care roles and responsibilities for committee members.

#### PREVENTION

Delaware County plans to identify one strategy to increase funding for prevention activities by January 2008. Additionally, they will identify one new strategy to address non-financial barriers to maintaining housing such as life skills or employment retention.

#### RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

The Delaware Affordable Housing Task Force (AHTF) approved a point-in-time count plan developed by its Continuum of Care. In order to have the most accurate point-in-time count of sheltered and unsheltered persons in Delaware County, methodologies were identified. For persons at-risk of homelessness and individuals currently in shelters, community-based programs serving the homeless (or those at-risk of

# DELAWARE County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

homelessness) completed surveys. For unsheltered homeless individuals, the Delaware County Sheriff's Office and the City of Delaware's Police Department completed a survey. In 2007, five single adults, three adults in families, and three children were identified as homeless using the HUD definition of homeless.

In order to improve data collection, the Continuum will employ the following strategies:

- 1) use HMIS data and individual agencies' statistics on homelessness to gain a better understanding of those persons receiving homeless or prevention services in 2007;
- 2) seek to involve members of the faith community in efforts to count and engage unsheltered homeless persons; and
- 3) improve the point-in-time count by adding a survey component to gather information on peoples' homeless situations and conduct count training for community organizations.

### *AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

Delaware County's plan states that its Coalition will seek to identify new permanent supportive housing and Shelter Plus Care projects for priority populations through the HUD Balance of State application process. Specifically, they have set a goal of identifying one new permanent housing project

to meet the needs of an identified priority population by January 2008, developing ten units of permanent supportive housing for homeless families with a disabled person by June 2007, and identifying possible Shelter Plus Care partners for a HUD application by September 2007.

### *IN PARTNERSHIP WITH UNION COUNTY, IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF DELAWARE'S TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

The combined Delaware/Union County Housing Coalition will work collaboratively toward implementing the following five strategies/priorities:

- 1) coordination of housing development;
- 2) access to and coordination of mainstream resources through the No Wrong Door program;
- 3) coordinated and targeted data collection efforts;
- 4) coordinated mentoring services for formerly homeless persons and families; and
- 5) coordinated community capacity building efforts to increase awareness of homelessness.

# DELAWARE *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

The strategies will be undertaken by a coalition staff person also responsible for the following activities:

- 1) facilitating joint and individual monthly meetings of both county Continuums of Care and community stakeholders to begin implementation of project objectives; and
- 2) program outcome monitoring.

The Delaware/Union County Housing Coalition, in coordination with the proposed staff person, will positively impact the community in the following ways in the next three years:

- 1) increased community awareness on the issue of homelessness and its contributing factors, such as poverty and shortage of affordable housing;
- 2) increased coordination of resources and services so that providers and homeless persons and families have access to needed information and services;
- 3) increased knowledge of the scope and service usage of homeless persons and families and those at-risk in our community as a result of improved data collection activities;
- 4) additional affordable housing units for persons at-risk and/or homeless; and

- 5) life skills and household management mentoring services available to formerly homeless individuals and families to assist them in maintaining housing stability.

### *HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN DELAWARE COUNTY*

Delaware County has a strong contingency of local providers who are working collaboratively to address the homelessness and housing crisis in their community. While the County has few services and programs dedicated exclusively to serving homeless people, local providers and community officials are dedicated to increasing the amount of resources to the most vulnerable of their county. The Delaware County Affordable Housing Task Force and its Continuum of Care have begun working on strategies to identify homeless and at-risk persons, and have engaged in planning processes to meet their needs. Goals and objectives outlined in the County's ten year plan to end homelessness will assist the Task Force in identifying new resources to meet gaps in service delivery and to assist persons in ending their homeless or housing crisis.

DELAWARE COUNTY AFFORDABLE HOUSING TASK  
FORCE CONTACT INFORMATION:

BETH FETZER-RICE,  
[bfetzer-rice@usesalvationarmy.org](mailto:bfetzer-rice@usesalvationarmy.org)

# DELAWARE County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### DELAWARE COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	442.5	Without High School Diploma:	7.1%
2006 Population:	156,697	Bachelor's Degree of Higher:	41.1%
Population Density in Square Miles:	354.12	Median rent as % of Income:	23.1%
Median Household Income:	\$67,258	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	20.9%
Percent Minority:	6.4%	Average Year Housing Built:	1989
Poverty Rate:	3.8%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$190,400
Unemployment Rate:	3.9%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

\* Taken from Delaware County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness

\*\* Taken from Delaware County's proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations

# FAIRFIELD *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

In 1987, the Fairfield County Board of Commissioners established a Continuum of Care Committee. After instrumental involvement in community housing planning, the Committee formally identified itself as the Fairfield County Housing Coalition (FCHC) in 1997. Shortly thereafter, the group conducted its first point-in-time count and agreed on a set of priorities. In 2002, the Metropolitan Housing Authority and Lutheran Social Services partnered to create a more coordinated system of services and the Coalition was restructured. Today, the FCHC is a collaborative organization whose members represent, to the extent possible, each local agency providing services to persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The coalition has had healthy attendance and interest from key stakeholders since its initial involvement in RHISCO. The group has completed point-in-time counts in each of the past four years and submitted a HUD application for Shelter Plus Care vouchers in April 2006. The coalition welcomed a large group when they hosted a community summit on housing issues this year. Fairfield County conducted focus groups with county consumers to inform, in part, the development of their ten year plan to end homelessness. The county plan cited a goal of “help[ing] people who are homeless regain housing stability and quality of life.” To reach this goal, four strategies were outlined and will be addressed by four corresponding committees: prevention, housing, supportive services, and

finance. The proposal that the Fairfield County Housing Coalition submitted to the Foundations outlines a new position for a housing coalition coordinator who will support and oversee the implementation of the plan goals and strategies. In addition to this position, the coalition will contract with Fairfield County Information and Referral to: gather current information on affordable housing units; develop Housing Tip Sheets; develop a plan with best practice methods to reach and train social services staff on housing resources within the community; design a Consumer Follow-Up Service to monitor consumer progress in the housing and homeless services system; and document performance and record consumer data. They have a longstanding, well-established, and diverse coalition structure that is likely to enjoy success with the current project as well as those to come.



# FAIRFIELD *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### FAIRFIELD COUNTY IN BRIEF\*

Fairfield County serves as a bridge between Columbus and Appalachian Ohio. It encompasses some of the strengths and challenges of both areas. The County has relatively low levels of poverty and unemployment and a higher-than-average rate of home ownership. Fairfield has a cooperative and diverse housing coalition that works together to serve residents in need and strengthen the system of care. In general, service providers for homeless and low-income residents are known to be responsive, caring, and professional. Fairfield County and its county seat, Lancaster, are caring communities that step forward to serve people in need, including churches, volunteer groups, foundations, generous individuals and corporate donors.

### FAIRFIELD COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\*

#### *A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION*

#### *COORDINATION*

The Fairfield County Housing Coalition (FCHC) plans to establish a single point of entry "housing assistance center" for homeless persons with a dedicated staff person to provide information and guidance on available resources and access

to housing services. It also plans to work on system changes through contacting institutions that discharge people to Fairfield County (Veterans Affairs hospitals, correctional institutions, etc.). They will work to build coordination by encouraging dialogue, providing education, and coordinating care for shared clients and by sending a list of landlords with affordable housing to all FCHC members on a regular basis. More concrete plans are in place for working with the legal system to prevent evictions.

#### *PREVENTION*

Fairfield County's prevention objectives include providing more assistance to people before they are in crisis and assessing home repair services and resources to prevent low-income residents from becoming homeless. Specifically, the County would like to target elderly and disabled residents in their exploration of additional rental assistance resources, possibly through levy funding. Fairfield would also like to compare their county's housing assistance funding with five similar counties to determine if there are additional opportunities to bring more funding into the county for housing assistance.

#### *RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION*

The Fairfield County Housing Coalition intends to act as a statistical clearinghouse for the

# FAIRFIELD County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

dissemination of homelessness data, to study and interpret homelessness trends, and to develop a countywide survey and data collection system modeled on HUD's Homeless Management Information System. In 2006, a cooperation agreement was established with Fairfield County shelters to share information regarding the homeless population.

In January 2007, a point in time count of homeless persons was conducted; 93 homeless single adults and 57 homeless families, including 92 children were counted. All of these met the HUD definition of homeless. In 2007, the group has focused on collecting the following data: the unduplicated count of clients served; client characteristics, such as age, race, sex, and disability status; units and types of housing received (shelter, transitional, permanent); services rendered; and sources of income.

### *AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

Fairfield County's housing goals include changing the local preference for Section 8 vouchers so that they serve more families, establishing a method to determine who in the County has vacant housing, and encouraging more landlords to open their rental properties to clients from the Housing Authority. The County is looking into developing new supportive housing projects and/or Shelter Plus

Care projects. The county would also like to create more permanent, affordable housing for families with children who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness and for youth aging out of foster care, as well as more accessible housing units for people with disabilities. Longer term, Fairfield plans to initiate mixed-income projects with a percentage of units designated for low-income people and to explore assisted living housing using a combination of Medicaid waivers and project-based housing vouchers.

### *IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF FAIRFIELD'S TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

The Fairfield County Housing Coalition has prioritized key strategies for planning and implementation of the ten year plan to end homelessness. They will hire a Housing Coalition coordinator to update the Continuum of Care; work with the Housing Coalition Finance Committee; facilitate monthly Housing Coalition meetings; coordinate and support execution of the ten year plan to end homelessness; and document activities and performance for use in evaluation and reporting.

In addition, the coalition will contract with Fairfield County Information and Referral for the following tasks: gathering current information on affordable housing units;

# FAIRFIELD *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

developing Housing Tip Sheets; developing a plan with best practice methods to reach and train social services staff on housing resources within the community; designing a Consumer Follow-Up Service to monitor consumer progress in the housing and homeless services system; and documenting performance and consumer data. The coalition will also engage in capacity building including conference attendance and other forms of professional development.

### *HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN FAIRFIELD COUNTY\**

Last year's point-in-time count identified 242 people in Fairfield County who were homeless. It is likely that many more homeless people remain uncounted in Fairfield County at any given time. The costs of homelessness are significant. For individuals and families, the costs include disruption of work, school, and family life, embarrassment, stress, and depression. Systems of care experience increased healthcare, housing, and social service costs. Communities sense that they are not providing adequate housing, services, or opportunities for all of their citizens.

The goal of the Fairfield County Housing Coalition is to help people who are homeless regain housing stability and quality of life. With the continued cooperation of the Fairfield County community, the Coalition believes it can address the problem and make significant progress toward ending homelessness.

A workgroup of the FCHC met from August through December 2006 to develop the ten year plan. The workgroup reviewed existing needs assessments and studies, data from multiple systems of care, and input from homeless and low-income residents. The workgroup discussed the strengths and needs of the system of care for homeless people in Fairfield County and then developed strategies to build upon strengths of the current system and create new programs and services to meet the needs of homeless people.

### FAIRFIELD COUNTY HOUSING COALITION

#### CONTACT INFORMATION:

MARY JO SMITH,  
[communitydevelopment@ci.lancaster.oh.us](mailto:communitydevelopment@ci.lancaster.oh.us)

# FAIRFIELD County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### FAIRFIELD COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	505.7	Without High School Diploma:	12.4%
2006 Population:	140,591	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	20.8%
Population Density in Square Miles:	278.01	Median Rent as % of Income:	23.1%
Median Household Income:	\$47,962	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	21.0%
Percent Minority:	5.5%	Average Year Housing Built:	1972
Poverty Rate:	5.9%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$129,500
Unemployment Rate:	4.8%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

\* Taken from *Fairfield County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness*

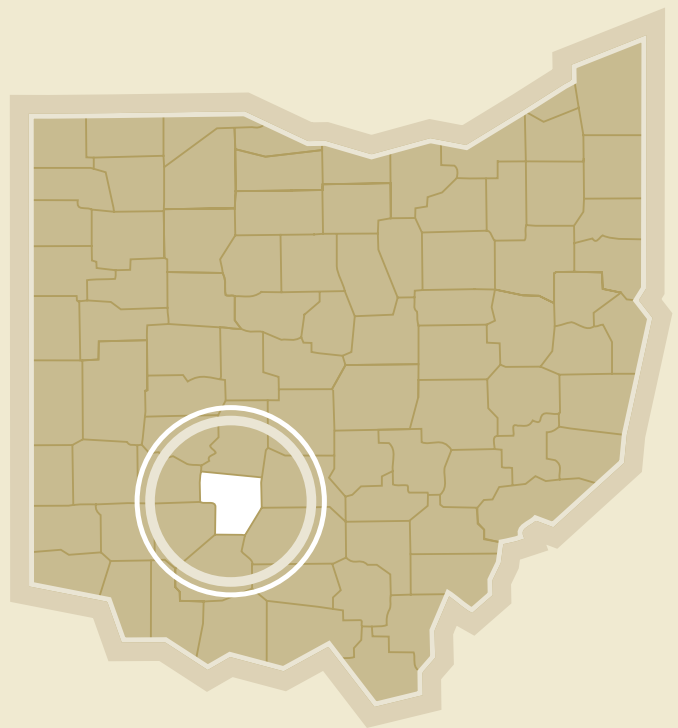
\*\* Taken from *Fairfield County's proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations*

# FAYETTE *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

The Fayette County Continuum of Care has had a strong presence in the county for several years. Since their initial engagement in the RHISCO project, the group has added some members and has turned more attention toward long-term planning. The Community Action Agency has provided leadership for the coalition both prior to the RHISCO project and throughout it. The agency oversees a self-help housing project that facilitates home ownership for low-income families as well as a YouthBuild program, where participants learn construction skills while working toward their GEDs. Since its initial involvement in the project, Fayette County has focused efforts on boosting involvement from the faith-based community. The County's ten year plan to end homelessness included a variety of objectives designed to increase both permanent and emergency housing, recruit additional volunteers, create case management for prevention services, and improve coordination of services. Based on the County's coalition history, capacity, and experience, Fayette has submitted a proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations seeking funding for a Housing Specialist who will coordinate local and regional homelessness resources. This person will serve as the initial point of contact for people who are homeless or at-risk. He or she will also coordinate volunteers for the Continuum, point-in-time count, and for local service agencies serving

homeless persons. The Housing Specialist will provide some case management services to persons requesting homeless prevention services. He or she will also provide education for tenants and landlords regarding tenant/landlord law. Fayette has exhibited preparation and readiness for implementation with strong plan objectives and solid community leadership. Fayette County has also been participating in a new project with the Corporation for Supportive Housing. Involvement in this project is likely to further implement goals from the County's ten year plan.



# FAYETTE *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### FAYETTE COUNTY IN BRIEF<sup>†</sup>

Fayette County is located just southwest of Columbus, and has one of the lowest population densities of all of the counties in the RHISCO project area. According to the Ohio Department of Development, its county seat, Washington Court House, has only around 13,300 residents. Fayette County has suffered significantly from the loss of manufacturing jobs in the area. Much of the economy has shifted from agriculture and manufacturing to the service industry, resulting in lower wages for many of the county's residents. Currently, a significant portion of the workforce commutes to neighboring cities such as Columbus and Wilmington for employment. Fayette County has a significant amount of affordable housing stock, but the county struggles with a lack of adequate case management.

### FAYETTE COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\*

#### A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION

#### COORDINATION

Fayette County plans to invite greater participation by mainstream providers and to engage the faith community for better collaboration. They will select a Continuum of

Care meeting to be "Church Day" and invite clergy and members to describe services they provide. They also plan to invite the Metropolitan Housing Authority director and domestic violence shelter representative to attend Continuum meetings to grow participation in planning and further efforts to coordinate.

#### PREVENTION

Fayette County plans to create case management for prevention programs. Steps for this goal include finding additional funding sources from private foundations and hiring additional staff for case management.

#### RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

In Fayette's 2007 point-in-time count, there were 46 adults and 34 children who met the HUD definition of homelessness. Continuum members attended a Coalition on Housing and Homelessness in Ohio (COHHIO) training on point-in-time counts in rural areas. As a result of the training, the Continuum members plan to enhance the previous data collection methodology by contacting communities similar in population and area in order to see what strategies have been successfully implemented. The Continuum will develop a volunteer pool, and volunteers will be trained on the day of the count. Service providers will be asked to participate in the count, a street count will take

# FAYETTE County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

place, and those in shelter will continue to be counted. Questionnaires from the RHISCO project will be used for every individual who did not already have the data collected at intake and incentives will be used to encourage participation by homeless individuals. In an effort to engage the community and raise awareness of homelessness, an article will be submitted to the local paper and/or television station publicizing the count and recruiting volunteers.

### *AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

In Fayette County, housing goals include identifying funding and finance programs and finding sites to purchase. The plan lists several potential funding sources for these steps. The County also plans to create additional single room occupancy units (SROs), possibly through HUD funding and private foundations, and to create 20 units of permanent supportive housing.

### *IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF FAYETTE'S TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

Fayette County's implementation project includes the hiring of a part time Housing Specialist to coordinate local and regional resources that provide services to homeless persons and persons

at-risk of homelessness. The Housing Specialist will: 1) serve as the initial point of contact for agencies' staff and persons who are at-risk or currently homeless; 2) provide case management services to persons requesting homeless prevention services; and 3) coordinate the recruitment of volunteers for the Continuum of Care, and point-in-time count.

In addition, the Continuum will provide education for tenants and landlords regarding tenant/landlord law; develop a pilot program for employment transportation for persons who are non-TANF eligible or who work outside Fayette County; and host a local Grantsmanship Training Center session for agencies belonging to the Fayette County Coalition and nearby county coalitions.

### *HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN FAYETTE COUNTY\**

Fayette County has programs that provide shelter for homeless people. Community Action's family shelter has 16 emergency shelter beds. The agency also operates 16 transitional housing units for families and 17 permanent supportive housing units for single adults. My Sister's House has six beds for domestic violence victims. Scioto Paint Valley Mental Health Center has 12 beds for persons in Fayette County with mental health issues.

# FAYETTE County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

In 2005, Community Action reported that 139 individuals received shelter at the homeless shelter and 51 received alternative shelter for a total of 190 individuals receiving shelter services. In total, 2,595 shelter nights were used in 2005. Only one family was turned away.

In January 2006, the Fayette County Continuum was asked to join in the process of creating a local and regional plan to end homelessness. A needs assessment was taken of Fayette County in April 2006 to identify what support systems

existed in the county and what resources were needed to provide homeless individuals and families, or those at-risk of homelessness, with necessary services. The Continuum of Care requested that members join the planning committee and that group began to meet in August 2006 to frame the plan.

### FAYETTE COUNTY HOUSING COALITION CONTACT INFORMATION:

BAMBI BAUGHN, [imbambi@roadrunner.com](mailto:imbambi@roadrunner.com)

### FAYETTE COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	406.6	Without High School Diploma:	21.3%
2006 Population:	28,305	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	10.8%
Population Density in Square Miles:	69.6	Median Rent as % of Income:	23%
Median Household Income:	\$36,735	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	20.5%
Percent Minority:	4.8%	Average Year Housing Built:	1960
Poverty Rate:	10.1%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$85,800
Unemployment Rate:	5.0%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

<sup>†</sup> Taken from [www.homepages.rootsweb.com/~maggie/mfayette.html](http://www.homepages.rootsweb.com/~maggie/mfayette.html)

\* Taken from Fayette County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness

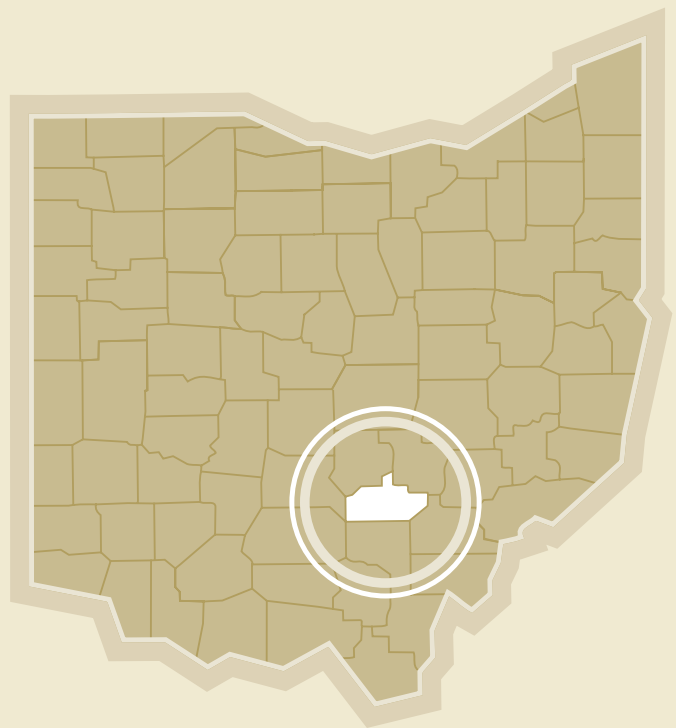
\*\*Taken from Fayette County's proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations

# HOCKING *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

A Hocking County Housing Coalition (HCHC) member working at a community mental health center was introduced to the Continuum of Care process in April 2004. This participant and others in the County were facing sizable budget cuts in housing programs and were motivated to learn about balance-of-state funding, as well as how the development of a housing coalition could focus their efforts. HCHC met as a steering committee in May 2004 and the full coalition started in November 2004. The group has been meeting regularly ever since with a small but consistent membership. HCHC has completed three point-in-time counts, with one in the month of July (2006) and two in January (2005 and 2007) to compare the incidence of homelessness in different seasons. Following HCHC's first count, the group secured 15 Shelter Plus Care vouchers and they are currently in the second of five years of implementation. Starting in 2007, the County has been participating in a new project with the Corporation for Supportive Housing. Hocking County has completed a strong ten year plan that builds on a number of strengths that have been developed over the course of their brief but vigorous tenure. One of the primary objectives of the Hocking plan is to develop a Housing Coordinator position to act as a point person for those in the community with housing needs. The County has partnered in its proposal with neighboring Athens County to address this shared goal. The

Coordinator's tasks in Hocking are likely to focus on "opening the back door," or creating better access to emergency services and re-housing opportunities. Hocking and Athens Counties have several longstanding partnerships, both formal and informal, for homeless and housing services; this collaborative history led to a natural linkage for the project proposal. Other objectives outlined in the Hocking plan include increasing prevention services, increasing community involvement in the Coalition, exploring options for supportive housing, and distributing a Housing Resource Guide to the community. In the immediate future, the County will be further developing the Housing Coordinator position and will be working with this person to implement prioritized objectives from the ten year plan.



# HOCKING *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### HOCKING COUNTY IN BRIEF

As is the case with many counties in Appalachia, Hocking County is an area severely lacking in services and resources. Although the tourist industry brings some significant income to the county, there is little other industry and, according to the Ohio Department of Strategic Research, more than 10% of residents still live in poverty. Hocking County has a handful of manufacturing businesses, but the unemployment rate is high and median incomes are quite low.

In spite of these challenges, the Hocking County Housing Coalition (HCHC) has made the most of the resources at hand. Key leaders such as community mental health; the Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Board; the Housing Authority; the faith-based community; Red Cross; and the Southeast Center for Independent Living have combined efforts to become a significant force for ending homelessness in Hocking County.

### HOCKING COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\*

*A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING  
THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION*

#### COORDINATION

Hocking County plans to improve coordination of services and systems through establishing a

housing coordinator and a comprehensive housing resources guide. HCHC will work collaboratively with other agencies to plan for discharges early, and provide needed information and referral services for agencies and the public. The HCHC recognizes the need for more buy-in from agency directors and for staff participation in planning efforts.

#### PREVENTION

Hocking County has cited homelessness prevention funding a priority need. The Coalition plans to meet with local agencies whose missions may be a good fit for this service and to explore ways that these groups could collaborate around meeting this need. HCHC also plans to work with the Hocking County Housing Advisory Committee, county commissioners, and Community Action to access Community Housing Improvement Plan (CHIP) and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for homeless prevention services like weatherization and housing repair/rehabilitation to preserve existing affordable housing in Hocking County.

#### RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

HCHC has created and modified an effective survey tool, and currently conducts an annual point-in-time survey, which is completed through agency distribution, local contacts, and an actual street count. The HCHC utilized graduate social

# HOCKING *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

work interns to input data and create reports for the first survey in 2005.

HCHC members also documented techniques found to be useful in a rural Appalachian setting and shared these with others using the RHISCO website. For future point-in-time studies HCHC plans to involve more volunteers at each count and provide more information to the community by distributing housing resource guides, apartment lists, and contact information. They also plan to recruit formerly homeless individuals to assist with outreach. In the 2007 count, 10 people were homeless.

### *AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

Hocking County is looking into a variety of housing options for homeless people, including not just traditional permanent housing options, but also immediate housing such as boarding homes for special populations. Other objectives include: advocating for the development of additional supportive housing, researching the possibility of an increase in Shelter Plus Care funding, and identifying possible landlords willing to work with homeless persons. Hocking is also focusing efforts on homeownership opportunities through their county Housing Authority, Habitat for Humanity, and the Rural Appalachian Housing Development.

### *IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ATHENS COUNTY, IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF HOCKING'S TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

Athens and Hocking County Housing Coalitions propose combining resources to hire a Housing Coordinator to assist the coalitions with capacity building and implementation of their 10-year plans. Both groups plan to implement demonstration projects to work with homeless and at-risk persons and families, for emergency prevention of homelessness, and to provide billable case management services for underserved persons who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless.

In Hocking County, the priority for the Housing Coordinator's services will be to provide crisis intervention services for those in emergency homeless situations ("back door"). Athens County has cited a need for assistance with stabilizing persons and families precariously housed ("front door"). The Housing Coordinator position has been designed to serve both populations. Emergency prevention funds are in significantly short supply in both counties. Prevention funds awarded to Athens County by the Ohio Department of Development led to a flood of requests for assistance; the two-year award was depleted in a very few months. In some cases, persons who are experiencing a

# HOCKING County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

housing crisis “fall through the cracks” of the local care system; this group is largely comprised of the working poor, as well as those ineligible for Medicaid and without other insurance to cover needed services. For this reason, Athens and Hocking seek to provide a pool of funds available for case management for those with housing needs, provided by partnering area agencies.

### HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN HOCKING COUNTY\*

The Continuum of Care process in Hocking County is collaborative and the HCHC has a broad membership. The full coalition includes 23 different groups and agencies. They have worked to identify housing resources, as well as gaps and unmet needs, and have developed planning priorities.

To date, the HCHC has conducted three point-in-time studies of homelessness. The first was done in January 2005 and followed by a summer count in July 2006. The first survey was limited to collecting data on homelessness and at-risk of homelessness as defined by HUD. Data collected from the first study was used to complete the first Continuum of Care plan for the Balance of State funding. The most recent count was conducted in 2007. The County will continue to use this data for homelessness planning.

HOCKING COUNTY HOUSING COALITION  
CONTACT INFORMATION:

MARTIN HAMMAR, [mhammar@tcmhcs.org](mailto:mhammar@tcmhcs.org)

### HOCKING COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	422.8	Without High School Diploma:	22%
2006 Population:	28,973	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	9.8%
Population Density in Square Miles:	68.53	Median Rent as % of Income:	22.5%
Median Household Income:	\$34,261	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	19.9%
Percent Minority:	2.5%	Average Year Housing Built:	1970
Poverty Rate:	13.5%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$83,300
Unemployment Rate:	6.2%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

\* Taken from Hocking County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness

\*\*Taken from Hocking County's proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations

# JACKSON & MEIGS *Counties*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

Jackson County had a partnership prior to the RHISCO project with Gallia County, which, though not officially in the RHISCO region, has a long history of collaboration with Jackson County. The two counties have continued this relationship as one entity throughout the planning process, including a joint submission to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations. This partnership began in the fall of 2004 when a mental health center, looking to develop a Continuum of Care, discovered an existing Housing Advisory Committee that had been formed as a requirement of the Community Development Block Grant program. County participants observed early on that several key people overlapped in these groups. The two groups merged and have developed a three-county Continuum with neighboring Meigs County. The group has been active in increasing membership through outreach to additional community stakeholders. Gallia and Jackson, along with Meigs County, developed a ten year plan based on a needs assessment as well as ongoing dialogue with community partners. Four focus areas were derived: community partners and linkages, advocacy and outreach, housing options and availability, and homelessness prevention systems. A total of 16 goals were developed around these focus areas and the proposed project addresses six of these. The counties plan to develop a website as a “one stop” information and referral tool that will also be used as a housing “hotline” that contains landlord

and rental listings. The goal of this service is to improve coordination of support services and referrals to benefit both clients and providers. Improved supportive services, employment options, and transportation availability will also be addressed through the transportation component of this project. Finally, increased public awareness will be achieved through community education about the availability of these new services. This project will be both effective and efficient in addressing many goals of this community's plan. The proposed project builds on the existing strengths of the community and should achieve some measurable results that can be used further improve their plan. In the coming year, the group will continue work on building partnerships with key agencies and organizations, particularly in Jackson and Meigs, and will continue to develop details and outcomes of their ten year plan.



### JACKSON COUNTY IN BRIEF<sup>†</sup>

Like many Appalachian Counties in Ohio and the RHISCO Project, Jackson County suffers from double-digit poverty rates. The coal mine, which was a major provider of living wage jobs, shut down recently and left many in the area unemployed and with few skills or prospects for obtaining comparable employment in the area. The major employers that exist currently in the area either do not provide comparable wages to that of coal mining or offer jobs that are unattainable to the large population of people without the benefits of higher educational degrees and training. Jackson County also has a lack of available low-income housing, making it difficult for people with low incomes to find safe, affordable units. A 12-bed emergency/domestic violence shelter serves the counties of Gallia, Meigs, and Jackson. Due to the lack of existing resources in the area, many people who are homeless have no options when they need assistance. Although there are many challenges for Jackson County in regards to poverty and homelessness, the tri-county area has tried to address the ever-present rural problem of transportation by creating an innovative community system for people with low-income and no access to a vehicle.

### JACKSON COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\*

#### *A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION*

#### *COORDINATION*

Gallia, Jackson, and Meigs Counties want to coordinate information and develop a housing hotline and website. They plan to develop a one-stop site and discuss needs to expand coordination/linkages across providers.

#### *PREVENTION*

The Gallia/Jackson/Meigs Continuum plans to improve supportive services, employment options, and transportation availability. They would also like to seek additional funding to support transportation coordination and to partner with county one-stop programs for job training and development.

#### *RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION*

In October 2004, the Gallia/Jackson/Meigs Continuum of Care determined that a written survey would be used to establish a baseline for identifying needs and developing an inventory of resources. The survey was distributed to 28

# JACKSON & MEIGS Counties

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

community agencies and organizations in December 2004. Also, the Continuum obtained additional homelessness data through the point-in-time homeless count conducted in January 2005. The counties' most recent point-in-time count took place in 2007 and, in the three county area, seven individuals met the HUD definition of homelessness.

### *AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

The Gallia/Jackson/Meigs Continuum plans to develop landlord and rental listings through a new website and to "partner with private developers and others to build or otherwise create additional low-income, one-bedroom apartments." Additionally, they plan to explore other funding resources for the development and/or rehabilitation of affordable housing units, through HUD, SAMHSA, Veterans Administration, and private lenders.

### *IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GALLIA AND MEIGS COUNTIES, IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF JACKSON'S TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

With Project WHEELS (Working to House the Homeless Efficiently and Effectively Leads to Stability and Sustainability), the Gallia/Jackson/Meigs Continuum of Care will continue to facilitate community partners' knowledge of housing and supportive services

available in this area as indicated in the ten year plan. Newspaper articles, speakers, development of the brochure, and the new website are all efforts to increase accessibility. Using the hotline to access and dispatch transportation adds to its value, use, and efficiency. The proposed transportation program is targeted toward participants who are applying for and/or using housing services; or to access employment, job training, and other income-related appointments (e.g. Social Security, Job and Family Services, etc.). Finally, budgeting classes address the identified need of teaching participants how to manage their income more effectively in order to sustain their housing.

### *HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN JACKSON COUNTY\**

The Gallia/Jackson/Meigs Continuum of Care held its first formal meeting on October 21, 2004. Its current membership represents over 20 community partners. In 2005, the Continuum developed the following statement, which was revised in September 2006:

*The mission/vision of the Gallia/Jackson/Meigs Continuum of Care is to create a strong coalition of community partners who collaborate to maximize federal, state, and local resources and establish linkages to support the planning, funding, and development of housing options and comprehensive*

# JACKSON & MEIGS Counties

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

*supportive services for at-risk populations living in the three-county area one person at a time.*

Woodland Centers has been identified as the fiscal agent for the Continuum. In early 2006, the group moved from an informal steering committee to a more formal structure utilizing an Executive Committee as the core group to guide its ongoing efforts. Members of the Executive Committee represent all three counties and include organizations that are already actively engaged in housing activities.

The Executive Committee also serves as the Continuum's planning committee for purposes of the RHISCO Project and continues to use consensus as its primary decision-making method.

GALLIA/JACKSON/MEIGS CONTINUUM OF CARE  
CONTACT INFORMATION:

MARY JO FRANK, [mjfrank@woodlandcenters.org](mailto:mjfrank@woodlandcenters.org)

### JACKSON COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	420.3	Without High School Diploma:	26.5%
2006 Population:	33,543	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	11%
Population Density in Square Miles:	79.81	Median Rent as % of Income:	26.4%
Median Household Income:	\$30,661	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	21%
Percent Minority:	3.6%	Average Year Housing Built:	1968
Poverty Rate:	16.5%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$70,400
Unemployment Rate:	7.5%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

<sup>†</sup> Taken from interview with Mary Jo Frank

\* Taken from Gallia/Jackson/Meigs Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness

\*\*Taken from Gallia/Jackson/Meigs proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations

### MEIGS COUNTY IN BRIEF+

Meigs County is another Appalachian county in the RHISCO Project area, and suffers from many of the same difficulties as its neighboring counties in the region. There is a lack of industry in the county, a lack of education in the population, a poor economy, and significant poverty that has existed in families for generations. The housing stock in Meigs County is described by local experts as old and often not able to be rehabilitated. Due to the hilly landscape, there is a shortage of suitable building sites for single and multi-family units. All of these issues combine to create significant challenges for Meigs County in its efforts to address the issue of homelessness.

Although Meigs County does have some significant challenges, it also has some significant strengths. Local experts describe the county as having a good infrastructure, an above average rural water system, good schools, and low property taxes. The new state highway (Route 33) is helping the area to become more connected to the rest of Ohio. Meigs County's Appalachian cultural values also serve to address the homelessness problem through the norm of social cohesion, which leads people to pull resources together to help themselves, their families, and their neighbors.

### MEIGS COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\*

#### A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION

#### COORDINATION

Gallia, Jackson, and Meigs Counties want to coordinate information and develop a housing hotline and website. They plan to develop a one-stop site and discuss needs to expand coordination/linkages across providers.

#### PREVENTION

The Gallia/Jackson/Meigs Continuum plans to improve supportive services, employment options, and transportation availability. They would also like to seek additional funding to support transportation coordination and to partner with county one-stop programs for job training and development.

#### RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

In October 2004, the Gallia/Jackson/Meigs Continuum of Care determined that a written survey would be used to establish a baseline for identifying needs and developing an inventory of resources. The survey was distributed to 28 community agencies and organizations in December 2004. Also, the Continuum obtained additional homelessness data through the point-

# JACKSON & MEIGS *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

in-time homeless count conducted in January 2005. The counties' most recent point-in-time count took place in 2007 and, in the three county area, seven individuals met the HUD definition of homelessness.

### *AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

The Gallia/Jackson/Meigs Continuum plans to develop landlord and rental listings through a new website and to "partner with private developers and others to build or otherwise create additional low-income, one-bedroom apartments." Additionally, they plan to explore other funding resources for the development and/or rehabilitation of affordable housing units, through HUD, SAMHSA, Veterans Administration, and private lenders.

### *IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GALLIA AND JACKSON COUNTIES, IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF MEIGS' TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

With Project WHEELS (Working to House the Homeless Efficiently and Effectively Leads to Stability and Sustainability), the Gallia/Jackson/Meigs Continuum of Care will continue to facilitate community partners' knowledge of housing and supportive services available in this area as indicated in the 10-year plan. Newspaper articles, speakers, development of the brochure, and the new website are all efforts to increase

accessibility. Using the hotline to access and dispatch transportation adds to its value, use, and efficiency. The proposed transportation program is targeted toward participants who are applying for and/or using housing services; or to access employment, job training, and other income-related appointments (e.g. Social Security, Job and Family Services, etc.). Finally, budgeting classes address the identified need of teaching participants how to manage their income more effectively in order to sustain their housing.

### *HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN MEIGS COUNTY\**

The Gallia/Jackson/Meigs Continuum of Care held its first formal meeting on October 21, 2004. Its current membership represents over 20 community partners. In 2005, the Continuum developed the following statement, which was revised in September 2006:

*The mission/vision of the Gallia/Jackson/Meigs Continuum of Care is to create a strong coalition of community partners who collaborate to maximize federal, state, and local resources and establish linkages to support the planning, funding, and development of housing options and comprehensive supportive services for at-risk populations living in the three-county area one person at a time.*

# JACKSON & MEIGS Counties

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

Woodland Centers has been identified as the fiscal agent for the Continuum. In early 2006, the group moved from an informal steering committee to a more formal structure utilizing an Executive Committee as the core group to guide its ongoing efforts. Members of the Executive Committee represent all three counties and include organizations that are already actively engaged in housing activities.

The Executive Committee also serves as the Continuum's planning committee for purposes of the RHISCO Project and continues to use consensus as its primary decision-making method.

GALLIA/JACKSON/MEIGS COUNTY CONTINUUM OF  
CARE CONTACT INFORMATION:

MARY JO FRANK, [mjfrank@woodlandcenters.org](mailto:mjfrank@woodlandcenters.org)

### MEIGS COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	429.5	Without High School Diploma:	26.8%
2006 Population:	23,092	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	7.4%
Population Density in Square Miles:	53.76	Median Rent as % of Income:	23.2%
Median Household Income:	\$27,287	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	21.6%
Percent Minority:	3%	Average Year Housing Built:	1970
Poverty Rate:	19.8%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$59,600
Unemployment Rate:	8.5%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

+ Taken from [www.MeigsCountyOhio.com](http://www.MeigsCountyOhio.com)

\* Taken from Gallia/Jackson Meigs Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness

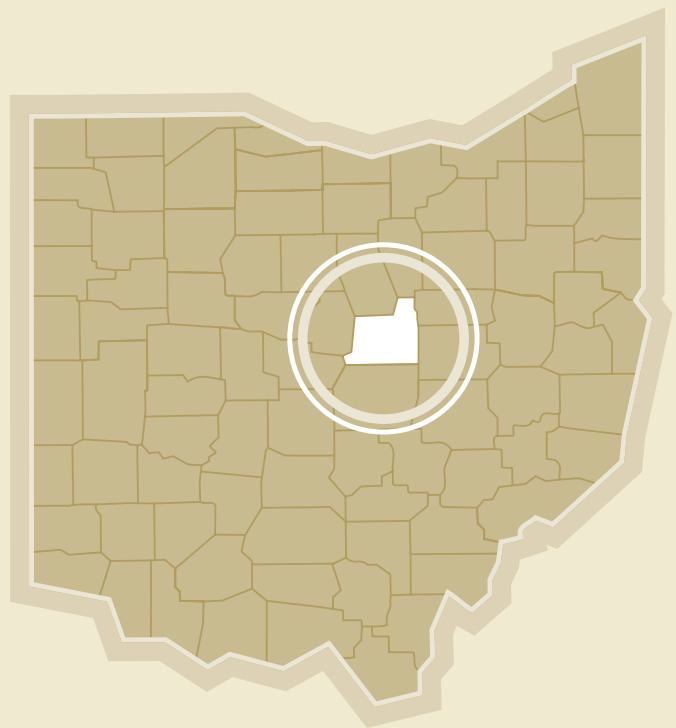
\*\*Taken from Gallia/Jackson/Meigs proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations

# KNOX *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

Knox County came to the RHISCO Project with one of the longest histories of local housing and homelessness planning of all the participating counties. About 15 years ago, the Emergency Needs Coalition (ENC) formed to look at emergency needs of people in the county, including food, clothing, and transportation issues, as well as housing and homelessness. The Knox County ENC is a collaboration of faith-based, government, and social service entities that are partnering to address the emergency needs in Knox County. Over the course of the last 15 years, the group started to focus more on housing and homelessness issues and the past six or seven years have been dedicated primarily to these topics. The ENC has been working with a core group of six to eight individuals who have spent significant energy researching needs of area homeless persons and the best way of meeting those needs. Knox submitted a thorough and thoughtful ten year plan that focuses on a set of priorities that include enhancing coordination, providing housing, supportive services to prevent homelessness, rapid re-housing, and new housing programs. The project proposed to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations addresses several of the primary goals of the plan. Through the proposed Sustainable Housing Initiative, Knox hopes to create a network of services that should quickly place homeless people into housing and will subsequently stabilize them in

that housing. The program will combine rent subsidies, case management, and education to support and encourage self-sufficiency. This combination should address homelessness prevention by stabilizing formerly homeless people in housing as well as by increasing the amount of affordable housing. Knox County has also partnered with the United Way to provide education to people in the community about budgeting and minimizing debt. This type of service will provide important prevention care for homeless and at-risk people in this county. Given its past successes, Knox is likely to see great progress as it moves toward implementing its plan through the proposed project.



### **KNOX COUNTY IN BRIEF\***

Knox County is a highly agricultural part of the state where 4-H competitions and the county fair are highlights of the year. Knox County has some significant strengths when compared to other counties in the RHISCO Project. Knox County is home to both Kenyon College and Mt. Vernon Nazarene University. The County has benefited greatly from the presence of a local collaboration of local churches formed many years ago to address poverty issues. This is now a non-profit organization that still has representation by several churches. Information is shared between the churches at the Board of Directors meetings of the organization. The group is also a member of the Ohio Council of Churches. The high quality of coordination by the local faith-based organizations in Knox County is extremely beneficial for those who receive social services in the area. The agreement amongst the local churches to develop such an agency has led to a particularly effective organization that obtains guidance from the numerous member churches.

### **KNOX COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\***

*A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING  
THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION*

### **COORDINATION**

Knox County plans to streamline access to services by utilizing a 211 information system for linkage and referral to resources and to further coordinate available services through development of a one-page resource guide. Specific coordination plans include working with local jail and prison systems to reduce discharges to homelessness. Knox County wants to work with provider agencies to give preference to homeless people on their wait lists and improve coordination between providers to assist households to move on from the shelter. Finally, collaboration with addiction services and mental health providers to provide behavioral health services for homeless people is a goal in the County's plan.

### **PREVENTION**

The Knox County plan included numerous objectives for preventing future homelessness. Several of these are a continuation of what they already have in place. For example, the County plans to continue using state and local funds for prevention services. They would also like to add a question to a pre-application used by various agencies to determine if applicants are doubled-up in housing. Knox is planning a variety of other activities that would decrease the risk of future homelessness, including: implementing a life skills curriculum, networking

with child care providers and Head Start to make child care more accessible to families, increasing access to funds for license reinstatement and car repair, and collaborating with institutions on discharge planning.

### *RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION*

Knox County has held three agency point-in-time counts to gather homeless data. The most recent count was conducted in 2007. Seven homeless single adults and eight homeless families were counted, all of whom were doubled up in housing. Survey methodology was developed for the Knox County Emergency Needs Coalition (ENC) and is reviewed annually.

The ENC decided that, as part of the RHISCO project, service providers would collect monthly statistics to obtain a better picture of the homeless in Knox County. Statistics have been gathered and will be employed in the development of programming for the community. The ENC currently has two agencies that are entering data into the Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS). Initial conversations have begun to add additional providers to those entering data into HMIS so that a truer representation of the homelessness situation is achieved.

### *AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

Knox County has listed a timeline that they will follow for determining the need for additional housing projects and services. This timeline starts with a preliminary study to determine feasibility of the projects in the county and continues with funding research, collaboration with community partners, completing funding applications, and partnerships with housing developers. The group also plans to: encourage one-to-one replacement of any public subsidized units that are lost due to demolition or redevelopment and continue using state and local funds for housing placement and services for those transitioning in to permanent housing. Knox County also plans to apply for Shelter Plus Care vouchers and to fund and develop 30 units of low-demand, permanent supportive housing.

### *IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF KNOX 'S TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

The Knox County Sustainable Housing Initiative (SHI) is designed to support and encourage individuals and families in their quest for self-sufficiency. A housing specialist will be hired to assist individuals and/or families in securing stable, quality housing. Referrals will be sought from service providers. Using Fair Market Rent values, it is estimated that rent subsidies may be provided for up to a year for one, three

bedroom home and two, two bedroom homes. Additional supportive services will be provided including, but not limited to, financial and debt management counseling, job seeking skills, parenting skills, and time management. The Benefit Bank, a counselor-assisted Internet application that helps low- and moderate-income individuals and families apply for a range of public benefits and file tax returns, will be utilized. Participation in these supportive services will be required of the individuals and/or families receiving rent subsidies.

### *HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN KNOX COUNTY\**

The Knox County Emergency Needs Coalition (ENC), in existence since 1989, is a collaboration of faith-based, government and social service entities that are collaborating to address the emergency needs in Knox County. The group has been addressing the issues of housing and homelessness to develop *Our Plan to Address Homelessness*.

Self-sufficiency was a central issue that the ENC prioritized in their plan. Obtaining and/or maintaining employment while being forced to re-locate due to lack of safe, decent and affordable housing is a constant challenge for low- and moderate-income households. Knox County has over 10% of its population living below the poverty level. The lack of housing and stable employment often leads to a cycle of poverty. Children in low- and moderate-income households frequently move due to a lack of affordable housing and to limited household income. Children often miss school or switch schools, fall behind their peers, lose access to further educational options, and are less likely to acquire the skills necessary to escape poverty as adults. Hence, the ENC has developed the following needs statement: *By 2017, individuals and families in Knox County will be able to obtain and/or maintain housing by achieving self-sufficiency.*

KNOX COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE CONTACT  
INFORMATION:

JOY HARRIS, [harris.joy@embarqmail.com](mailto:harris.joy@embarqmail.com)

### KNOX COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	5272	Without High School Diploma:	18.2%
2006 Population:	58,561	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	10.5%
Population Density in Square Miles:	111.08	Median Rent as % of Income:	22%
Median Household Income:	\$38,877	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	20.7%
Percent Minority:	2.8%	Average Year Housing Built:	1963
Poverty Rate:	10.1%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$92,100
Unemployment Rate	5.1%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

\* Taken from Knox County's *Our Plan to Address Homelessness*

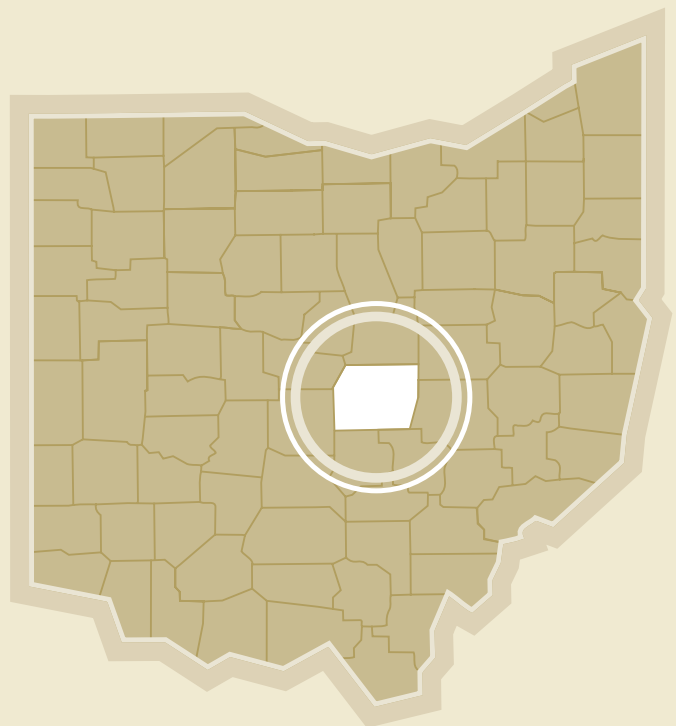
\*\*Taken from Knox County's *proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations*

# LICKING *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

Licking County Housing Initiatives has been in existence in some form since the early 1990s. Group members recognize the period of 1994-1995 as a time when their Continuum of Care planning process was jumpstarted. At that time, the Continuum was expanding a transitional housing program and engaging in community planning in conjunction with the City of Newark. As part of their participation in the RHISCO Project, the County submitted a ten-year plan to end homelessness in their community that included goals of completing an assessment of affordable housing needs, creating an advisory group to increase affordable housing capacity, and creating a community-based model for working with people reentering the community after leaving the criminal justice system. Licking has developed a three-part proposal for the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations that addresses several of their plan objectives. A data project will include both an affordable housing needs assessment and advanced engagement in HMIS. There will also be a project designed to help stabilize persons leaving the criminal justice

system. Finally, a staff position is being developed that will advance the objectives of the initial plan. Licking County has a strong plan for implementation and the experience and capacity needed to advance its objectives. The proposal application cites a number of current funding sources that suggest solid experience with various types of programs as well as broad community involvement in homelessness and housing programs. Licking County has also been participating in a new project with the Corporation for Supportive Housing. It should see great success pursuing its implementation strategy through its participation in the Institute, its continuing Coalition meeting, and the activities described in its proposal for OHF.



# LICKING *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### LICKING COUNTY IN BRIEF\*

Licking County is experiencing accelerated growth, increasing population migration, exploding student numbers, and new single family housing development. On the eastern edge of the county, the beginning of the Appalachian plateau displays a dispersed sprawl of large homes for commuters to Columbus as well as a landscape dotted with modular homes and trailers set on small parcels of land. Near the major roads and often near backcountry intersections are old farmsteads with multiple “roll off” housing units in the front and back with extended family clusters in a variety of spaces on one parcel. Licking County has experienced a loss of manufacturing jobs and a relatively moderate shift to a service-based economy.

### LICKING COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\*

#### *A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION*

#### *COORDINATION*

Licking County has acknowledged that changes need to be made to effect greater coordination and collaboration of their many existing service providers. Their strategies to improve coordination include exploring new, shared funding streams, incorporating training for

providers, and the potential merger of existing programs. Like many other RHISCO county coalitions, they see a need for greater participation in the local Continuum of Care planning process and have distinct goals for targeting media outlets and potential new partners in planning. Finally, their plan calls for a team of coordinated social workers and case managers to implement community-wide strategies.

#### *PREVENTION*

Licking County plans to develop a funding source that has few “strings” attached as to who can be served and for how long. They would also like to work on re-entry grants for persons exiting prisons and jails, especially sex offenders, as well as to create a mentorship position to work with these populations.

#### *RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION*

Members of the Licking County Housing Initiatives (LCHI) contacted area agencies and churches to determine the number of homeless persons for whom they provided beds on a selected date. LCHI attempted to determine the number of unsheltered homeless persons by consulting various employees of truck stops in the area who were sometimes familiar with the homelessness situation of some of their customers.

# LICKING County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

In order to enhance the accuracy and efficacy of their data collection methodology, LCHI has collaborated with Dr. Karl Sandin of Denison University who has significant experience in identifying likely locations of homeless individuals. In a 2007 agency-only count, 52 single adults and 47 families were counted as homeless in Licking County, using the HUD definition of homeless.

### *AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

Licking County has a number of goals and specific objectives for increasing housing options. They would like to improve the local housing stock through improved property maintenance codes, strict enforcement of these codes, and expanded rental rehabilitation programs and incentives for property owners. Looking at specific subpopulations, the County plans to expand the number of quality housing units for recovering adults in post-treatment, to improve the accessibility of existing rental housing for those with physical disabilities, and to increase the number of safe, decent, and affordable housing units available to homeless families and individuals. They plan to establish low-demand housing for homeless persons not willing or able to participate in other housing programs. Licking County plans to increase the number of Habitat for Humanity homes built annually and to secure additional Shelter Plus

Care vouchers, “if appropriate and available, particularly for those with severe and persistent mental illness and severe substance abuse.”

### *IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF LICKING’S TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

The proposed project will establish staffing dedicated to implementing key features of the ten-year plan to end homelessness. Staffing responsibilities will include: serving as the primary HMIS Coordinator for Licking County; coordinating the point-in-time count in January 2008; tracking project expenses and preparing reports; evaluating progress and efficacy of projects; assisting LCHI with media and communication needs; organizing and supporting LCHI meetings; organizing and supporting training for LCHI membership; identifying and assembling grant/funding opportunities pertinent to LCHI goals; assisting LCHI in the development of a multi-year funding strategy to implement its RHISCO plan; participating as directed in RHISCO activities at the regional level; and participating in training and conferences as necessary and as directed.

In addition to improving and enhancing LCHI’s administrative and data collection capacity, two project sub-activities have been developed. The first is the development of an affordable housing

# LICKING County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

needs assessment to clarify the “ways, means and where’s” of developing additional housing stock appropriate for the prevention of homelessness, as well as for use by those leaving homelessness for more stable housing. This project will be overseen by the Licking Metropolitan Housing Authority and its newly reformed non-profit, Licking County Housing, Inc. Secondly, the group has focused on the implementation of a pilot project to demonstrate a method for increasing the capacity for re-entrants into society from the criminal justice system. This sub-project will be designed and implemented by the St. Vincent de Paul Society, with ongoing support and evaluation conducted by LCHI.

### *HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN LICKING COUNTY\**

Licking County Housing Initiatives (LCHI) is a collaboration of ten local agencies and organizations directly involved in providing emergency, transitional, and supportive housing to area residents who meet the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of “homeless.” Its mission: *LCHI is committed to eliminating homelessness and*

*improving housing options in Licking County through the implementation of a comprehensive Continuum of Care.*

Over the last two years the LCHI group has conferred, compared data, surveyed the public as well as their own agencies, and held open meetings to solicit input from a broad spectrum of perspectives on what ending homelessness in Licking County by 2017 would look like.

No single, central issue has been identified by stakeholders and participants as pivotal in this process. In fact, the most common observation has been that Licking County, which includes extremely rural, dispersed population areas along with high-density, urban, post-industrial neighborhoods, has seen great change over the last few decades – and everyone expects further dramatic change in the next ten.

### LICKING COUNTY HOUSING INITIATIVES CONTACT INFORMATION:

DEB TEGMEYER, [dtegtmeyer@lchousing.org](mailto:dtegtmeyer@lchousing.org)

# LICKING County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### LICKING COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	686.5	Without High School Diploma:	15.3%
2006 Population:	156,287	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	18.9%
Population Density in Square Miles:	227.66	Median Rent as % of Income:	23.3%
Median Household Income:	\$44,124	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	20.6%
Percent Minority:	4.9%	Average Year Housing Built:	1969
Poverty Rate:	7.4%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$110,700
Unemployment Rate:	5.1%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

\* Taken from Licking County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, and interview with RHISCO contact

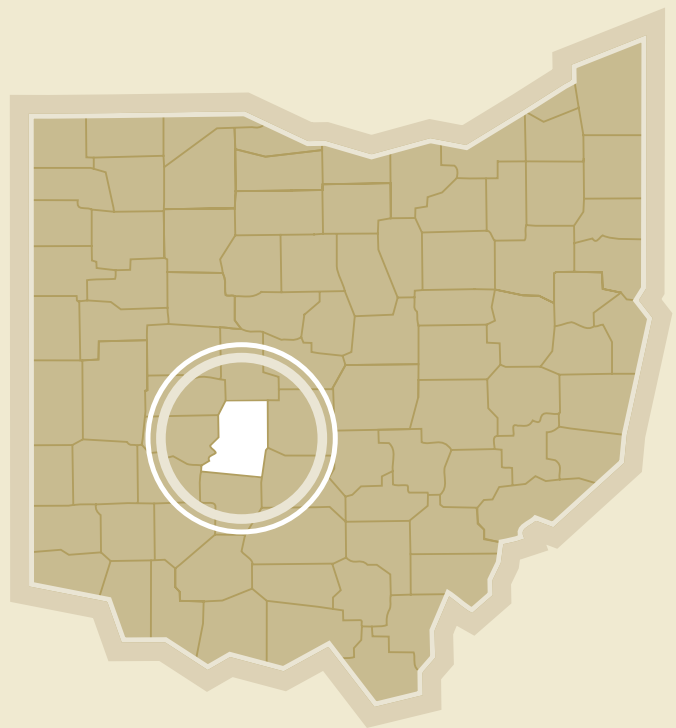
\*\*Taken from Licking County's proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations

# MADISON *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

Changes in the Madison County housing coalition have been significant since the group's initial participation in the RHISCO Project. After a year of confronting longstanding challenges with engagement, the coalition has become more cohesive and purposeful. Better data collection has led to a broader awareness of the needs of persons and families in the county and plans for addressing these needs are starting to fall into place. Coalition members note that there is now recognition of homelessness in Madison County and the group has been able to refocus efforts from awareness and crisis intervention to longer-term solutions. Madison County has been consistent in its work to stabilize families at-risk of losing housing. The stated emphasis in their ten year plan reflects the belief that families who are marginalized should be served in a comprehensive manner in order to meet their needs and to strengthen the community as a whole. Over 75 community organizations, consumers, and government entities have come together to form the Madison County Family Council which serves as a centralized strategic

planning organization in the county. The Council is focusing on several key areas, including a community plan for prevention, collaboration between families and providers, community awareness of services, and coordinated services. Madison has submitted a project proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations that describes a financial literacy training that will incorporate credit counseling, budgeting, and case management to a targeted clientele of families with children. The Council plans to develop a curriculum for use with both families already being served as well as the community at large. The capacity building work that the County has conducted over the past several months, in conjunction with a successful pilot project, should ensure success.



# MADISON *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### **MADISON COUNTY IN BRIEF\***

Madison County is located in central Ohio between Columbus and Springfield. Primarily an agricultural area, 88% of its land consists of farms. Madison County ranks fourth in both soybean and corn production in the State of Ohio.

Madison County has long been a county of close-knit professionals working together to solve county problems. From the county commissioners to agency directors to the many staff people supporting the activities of the county, all have one thing in common – to make Madison County a good place to live, work and raise families. This county continues to resolve its problems through the many partnerships formed within the communities. The Continuum of Care has identified potential problems with the help of its community partners, and more importantly, opportunities to help its friends and neighbors.

### **MADISON COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\***

*A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING  
THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION*

### **COORDINATION**

Madison County identifies a general lack of knowledge of available services as well as a lack of a “one-stop” services center as barriers to coordination and collaboration. They cite restrictive policies on emergency funds and turf issues among providers as additional concerns. Their identified strategies to address these gaps include improving training and documentation efforts among providers and advocating for improved flexibility among funders.

### **PREVENTION**

Madison County’s main objective for prevention is to provide case management for those in need, specifically offering parenting and child-related trainings. Other objectives focus on identifying available services and making sure the community is aware of them.

### **RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION**

In Madison County’s 2007 point in time count, nine adults and one child met the HUD definition of homeless. The community intends to engage in counts in the future with more attention to methodology and analysis. Madison County contracts to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment tri-annually. Such research

# MADISON *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

and data has informed homelessness planning in the county. Community Action of Delaware/Madison/Union has been trained on the use of HMIS software and has been inputting data into the system.

### *AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

Madison County is planning on improving housing by boosting access to its Metropolitan Housing Authority. Steps for this goal include identifying new sites for Section 8 housing and Shelter Plus Care vouchers and requesting additional Section 8 vouchers. Madison also has several objectives in place to increase the amount of affordable housing available, including: continuing to use local, state, and federal funding to increase the supply of affordable housing for low-income households, seeking affordable senior housing, and supporting Habitat for Humanity activities. The County is also evaluating the need for, and exploring opportunities to, provide permanent supportive housing.

### *HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN MADISON COUNTY\**

The Continuum in Madison County developed as a result of the RHISCO Project. During the past nine months, the Continuum has developed a plan to promote stable homes and stable

families that includes ending homelessness in the county in the next ten years. The work presented in the plan is the labor of numerous meetings with affected groups and stakeholders in the community, and technical assistance offered from organizations dedicated to solving these problems. It is the county's intention to continue to seek input and direct involvement with this plan from both old and new partners as they identify additional areas of concern.

Their efforts are only the beginning of a process that is subject to continuing updates and revisions as results are achieved, new opportunities are uncovered, and the mission of the Continuum is accomplished.

### *IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF MADISON'S TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

Madison County has developed plans to develop, produce, market and distribute a community video focusing on the basics of financial literacy with a post-screening evaluation tool demonstrating a newly learned skill set. The video will present the hazards of predatory lending businesses in the form of rent-to-own establishments, payday check cashing stores, refund application loans as well as the advantages to having checking and savings

# MADISON County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

accounts, reviewing a credit report, budgeting and managing money. A reference for personal consultation will also be made for additional information or counseling.

The video will be required viewing for clients applying for emergency assistance and a post viewing test must be completed for determining effectiveness of their learning experience and for providing results of the program.

MADISON COUNTY HOUSING COALITION

CONTACT INFORMATION:

JIM CESA, [jwcesa@caodmu.org](mailto:jwcesa@caodmu.org)

### MADISON COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	465.2	Without High School Diploma:	21%
2006 Population:	41,496	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	13.1%
Population Density in Square Miles:	89.20	Median Monthly Rent as % of Income:	22.3%
Median Household Income:	\$44,212	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	21.4%
Percent Minority:	8.7%	Average Year Housing Built:	1969
Poverty Rate:	7.9%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$104,300
Unemployment Rate:	5.2%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

<sup>+</sup> Taken from [www.co.madison.oh.us](http://www.co.madison.oh.us)

<sup>\*</sup> Taken from *Madison County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness*

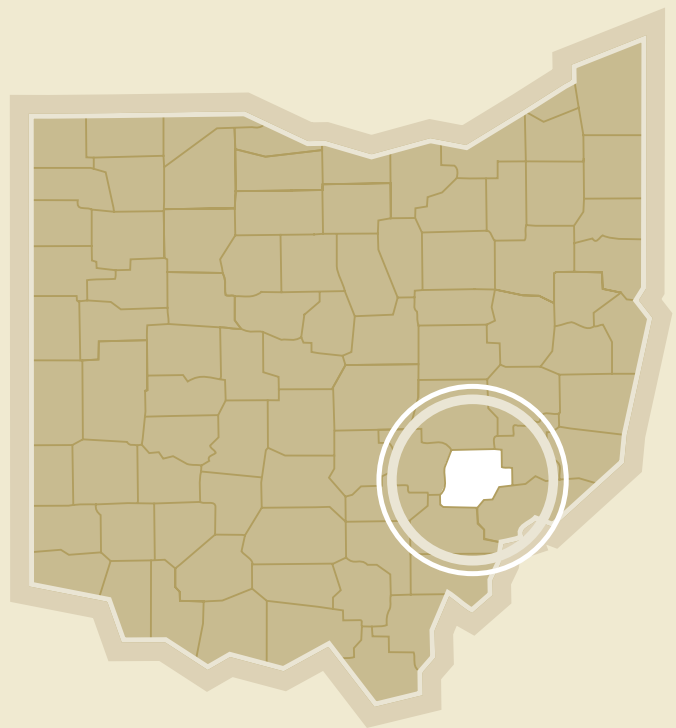
<sup>\*\*</sup> Taken from *Madison County's proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations*

# MORGAN *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

RHISCO partners in Morgan County count themselves among the coalitions that have sprung up as a result of participation in the project. A few individuals in the county had just started discussions about homelessness when the RHISCO Project began. Representatives in Morgan County have attributed the current level of awareness of housing issues in the county to their engagement in the project. Through their participation, the County has started to organize its Continuum of Care. Although collaboration is just beginning relative to housing and homelessness, the key players are at the table: public housing, behavioral health, the faith-based community, and others. A county commissioner spearheaded Morgan's participation in the RHISCO Project and, while this particular commissioner is no longer active in the project, others have stepped in to take part. Engaging county leadership will be ongoing work in Morgan County and this is a goal of the County's ten year plan. Other goals include increasing funding for prevention services and affordable housing, developing a

homeless prevention program for families with children, and increasing the understanding and public awareness of the homeless population. Morgan's proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations describes a plan for coalition building and includes the development of a program operator for referrals, who will also facilitate coordination of provider services. Morgan County will be partnering with neighboring Washington County on this project and should benefit from its collaboration with a more established Continuum of Care. Morgan County will be further developing its coalition in the coming months.



### **MORGAN COUNTY IN BRIEF\***

Morgan County's population has not seen substantial growth for decades. County unemployment levels are usually among the highest in the State of Ohio. Due in part to external policies and economic changes, Morgan County lost several hundred mining jobs and several hundred manufacturing jobs over the last several years. As with most areas that have experienced major shifts in their economic base, the loss of these jobs has had a domino effect on all businesses in the area. Furthermore, unlike any other county in Ohio, Morgan County lacks any four lane roads. With this disadvantaged infrastructure in mind, it is not surprising that the neighboring counties to the north and south of Morgan County have absorbed the majority of the economic growth in the commercial, medical, and other service-based sectors. These economic factors have played a key role in the resulting lack of resources available to pay for housing in Morgan County.

### **MORGAN COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\***

*A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING  
THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION*

#### **COORDINATION**

Morgan County's plan includes objectives for establishing a homeless services resource guide and referral system, creating a centralized one-stop service center, developing a website, and participating in HMIS.

#### **PREVENTION**

Morgan County's prevention goals are two-fold. They plan to increase funding for additional prevention services during 2007 and to engage the community in discussing potential improvements to existing prevention activities and services in the county.

#### **RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION**

Morgan County's Continuum of Care conducted its first countywide point in time survey on January 26, 2007. For this survey the Continuum counted not only homeless people but also people who were at risk of homelessness due to a variety of factors. Using this definition, 101 single adults, 107 adults in families, and 41 children were counted as homeless or at-risk.

#### **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Morgan County's housing plans are in the beginning stages of development. They cite a need to identify target populations for permanent housing and to identify possible

housing developers and potential housing sites or locations.

*IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WASHINGTON COUNTY, IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF MORGAN'S TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

The Washington/Morgan Coalition seeks to further develop the Coalition, launch essential homelessness prevention services in Washington County, and develop services in Morgan County. Both communities will focus on homeless families with children and homeless victims of substance abuse and mental illness. Services for families will be aimed at the development of skills to become self-supporting. Such services include short-term housing supports and family mentoring and training. Life skills training will help families gain access to health care and childcare, career development, and employment through community-based resources.

*HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN MORGAN COUNTY\**

During the process of developing the county's ten-year plan to end homelessness, Morgan County's Continuum of Care was formed and met frequently. The community has several providers that deliver essential but limited services to homeless families and individuals. The leadership in the Morgan County Continuum represents a core group of caring individuals representing those providers.

It is essential for planners, funders, and other stakeholders to understand the rural practice of stretching resources and personnel to assimilate service models that are mandated by funders and regulators. Every member of the Morgan County Continuum of Care, including each volunteer, is a leader with a number of other work and community responsibilities.

MORGAN COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE CONTACT INFORMATION:

JIM BAKER, [jbaker@wmcap.org](mailto:jbaker@wmcap.org)

# MORGAN County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### MORGAN COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	417.7	Without High School Diploma:	19.4%
2006 Population:	14,821	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	9%
Population Density in Square Miles:	35.48	Median Rent as % of Income:	23.8%
Median Household Income:	\$28,868	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	18.8%
Percent Minority:	6.2%	Average Year Housing Built:	1965
Poverty Rate	18.4%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$66,800
Unemployment Rate:	9.1%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

\* Taken from Morgan County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness and interview with RHISCO Contact from Morgan County

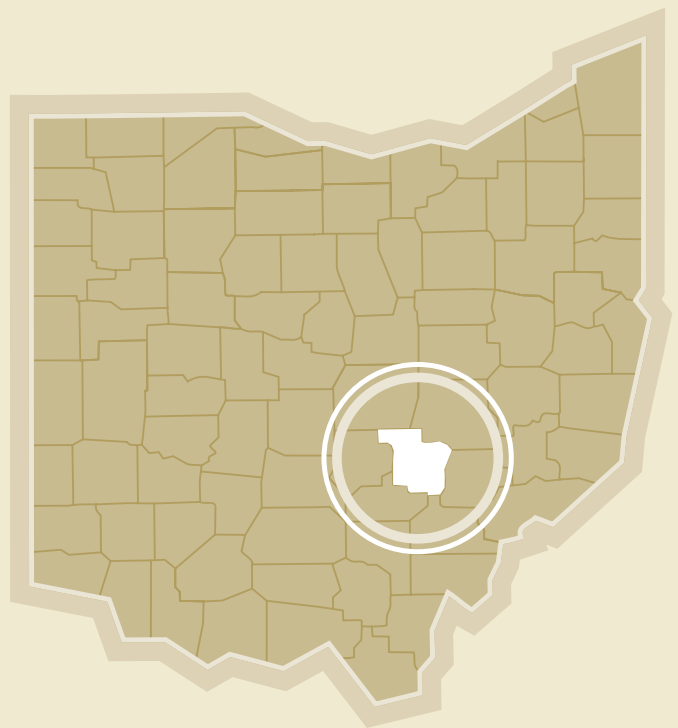
\*\*Taken from Morgan County's proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations

# PERRY *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

By all accounts, the RHISCO Project was the primary motivator to develop a housing coalition in Perry County. Prior to the project, little was known about the extent of homelessness and housing needs in the county but the County has made significant progress since the Project's inception. As the planning year started, Perry County's housing coalition began to develop on the foundation of the Family and Children First Council. From this group, Perry County has started a steering committee, which has been meeting regularly throughout the year to discuss homelessness planning. For their ten-year plan, the Perry County Housing Coalition identified data collection and substandard housing as critical priorities in their community. The group has developed a project proposal that includes plans for a comprehensive needs and assets assessment, coalition building, and the creation of a directory of housing resources for the community. The needs assessment will establish baseline information about housing and homeless needs and resources in the county and

will create a data collection process to be used in future projects. The process will also prime the county to conduct point in time counts on an annual basis. The work that the County has completed since the inception of RHISCO suggests a productive future for this burgeoning coalition.



### PERRY COUNTY IN BRIEF+

Perry County, one of many Appalachian counties in the RHISCO Project, struggles with a high poverty rate and a dearth of jobs that pay a living wage. Many people with low incomes are forced to live in older, substandard, and unsafe housing, since that is what is available at prices that they can afford. Due to a lack of industrial and manufacturing jobs in the area, wages are depressed, and many low-income families and individuals utilize bulk fuels such as kerosene. However, Perry County does have some significantly important resources such as the Hocking-Athens-Perry Community Action, which helps to provide things like down payments as well as rent, utility, and mortgage assistance.

### PERRY COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\*

*A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING  
THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION*

#### COORDINATION

Perry County acknowledges no formal service coordination system in their community related to homelessness, though agencies in the county do share a strong collaboration in other areas. Strategies to improve coordination and collaboration for housing and homelessness

include hiring a housing services specialist to serve as a centralized point of contact for agency staff and at-risk individuals. Additionally, relationship building will continue within the county as well as on a regional level to improve coordination of existing services and plan for new services. More specifically, the County will seek to work more effectively with the housing authority.

#### PREVENTION

Perry County plans to reduce the number of evictions and foreclosures by establishing an emergency funding pool to provide assistance to residents facing these scenarios. They aim to see a 10% reduction in the number of evictions and foreclosures within three years. Specifically, the county is looking at using TANF funds for persons and families threatened with evictions or foreclosures.

#### RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

The Perry Housing Coalition (PHC) is currently developing a data collection plan for implementation. The PHC intends to gather information on persons who are currently homeless and persons who are at-risk of becoming homeless. The group is currently developing an instrument for service providers

to utilize, as well as a form that clients can complete at the time of intake to gather data regarding homelessness. The PHC also plans to do an in-depth review of local resources (including the identification of existing subsidized housing options, groups for which they are available, occupancy rates, and length of waiting lists) to address the problem of homelessness in Perry County. The PHC identifies the state of their data collection efforts as a work in progress.

### *AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

Perry County would like to see a 25% increase in the number of subsidized housing units in their county and plans to establish a strategy and planning committee to explore how they will go about this.

### *IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF PERRY'S TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

The community-based strategy to identify the housing needs and resources in Perry County represents a plan to expand knowledge, educate the community, and broaden the base of participation in the work of the Perry Housing Coalition (PHC). They will do this through the development and implementation of a multi-faceted housing and homelessness needs

assessment. They hope to identify not only the housing needs and resources, but also the gaps in services and barriers to accessing existing services in order to provide an overall picture of the current state of housing and homelessness in Perry county and to create an information base for future planning.

### *HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN PERRY COUNTY\**

The lack of safe, decent, and affordable housing, good jobs, water, and public transportation has caused significant economic needs within the county. The impact of generational poverty in this rural community has sustained a sense of hopelessness.

The Perry Housing Coalition started in April 2006, after a meeting with local representatives of the Family and Children First Council and the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations to discuss the on-going and often hidden issues of substandard housing and homelessness in the county.

Coalition members have begun discussions about bridge building, developing partnerships, and researching innovative programs and services both locally and nationally. They have

# PERRY County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

come to appreciate their many strengths and realize that although there is yet much to do, this community has the dedication and willingness to work towards positive change in housing efforts for all who choose to live in Perry County.

### PERRY HOUSING COALITION CONTACT INFORMATION:

PATTI SMITH, [confidentialjustice@yahoo.com](mailto:confidentialjustice@yahoo.com)

### PERRY COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	410	Without High School Diploma:	21.1%
2006 Population:	35,313	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	4.5%
Population Density in Square Miles:	86.13	Median Rent as % of Income:	20.9%
Median Household Income:	\$34,383	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	19.2%
Percent Minority:	1.8%	Average Year Housing Built:	1964
Poverty Rate:	11.8%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$72,500
Unemployment Rate:	7.4%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

+ Taken from ODOD Office of Research website

\* Taken from Perry County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness

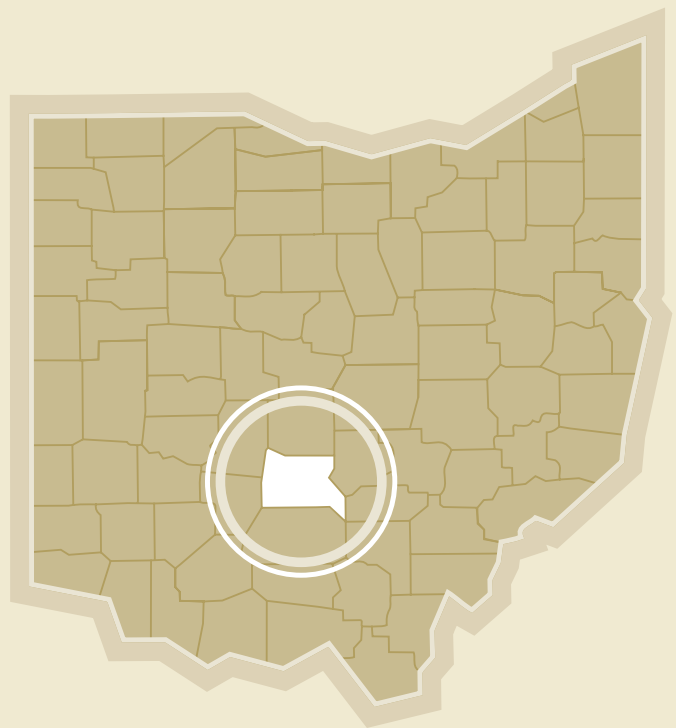
\*\*Taken from Perry County's proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations

# PICKAWAY *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

The Pickaway County Continuum of Care has existed since 1997 but participation and momentum were boosted significantly by the HUD Continuum grant funding in 1997. At the beginning of the RHISCO Project, the coalition had around 30 members and that number has held steady throughout the project. Three agencies have been providing leadership but the group has enjoyed healthy participation and cooperation from others in the community as they have developed their plan. The mayor of the county's largest town, the assistant editor from the local newspaper, and management from service agencies are all active participants in the Continuum's activities. Pickaway has developed a strong ten year plan to end homelessness with clear objectives. The Continuum has identified ten goals for this plan, including creating new permanent housing for chronically homeless persons, ensuring that the Continuum has a functioning HMIS system, and building collaborations with area services. The group has developed specific outcome measures that they would like to achieve over the course of the next ten years. Pickaway has developed a proposal for the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations that includes funding for a Homeless Housing Coordinator position to coordinate housing and mainstream services for homeless persons and families as well as those who are at-risk. This person will be providing intensive case management services, assisting

homeless persons with securing permanent housing, and assisting at-risk persons in maintaining their housing status through landlord dispute resolution and assistance with past due rent. The proposal also includes a plan to use the Foundations' funds as a match for an Ohio Housing Trust Fund grant to repair housing units and to prevent future homelessness for the people living in these units. Pickaway County is clearly ready to move forward with implementation of its plan. The County's proposed activities are accompanied by goals that are achievable for a county with Pickaway's experience and capacity.



# PICKAWAY *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### PICKAWAY COUNTY IN BRIEF\*

In recent years, Pickaway County has experienced the devastating loss of several major manufacturers. The resulting loss of jobs and income created a domino effect that hurt the entire economy of the area. The subsequent move to a service-based economy has left many in the county with lower wages and fewer resources with which to survive. With the average income of families and individuals in Pickaway County dropping, housing in the area is becoming increasingly unaffordable. Transitional housing in Pickaway County is sparse, and many people double-up with friends and family in the existing subsidized housing in the area. Pickaway County faces many challenges in regard to ending homelessness, but dedicated professionals in the area are rising to the occasion.

### PICKAWAY COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\*

#### *A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION*

#### *COORDINATION*

Pickaway County has strong collaboration components in their plan, including goals to collaborate with city and county government to

further economic development as a prevention strategy, to build community will and strengthen collaborations, and to develop and implement a memorandum of understanding (M.O.U.) to clarify responsibilities of Continuum of Care agencies. This M.O.U. will detail the commitment of resources and the procedure for client follow-up of services provided in order to formalize this relationship. The Pickaway County Continuum of Care also describes goals of assisting people with obtaining and maintaining mainstream services, and specifically with several niche agencies. They plan to appoint a representative to liaison between the courts, prison release officials, and parole officers; to invite government, law enforcement, and the Ministerial Association to quarterly meetings of the Continuum; to draft M.O.U.s with local mental health agencies to provide additional support to agencies providing supportive services to those homeless with mental illness; and to appoint a representative to liaison between the Continuum and educators and employers. These objectives will be strengthened by Pickaway County's goal of collaboration to seek funding with faith-based groups and by working toward prioritizing the Shelter Plus Care vouchers for those individuals who are chronically homeless.

# PICKAWAY County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### *PREVENTION*

In Pickaway County, Continuum members believe that there are too many restrictions on existing prevention grants and are seeking funding to assist individuals and families prior to crisis. They also plan to seek funding that assists low-to moderate-income households in paying for rent and mortgage on a regular monthly basis to enable permanent housing. Pickaway County sees economic development as a prevention strategy and will be working with city and county government to further development efforts. The group also sees transportation assistance as a prevention measure. Finally, Pickaway would like to offer budgeting to help households stretch funds in order to make home or rental payments.

### *RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION*

The Pickaway County Continuum of Care employed a physical count of homeless individuals in public places. The Continuum also conducted an interview and survey of each unsheltered homeless person found during the count period. In order to complete the point-in-time count, the Continuum gathered and trained volunteers who were service providers, community volunteers, media volunteers, and members of law enforcement. In the future, the Continuum plans to recruit more individuals who have experienced homelessness in order to enhance their ability to locate areas where

homeless people reside and identify the number of homeless individuals in Pickaway County more effectively. In the 2007 count, the county identified six persons as homeless and unsheltered. They counted 38 homeless adults and 49 homeless children who were sheltered.

### *AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

Pickaway County is planning to end chronic homelessness and to move families and individuals into permanent housing. In ten years, they plan to create 15 new permanent housing beds for chronically homeless persons and their plan lists basic action steps to achieve this objective.

### *IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF PICKAWAY'S TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

To prevent and end homelessness in Pickaway County, the Continuum proposes to develop a Homeless Outreach and Assistance Center to serve as a single access location for all persons experiencing homelessness in the community. Many homeless persons have mental or physical disabilities that create barriers for them when seeking assistance with housing and services. This single access location can provide a centralized intake process that will minimize the need for people to travel from one agency to another to connect to the programs and services

# PICKAWAY *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

that will help them secure and maintain permanent housing, be connected to mainstream programs and services, and increase independent living skills.

### *HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN PICKAWAY COUNTY\**

In 2001, the County formed the Pickaway County Continuum of Care to bring together service providers that specifically address the needs of the homeless population. The Continuum identified the current resources available to the homeless and the agencies that provide those resources. The group also identified gaps in services and what must be done to fill those gaps. There are many reasons that people become homeless and the combination of factors that leads to homelessness is different for every person.

The Pickaway County Continuum has worked diligently to build strong collaborations with all agencies, community groups and the faith-based community. To end homelessness in Pickaway

County, these resources need to be combined to provide more supportive housing options with intensive case management to serve chronically homeless individuals and families. Public transportation needs to be expanded to serve those working jobs after normal business hours and weekends.

Pickaway County homeless people are not unlike those in most rural areas. Many are families living in shelters, in cars, in motels, at the local parks when it is warm enough, and in other unstable situations.

There are many contributing factors to homelessness and each family and/or individual has a story to tell. The Pickaway County Continuum believes that everyone deserves to have a warm place to call home.

### PICKAWAY COUNTY HOUSING COALITION CONTACT INFORMATION:

BECKY HAMMOND, [bhammond@piccainfo.org](mailto:bhammond@piccainfo.org)

# PICKAWAY County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### PICKAWAY COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	502.2	Without High School Diploma:	22.8%
2006 Population:	53,606	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	11.4%
Population Density in Square Miles:	106.74	Median Rent as % of Income:	24%
Median Household Income:	\$42,832	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	20.7%
Percent Minority:	8.3%	Average Year Housing Built:	1970
Poverty Rate:	9.6%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$112,400
Unemployment Rate:	5.8%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

\* Taken from *Pickaway County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness*, and interview with RHISCO contact

\*\*Taken from *Pickaway County's proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations*

# ROSS County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

In Ross County, the Continuum of Care had been meeting for about two years prior to the RHISCO Project. Composed of around 20 members from a variety of community agencies as well as volunteers, the group has had leadership provided by a local domestic violence agency throughout the planning process. According to the Ross County Community Housing Improvement Strategy (CHIS), affordable housing is a critical issue across the county. Through CHIS funding, home repair and rehabilitation are available for income-eligible applicants. An emergency shelter and transitional housing facility had been providing 15 beds for families and single adults but was forced to close its doors in the summer of 2007. Since its closure, the county's Community Action Agency has been providing emergency shelter beds to single men and a domestic violence shelter has made beds available to homeless single women and mothers with children. A number of faith-based organizations provide a limited number of hotel vouchers and the Department of Veterans Affairs offers homeless services to veterans. The County's ten year plan to end homelessness prioritizes improving data collection, improving and expanding emergency shelter facilities, expanding home repair efforts, increasing affordable housing options, increasing stakeholder and community involvement, and raising awareness of at-risk populations. Over the last year and a half, the Continuum of Care has experienced a great deal of transition. Agency representatives have come

and gone, including an individual who had provided much of the leadership through the planning process. The challenge of consistent involvement and leadership is ongoing in the coalition. In reflection of the work ahead and the challenges to be faced, the group submitted an implementation proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations. The strategies proposed include hiring a part-time staff person to coordinate the Continuum and the point in time counts. In addition, some of the funds will go toward a Continuum retreat to build capacity and a community forum to raise awareness of homelessness and housing issues and to garner support. Despite a number of challenges facing the county, the coalition is moving ahead with its ten year plan. It is a living document that can serve as a road map for ending homelessness in Ross County and the proposed activities will serve as a starting point.



### ROSS COUNTY IN BRIEF\*

Ross County is the second largest county in the state in area with most of the population concentrated within Chillicothe city limits. Chillicothe is a small city with some public services, but access to services for residents outside city limits is difficult due to distances and limited transportation opportunities.

Ross County is predominantly an Appalachian community with unique needs. Cultural norms make asking for help difficult for many. Often, residents experiencing housing crises stay with relatives or friends or go from household to household rather than seek assistance at a social service agency. Appalachian cultural values lead many to stay near family members in deprived areas rather than relocate to larger communities where jobs and other resources are more readily available.

### ROSS COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\*

#### A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION

#### COORDINATION

Ross County's plan speaks to the need to work toward better collaboration and generally to

getting more agencies involved in planning, which will help to foster collaboration.

#### PREVENTION

Ross County plans to address prevention through assisting the mission of their local shelter and by supporting the Continuum of Care application for funding of prevention activities. They will also explore new funding opportunities for prevention services.

#### RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

The Ross County Continuum conducted a point in time survey using a physical count in public places and an interview and survey of each unsheltered homeless person found during the count period. The Ross County Continuum also used administrative data to gather a more complete picture of how many individuals receiving social services were experiencing some form of homelessness. In order to conduct their point-in-time count, the Ross County Continuum trained volunteers from the community, service providers, and law enforcement. These individuals then did a physical count inside the City of Chillicothe as well as other known locations where people experiencing homelessness were known to reside. In the 2006 count, Ross counted 58 homeless adults and eight homeless children, all of whom met the HUD definition of homeless.

### *AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

Ross County's plan cites a significant need for rental subsidies, as evidenced by long waiting lists for both public housing units and Section 8 vouchers. It also cites a lack of supportive housing with wraparound services. Ross County does not have specific goals to meet these needs at this time. The group notes that they are continually seeking funding sources for housing solutions and all members of the Continuum are asked to "select a staff member to serve as the housing liaison to improve the rate of housing placement." Their plan cites a ten-year goal of seeing a 50% increase in affordable housing opportunities.

### *IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF ROSS' TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

The Ross County Continuum of Care will hire a staff person to build the coalition by identifying and inviting the participation of agencies and community members who are homeless or on the verge of becoming homeless. This staff person will also provide case management services, serve as the point of contact for homeless service providers, disseminate information to the community, and build awareness of housing and homelessness issues.

### *HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN ROSS COUNTY\**

The Ross County Continuum has a mission to end chronic homelessness in Ross County. The goals of the Continuum are: 1) to form collaborations between social service agencies, community services providers, businesses and faith-based groups to prevent homelessness; and 2) to find permanent housing solutions for those who are homeless.

According to the Ross County Community Housing Improvement Strategy (CHIS), affordability is a major housing challenge in Ross County. Agencies with membership on the Continuum collaborate to provide affordable homeownership in the City of Chillicothe and in the wider county. These agencies provide some measure of financial assistance to the low-to-moderate income population burdened by the high cost of housing.

### *ROSS COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE CONTACT INFORMATION:*

*JIM KENNELLY, [James.kennelly@med.va.gov](mailto:James.kennelly@med.va.gov)*

### ROSS COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	688.5	Without High School Diploma:	23.9%
2006 Population:	75,556	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	11.4%
Population Density in Square Miles:	109.74	Median Rent as % of Income:	22.2%
Median Household Income:	\$37,117	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	19.3%
Percent Minority:	8.5%	Average Year Housing Built:	1965
Poverty Rate:	12%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	87,000
Unemployment Rate:	6.2%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

\* Taken from Ross County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness

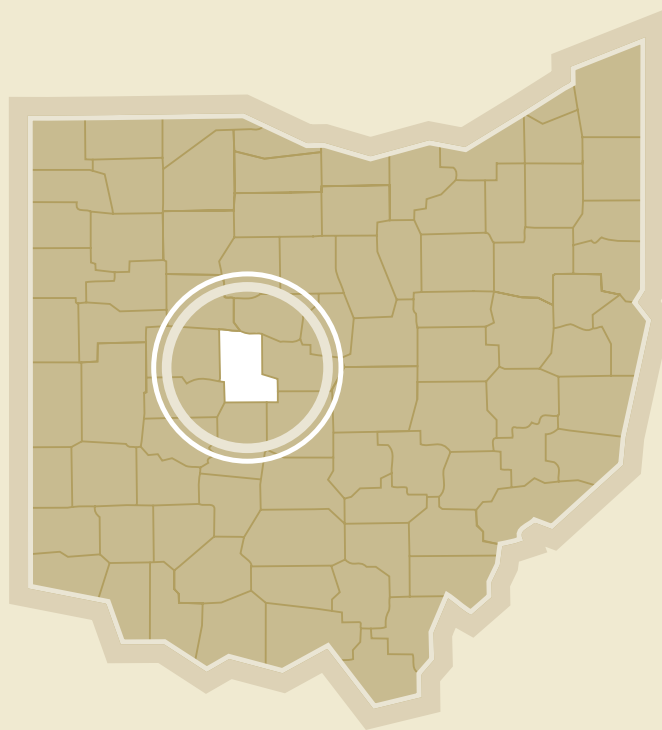
\*\*Taken from Ross County's proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations

# UNION *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

With a concern for the lack of affordable housing in Union County, the mental health board initiated the development of a housing coalition approximately six years ago with the assistance of the Coalition on Housing and Homelessness in Ohio (COHHIO) and the Ohio Department of Mental Health. At the beginning of the RHISCO Project, the group had many ideas and some good data, but little momentum. Coalition members reported feeling encouraged by their experience as the project began and have since cited RHISCO as a catalyst for growth and direction. The focus of the coalition has been on meeting the needs of mental health consumers and homeless people through supportive housing, direct housing and housing assistance. Several key collaborations have led to a single point of access for emergency housing needs. The County has also been working to raise awareness of homelessness and poverty beyond the social service and non-profit sector. Union County's ten year plan to end homelessness cited a need to increase housing stability and coordination, a goal shared by neighboring Delaware County. This led to the submission of a joint proposal for a new staff

position to coordinate both housing development and mainstream resources in the community. Through a "No Wrong Door" approach, persons and families with housing needs would be better served by existing services. Other objectives in the proposal include coordinated data collection efforts, mentoring services for formerly homeless persons and families, coordinated prevention activities, and increased awareness of homelessness. The Union County Affordable Housing Coalition is an established Continuum of Care and has existing capacity, resources, and experience.



# UNION *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### UNION COUNTY IN BRIEF\*

Union County is a rural community located in central Ohio and is the third fastest growing county in the state. Census figures report Union County's 2005 population to be over 45,000 with expected annual growth to reach 50,736 in 2010. In 1982, Honda of America built its first automotive plant in Union County. Since that time the county has seen a steady growth in employment and average household wages. It has also seen a steady growth of various businesses that provide services to Honda. These businesses include trucking, automotive parts suppliers, and a host of service sector businesses, such as temporary labor pools. Surprisingly, the community did not experience the corresponding growth that was anticipated by many. New housing developments were slow in emerging. It has only been in the past 10 to 15 years that dramatic increases in housing have become evident.

### UNION COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\*

*A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING  
THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION*

### COORDINATION

Union County's extensive focus on collaboration and coordination begins with having a single point of contact and coordination via a new staff position. They hope to develop a multi-service center that can pull resources together, better coordinate efforts, and develop new resources. In looking at the network of social services, coordination for them means establishing a point of contact or liaison who will address issues that are related to the school system and will educate a broad cross-section of providers on available services. In planning, Union County will work to create opportunities for additional social service agencies to participate in the coalition's efforts, establishing specific meetings for the faith-based community and partnering in planning for public transportation. Finally, they will work with administrators and legislators to modify current regulations that negatively impact homeless people and service agencies.

### PREVENTION

Union County plans to work with housing lobbyists to encourage legislators' understanding of the need for more flexibility in grants and funding streams. They also will be developing additional funding streams to expand the work that the Salvation Army is doing to provide short-term prevention assistance to persons at-risk of homelessness.

### *RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION*

The Housing Coalition of Union County developed and utilized a survey to conduct a point in time count in January 2007. The Coalition collected a large variety of service providers, law enforcement, and church members and trained them on the use of the survey. Then the group designated one agency to track the data collection and chart the results. Using the HUD definition of homeless, 19 single adults were identified as homeless, along with 15 adults in families and 22 children. An additional 71 adults and 15 children were found to be at-risk of homelessness.

### *AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

Union County plans to create a range of affordable housing that is decent, safe, and located throughout [the] community. They will continue to seek opportunities to expand their supported housing program through HUD applications. Specifically, the County has plans to submit a Shelter Plus Care application and will look into the possibility of a Section 811 grant.

### *IN PARTNERSHIP WITH DELAWARE COUNTY, IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF UNION'S TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

The Housing Coalition of Union County, along with Delaware County seeks to work

collaboratively toward implementing the following four strategies/priorities:

- 1) coordination of housing development;
- 2) access to and coordination of mainstream resources through the No Wrong Door program;
- 3) coordinated and targeted data collection efforts and community capacity building efforts to increase awareness of homelessness;
- 4) coordinated mentoring services for formerly homeless persons and families.

The strategies will be undertaken by a Coalition staff person also responsible for the following activities:

- 1) facilitating joint and individual monthly meetings of both Union and Delaware County Continuums of Care and community stakeholders to begin implementation of project objectives; and
- 2) program outcome monitoring.

The Coalition in Union and Delaware Counties, in coordination with the proposed staff person, will positively impact the community in the following ways in the next three years:

- 1) increased community awareness on the issue of homelessness and its contributing factors, such as poverty and shortage of affordable housing;

- 2) increased coordination of resources and services, so that providers and homeless persons and families have access to needed information and services;
- 3) increased knowledge of the scope and service usage of homeless persons and families and those at-risk in our community as a result of improved data collection activities;
- 4) additional affordable housing units for persons at-risk and/or homeless; and
- 5) life skills and household management mentoring services available to formerly homeless individuals and families to assist them in maintaining housing stability.

### *HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN UNION COUNTY\**

An important part of Union County's success has stemmed from the fact that persons involved in housing programs, several who were homeless, are ongoing participants in the Coalition's development. They have helped to focus the Coalition on ways to identify the need for and development of a variety of safe, decent, and affordable housing and apartment units, including home ownership opportunities.

In 2004 the Union County Department of Job and Family Services asked the Salvation Army to manage their TANF funds, which were directed at preventing homelessness for families. In 2006 they were successful in obtaining a Housing Trust Fund grant that enabled them to increase their work and increase the number of families they could serve. The Salvation Army has begun to develop a single point of access for emergency housing needs, including homelessness. While this program is currently only able to address homelessness prevention, they do receive many referrals for homeless issues as well. Through their efforts, numerous churches that also provide emergency support services are coordinating their efforts with The Salvation Army. The Salvation Army program has become the key referral point for all other community organizations, such as the Department of Job and Family Services, the Veterans' Service Commission, churches, Community Action, and a consumer-operated recovery center.

UNION COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE CONTACT  
INFORMATION:

MIKE WITZKY, [witzky@bgh.org](mailto:witzky@bgh.org)

### UNION COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	436.7	Without High School Diploma:	14%
2006 Population:	46,702	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	15.9%
Population Density in Square Miles:	106.94	Median Rent as % of Income:	22.7%
Median Household Income:	\$51,743	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	20.8%
Percent Minority:	4.8%	Average Year Housing Built:	1973
Poverty Rate:	4.6%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$128,800
Unemployment Rate:	4.6%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

\* Taken from *Union County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness*

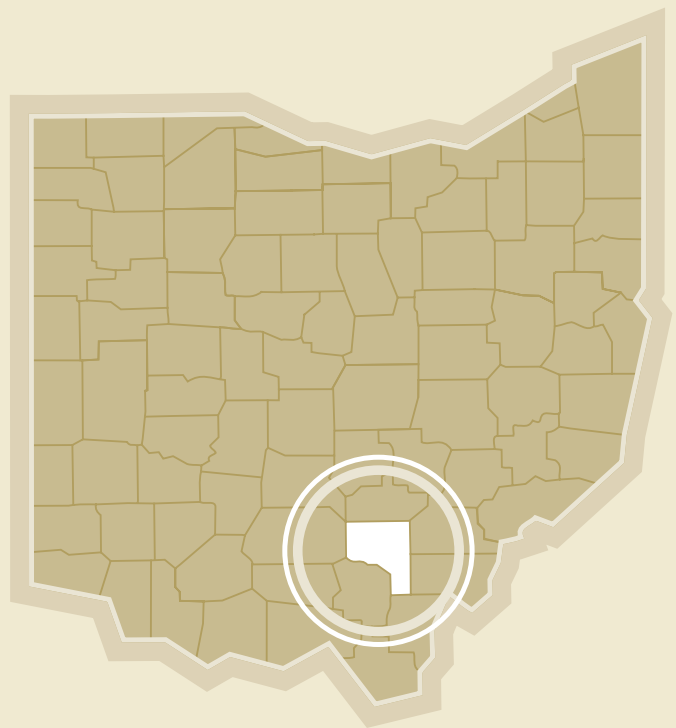
\*\*Taken from *Union County's proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations*

# VINTON *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

Through its participation in the RHISCO Project, Vinton County has been able to shore up community support for its homelessness and housing plans and projects. With support from the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations, the County developed a Continuum of Care and a coalition of providers began meeting on a regular basis. This group was led by the Vinton County Development Department and included leading providers in the community such as the Department of Jobs and Family Services, the Community Action Agency, and the Metropolitan Housing Authority. In the process of developing their ten year plan to end homelessness, a team from the coalition attended a technical assistance session on plan writing provided by the National Alliance to End Homelessness. Representatives from the county took part in regional planning and networking through participation in the RHISCO Summit and the statewide, annual conference of the Coalition on Housing and Homelessness in Ohio. The Continuum also hosted two community meetings designed to engage key stakeholders in a conversation about homelessness in the county. The group described the planning process, sought input for the plan, and invited

participation in its development. Following the stakeholders meetings, a number of committee meetings were held to discuss specific topics impacting the community, including infrastructure, transitional housing, and supportive services. These gatherings were well attended and participants lent expertise and insight from a variety of agencies and public offices. Vinton County made significant progress through the year of planning. The community is continuing to work on its ten year plan will be building on the foundation that has been developed.



# VINTON *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### VINTON COUNTY IN BRIEF

Vinton County, which is located midway between Chillicothe and Athens, is covered with vast forests (including the Zaleski State Forest) and is full of many beautiful views and covered bridges. As with many counties in Appalachian Ohio, Vinton County has a poverty rate that is consistently in the double digits and an unemployment rate that is significantly higher than the rest of the State of Ohio. Many of the residents who are employed in Vinton County work in the logging or coal industries, and a significant number of residents commute to Jackson, Wellston, Chillicothe, and Athens for adequate employment. The affordable housing stock in Vinton County is quite old, and is often so run down that it is not able to be repaired. Vinton County lacks many homelessness services and other resources. Although the county's residents are resourceful and resilient, they face significant challenges as they attempt to address the issue of homelessness in their area.

### HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN VINTON COUNTY

As a result of Vinton County's participation in the RHISCO Project, a coalition of providers led by the Vinton County Development Department, and including the Department of Jobs and

Family Services, the Community Action Agency, and the Metropolitan Housing Authority began meeting regularly. In the process of developing their ten year plan to end homelessness, a team from the county's housing coalition attended a technical assistance session provided by the National Alliance to End Homelessness. They also hosted two stakeholders meetings designed to describe the ten year planning process, to seek input, and to invite participation. Following the stakeholders meetings, a number of committee meetings were held on several topics, including infrastructure, transitional housing, and supportive services. The coalition is in the process of completing its county-level ten-year plan to end homelessness; for this reason, the county has not yet submitted a proposal for the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations.

### VINTON COUNTY CONTACT INFORMATION:

TERRI FETHEROLF, *dev.tfetherolf@co.vinton.oh.us*

# VINTON *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### VINTON COUNTY PROFILE

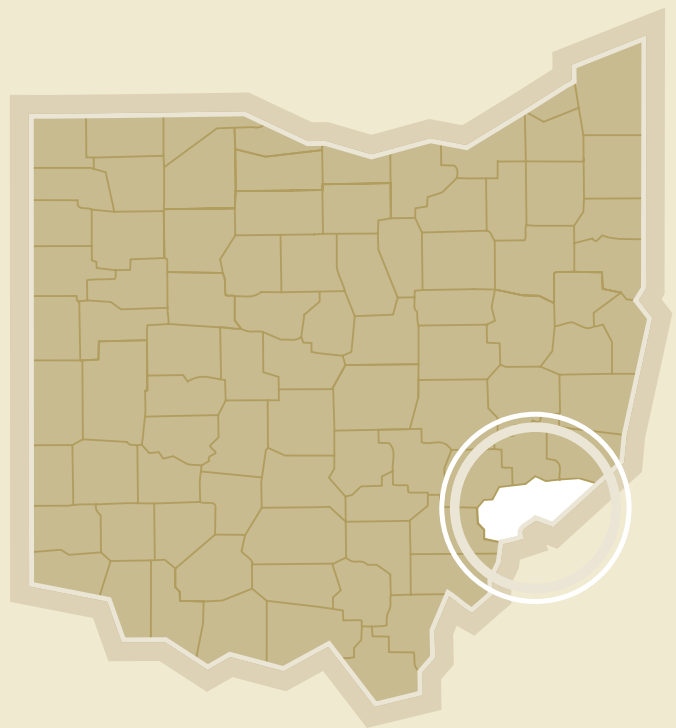
County Size in Square Miles:	414.1	Without High School Diploma:	29.3%
2006 Population:	13,519	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	3.9%
Population density in Square Miles:	32.6	Median Rent as % of Income:	26.7%
Median Household Income:	29,465	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	19.1%
Percent Minority:	2.5%	Average Year Housing Built:	1974
Poverty Rate:	20%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$64,400
Unemployment Rate:	7.9%		

# WASHINGTON *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

Washington County has had a Continuum of Care in place for nearly nine years, starting with a Shelter Plus Care project. While the group normally meets quarterly, gatherings have occurred monthly since the start of the RHISCO Project. Washington County's ten year plan to end homelessness emphasizes needed work with two subpopulations: single parent households and individuals suffering from chronic substance abuse; the County's plan includes goals to address both of these populations' needs. Washington has partnered with neighboring Morgan County to develop a viable proposal for the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations. The proposed project describes a plan for coordination of services through coalition building in each county. It also includes a program operator for referrals, who will also facilitate coordination of provider services. The Washington County Continuum has a reputation for advocacy and has earned the respect and

involvement of county leadership. This regard is evidenced by events such as the 2006 county stakeholders meeting at which the chief of police, a county commissioner, and other community leaders not previously engaged in community conversations about homelessness were in attendance. Washington County has an established Continuum of Care Committee with existing homelessness services and has done significant mentoring work with its neighbors.



# WASHINGTON *County*

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

### WASHINGTON COUNTY IN BRIEF\*

Washington County has a population of homeless people, many of whom seek service jobs and an array of community-based services. As with many counties participating in the RHISCO Project, Washington County has been significantly impacted by the loss of manufacturing jobs in the area. The ill effects of the loss of these jobs has been mitigated in part by county's relatively diverse economic base. Washington County is a regional banking center for Kentucky, West Virginia and Ohio served by Peoples Bancorp NA Marietta. The county also benefits from the presence of Marietta College, Washington State Community College, and the tourism industry that results from the community's history and its geographic location on the Ohio River. Washington County has also become a regional center for retail sales and the medical/healthcare industry. However, despite these strengths, Washington County has a high poverty rate relative to the state and national averages. Consequently, many families are struggling to pay for adequate housing.

### WASHINGTON COUNTY TEN-YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS\*

*A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OVERARCHING  
THEMES OF THE PROJECT REGION*

### COORDINATION

Washington County lists improved coordination among providers as a priority strategy. They will accomplish this by routinely discussing the actual experiences of providers and service delivery problems and discussing scenarios that would result in improved service delivery.

### PREVENTION

Washington County's prevention goals include advocacy for increased funding for rental assistance, discharge coordination with law enforcement, and payee programs for disabled consumers. The county also continues to support its home repair energy assistance programs as prevention measures.

### RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

Washington County's Continuum of Care conducted two point in time surveys in 2006. The first was conducted within the City of Marietta using HUD's definition of homelessness on April 24, 2006. Service providers were asked to keep count of the number of homeless persons who requested services that day. The second survey was conducted on June 5, 2006 and was countywide. For this survey the Continuum used an expanded definition of homelessness to include subpopulations that were not included in HUD's definition. A third point-in-time count

# WASHINGTON County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

was conducted in 2007; 43 single adults, 18 adults in families, and 8 children were identified as homeless. All of those identified in this count met the HUD definition of homeless.

### *AFFORDABLE HOUSING*

Washington County plans to develop a permanent housing strategy to assist low-income homebuyers with purchasing a home. They also note in their plan that they will assist housing developers in locating sites for additional affordable housing.

### *IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MORGAN COUNTY, IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES OF WASHINGTON'S TEN-YEAR PLAN HAVE BEEN PROPOSED AS FOLLOWS\*\*:*

Washington, along with partnering Morgan County, plans to further develop the joint coalition, launch essential homelessness prevention services in Washington County, and develop services in Morgan County. Both communities will focus on homeless families with children and homeless persons dealing with a substance abuse and mental illness. Washington County will utilize the experience of the domestic violence shelter to provide comprehensive services for homeless families that are referred from coalition members. Services for families will be aimed at the development of skills to become self-supporting.

Such services include short-term housing supports, family mentoring, and training. Life skills training will help families gain access to health care and childcare, career development, and employment through community-based resources.

### *HOMELESSNESS PLANNING IN WASHINGTON COUNTY\**

The Continuum of Care in Washington County has met regularly for nearly a decade. The group has supported housing for chronically mentally ill individuals, an emergency shelter for domestic violence victims, and a Shelter Plus Care project.

With the changes in the local economy, a growing number of families lack income and resources to pay for housing. The County has a consistent waiting list of 600-700 families requesting Section 8 tenant-based housing assistance.

The varied needs of homeless populations challenge small communities to provide services. An increase in the number of individuals suffering from substance abuse and the increase in the number of ex-offenders represents two subpopulations that are unheralded. Homelessness prevention providers in the county are fully engaged in a daily ritual of too many

# WASHINGTON County

## RURAL HOMELESS INITIATIVE OF SOUTHEAST AND CENTRAL OHIO:

homeless people and not enough resources. Planning is focused on improving effectiveness and efficiency and expansion of services to serve high-priority populations.

WASHINGTON COUNTY HOUSING COALITION

CONTACT INFORMATION:

JIM BAKER, [jbaker@wmcap.org](mailto:jbaker@wmcap.org)

### WASHINGTON COUNTY PROFILE<sup>‡</sup>

County Size in Square Miles:	635.2	Without High School Diploma:	15.5%
2004 Population:	61,687	Bachelor's Degree or Higher:	15.1%
Population Density in Square Miles:	97.11	Median Rent as % of Income:	23.7%
Median Household Income:	\$37,275	Median Monthly Mortgage as % of Income:	19%
Percent Minority:	3.2%	Average Year Housing Built:	1967
Poverty Rate:	11.4%	Average Value of a Housing Unit:	\$80,400
Unemployment Rate:	5.3%		

<sup>‡</sup> Taken from [www.odod.state.oh.us/research](http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research)

\* Taken from Washington County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness and interview with the RHISCO contact from Washington County

\*\*Taken from Washington County's proposal to the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations

# APPENDIX

[http://www.endhomelessness.org/section/tools/rhisco/\\_appendix](http://www.endhomelessness.org/section/tools/rhisco/_appendix)



## *TEN YEAR PLANS TO END HOMELESSNESS – RHISCO COUNTIES*

Each County in the RHISCO region created and is now implementing its own ten year plan to end homelessness.

## *STAKEHOLDER SURVEY REPORT*

This document is a summary of a stakeholder survey, which was emailed at the beginning of the RHISCO Project to approximately 150 community stakeholders of the seventeen participating counties. The survey was designed to capture the residents' opinions of homelessness in their region.

## *TEN YEAR PLAN TEMPLATE*

This document served as a template as RHISCO Counties created their ten year plans to end homelessness. Other communities can look to this document for suggestions on creating their own local ten year plans.

## *HOMELESS SURVEY INSTRUCTIONS*

This document outlines the various options for administering a homeless survey.

## *RHISCO FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES*

This document highlights the different funding opportunities – including from foundations, corporations, and the federal government – that were available to the RHISCO Counties and to other rural communities working to end homelessness.

# APPENDIX

*Continued*



## *SURVEY OF RHISCO COUNTIES*

This document provides a survey of the seventeen different counties participating in the RHISCO Project. It also provides a summary of the Project.

## *REGIONAL THEMES AND STRATEGIES*

This extensive document outlines the major regional themes of the RHISCO Project – emergency prevention, systems prevention, outreach, shorten homelessness, rapid re-housing, services, permanent housing, income, and implementing the plan – and identifies particular strategies that relate to each theme. It then assesses the extent to which each County’s plan includes those strategies.

## *PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS*

This document provides recommendations for how to create a ten year plan to end homelessness and identifies different communities that have successfully incorporated particular elements of a ten year plan.

## *PLANNING WORKSHEET*

RHISCO County partners used this worksheet to guide their planning process. This tool would be useful for any community looking to create a ten year plan to end homelessness.



[www.osteopathicheritage.org](http://www.osteopathicheritage.org)



[www.endhomelessness.org](http://www.endhomelessness.org)