

Preliminary HPRP Plan

This plan for \$6,594,081 in Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing (HPRP) funds is not the City of Buffalo's plan but a collaborative effort on the part over 50 agencies that provide homeless and/or housing services in Western New York, the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority, the County of Erie and the Town of Tonawanda.

The Goals of the Plan:

1. Develop the infrastructure to administer this large influx of funds in order to ensure complete compliance with the federal regulations including the timely expenditure of funds, data collection and reporting requirements.
2. Maximize the delivery of services to the clients with a rapid response to their needs with the appropriate follow up services so once the clients find housing they remain in a stable living environment.
3. Use these funds to prevent homelessness, find housing for those who are already homeless and set up a system that is sustainable to address future needs beyond the recession.

THIS IS NOT A FINAL PLAN. We have laid out broad parameters to serve as a guide. Once the sub-grantees are selected they and other stakeholders will be charged with the task of continuously revising and expanding upon this plan, and fill in the details. A policies and procedures manual will then be developed so the program guidelines are clear to everyone. In order to make this program a success there must be flexibility built into the plan in order to adjust to changing needs of clients or unforeseen circumstances.

The **most discussed detail** that must still be addressed is the exact process for clients to gain entry into the system. This is one of the most important tasks facing the committee that will develop the policies and procedures in compliance with HPRP regulations. This plan only serves as a guideline for further discussions.

Statement of Needs

According to the Spring 2008 Buffalo and Erie County Annual Homelessness Profile prepared by the Homeless Alliance of Western New York and statistics provided by other service agencies, there are approximately 5,447 potential clients per year that may qualify for the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing funds. The three- year number of potential clients is over 16,000 households. Preliminary estimates show that we may be able to service 825 households per year or a total 2,474 over the course of the 3-year grant time limit dependent upon the amount of assistance allocated to each client.

	Per Year	3 Years
Individuals in Shelters	2,071	6,213
Families in Shelters	318	954
Transitional Housing	358	1,074
Street Homeless	200	600
Parolees	500	1,500
Evicted in Housing Court	1,300	3,900
Tax Foreclosures	700	2,100
Potential Clients	5,447	16,341

These estimates are probably low. They are based upon 2007 statistics and every indication is that the incidence of homelessness has increased during the recession. These figures also do not include the number of prisoners who are discharged and not under parole supervision.

The first observation is that we cannot help everyone with the HPRP funds. The largest question becomes how do we focus our funds to have the greatest impact upon those who are homeless and preventing people from becoming homeless?

This will have to be resolved by the sub-grantee and stakeholders committee.

The HUD regulations determining the use of these funds states:

The main goal of the legislation is to “provide temporary financial assistance and housing relocation and stabilization services to individuals and families who are homeless or would be homeless but for this assistance.”

Gaps in Service

95 % of housing in the City of Buffalo was built before 1978 with the median year being 1939. There are currently 28,690 vacant properties in the City of Buffalo. Conditions such as low value and the poor physical condition of housing units make it difficult to maintain these homes, which leaves many of these housing units in disrepair and, in some cases, the units will be or have been demolished.

For families with children under the age of 6, there is a severe challenge to find housing that is safe from the risks of lead paint. The City of Buffalo has three of the five highest zip codes areas with Elevated Blood Lead Level in New York State. New York State Department of Health (2003-2004) figures show approximately 700 children in our target area of the City of Buffalo tested with an Elevated Blood Lead Level. Although the City of Buffalo, through its various

programs, continues to address lead hazards and EBLL, lead poisoning remains a consistent health threat to the optimal well being of our young children.

There is a great need for lead safe, affordable, livable housing. While the City of Buffalo has an abundance of vacant housing units, there is a lack of decent, affordable, safe and sustainable housing for those facing homelessness. This gap is magnified for those living in poverty, and facing mental health and/or substance abuse issues.

Locating housing that meets HUD's Housing Quality Standards and lead based paint requirements will be a challenge.

There is a need for employment that provides a living wage and job training to assist individuals and heads of household to exit the cycle of poverty that is the root cause of homelessness. Case management that follows a client through the homeless system would help to establish the networks and support systems needed to move towards self-sufficiency. Substance abuse and mental health care providers are overburdened and can result in delays in service.

In most discussions surrounding homelessness and poverty, the need for transportation is always raised. Clients need transportation assistance to travel to job interviews, work or to locate housing.

Outreach

In order to reach as many individuals and families in need, workshops will be held at community centers throughout the city, and literature describing this program will be developed and widely distributed to churches, soup kitchens, block clubs, community center, courts, agencies, etc. Street outreach to the homeless living in conditions not meant for human habitation will also be conducted. The selected sub-grantees along with members of the WNY Coalition for the Homeless and Homeless Alliance of WNY will develop these workshops, the informative literature and web based information services. These efforts will be coordinated with the agency selected to serve as the prime referral source for prevention activities for those not accessing the system through Housing Court or the Department of Social Services. A centralized list of available apartments needs to be compiled to assist in the housing search efforts.

The need exists for all outreach efforts to be culturally compatible and translated in order to meet the needs of our diverse community.

Rapid Re-housing/Diversion

Case Managers would work to identify those clients that would most likely achieve stable housing within 18 months through a rapid re-housing program or diversion from entering emergency shelters or limiting their stay at shelters. The

10 Year Plan to End Homelessness strongly endorses a continuous case management model for clients.

Continuous Case Management Model

The continuous case management (CCM) model will be implemented in this plan. The concept of this model is that one case manager coordinates all services, including services from specialized case managers such as those with developmental disabilities, and navigates the client through a myriad of support systems (often fragmented) to ensure optimum utilization of those services. There are a number of benefits in using the CCM as opposed to other models of case management. One is that the CCM will stay with the individual/family ensuring that they don't get lost in the systems or fall between the cracks. Other benefits include advocacy for entitlements, housing subsidies, utility negotiations, securing Earned Income Tax Credits, etc. Additionally, due to the longer-term nature of the CCM there is an opportunity to develop a deeper relationship with the individual or family perhaps gaining insight into other areas of need that may hinder housing stability. The model has been endorsed as part of the Buffalo and Erie County 10 year plan to end homelessness (PRISM Project).

The WNY Coalition for the Homeless Outreach Committee meets monthly to coordinate outreach efforts throughout the city and will play an instrumental role in monitoring on-going outreach efforts of this program. As a recommendation from this committee, one case manager will be assigned to Housing Court. Their job will be to coordinate the necessary services that will assist individuals facing eviction by either averting the eviction or rapidly re-housing the individual/family.

Housing Stabilization Plan

In the initial engagement stage, often the crisis stage, the CCM does a thorough assessment of immediate needs and along with the individual or family develops the framework for a Housing Stabilization Plan (HSP). This plan may include short-term or medium-term financial assistance, as defined by HPRP regulations, to avert an eviction, assist in rapid re-housing or help pay a utility bill, etc. The HSP may include referrals to agencies that will help with securing employment, credit counseling, addressing medical, developmental disabilities, mental health or substance addiction issue – or whatever other services are needed in order to maintain housing stability.

The HSP will be a living plan that may be modified as needed with the approval of both the client and the CCM. The clients will be responsible for following through with agreed upon activities in order to secure additional financial assistance. As part of the HSP, all financial resources will be explored. This includes the client applying for all subsidies: Section 8, Moderate Rehabilitation units, apartments with project-based subsidies, etc.

The HSP will be evaluated on a quarterly basis and will tie directly with the re-certification of financial assistance.

Prevention

The main entry point for homeless prevention will be the City of Buffalo's Housing Court where landlords bring tenants to court to force eviction. The City of Buffalo provides Neighborhood Legal Services funds through the Emergency Shelter Grant program to have legal staff represent clients in housing court 2 days per week. The Volunteer Lawyers Project through the Erie County Bar Association represents clients 3 days per week. Approximately 2,000 clients are represented each year between both agencies. Through their efforts approximately 700 people were saved from eviction through existing resources. Another 1,300 people either had their eviction delayed or were evicted.

Each year, 3,700 properties face potential tax foreclosure for non-payment of City of Buffalo taxes and fees. An additional, 300 clients can be prevented from losing their homes if legal assistance is provided.

This plan would have a Case Manager available in City Court to assist the clients in their housing options and to do an initial intake and assessment of needs and make needed referrals. The Case Manager could also work with the Department of Social Services in the afternoons.

Those needing prevention services may also enter the system through one of several "hot lines" available such as those provided by Crisis Services, Central Referral and the Mayor's Complaint line. One agency will be selected as the main referral source to the Central Finance Agency (CFA). Existing agencies in the City of Buffalo already provide homeless prevention services and those services will be utilized to the greatest extent possible. Additional staff may be necessary to augment these services. The goal would be to keep these services as centralized as possible so there would be one entry point into the system for those calling one of the existing hotlines or other referral sources.

Each client accessing the system will have at least an initial consultation with a case manager to assess the circumstances that caused the entry into the program and make the necessary referrals for other services and provide the client with possible Continuous Case Management.

Housing Location

The statistics noted in the Gaps in Service indicate there is a great need for safe, affordable, livable housing.

A database of rental units that complies with HUD's Housing Quality Standards and Lead Based Paint regulations must be compiled and maintained. The Rental Assistance Center and Belmont Shelter already have lists of Section 8 "friendly" units. These lists must be combined and other units must be added to the list including those built or renovated with Low Income Housing Tax Credits, HOME funds or other funding sources that offer rental subsidies. The waiting list for Section 8 vouchers is approximately 7 years so the waiting lists for other approved housing may be quite long. The plan calls for a centralized list of available apartment to be maintained by one agency. This would require establishing a database that is readily accessible to Continuous and Housing Case Mangers. A common application for apartments would also be utilized. The ideal plan would have the list of available apartments and application for housing to be accessible through the Internet.

Outreach to landlords would be conducted to inform them of this program and of the requirements for acceptable units. The City of Buffalo requires all rental property to be licensed and maintains a Rental Registry that can be utilized for any outreach efforts. Other outreach efforts could be provided to landlord associations, real estate agents, landlords in City Court, etc.

Housing Counselors would work with the CCM's to identify housing, work on educating tenants on how to maintain tenancy (how to be a good tenant), educate landlords on the program and help to intercede in landlord/tenant issues.

Some landlords may be reluctant to rent to clients with a history of evictions or who are coming from a homeless situation. Some of the reluctance may be overcome with a guarantee of 3 months rents and/or the availability of a Case Manager to help intercede if concerns arise regarding the tenancy.

Housing Counselors may be working for centrally located agencies but will have to be available in various parts of the city in order to be accessible in the neighborhoods. The Housing Counselors will be part of the outreach efforts. Neighborhood community based housing organizations that the City funds through the CDBG program will be utilized as neighborhood referral sources for tenant and landlord location services and will work with the CCM's and Housing Counselors to assist clients.

The Rental Assistance Center and Belmont Shelter have offered to assist with the inspection of apartments in order to meet HQS and LBP requirements. They would conduct a limited number of inspections without charge. The City of Buffalo currently pays HomeFront Inc. and Belmont Shelter for the services of Reconstruction Analysts (RCA) through the CDBG program. These RCA services may be called upon to assist with housing inspections. However, if the need may arise for funds to be utilized for inspections, lead risk assessments and lead clearances.

There is a need to expand the pool of available, pre-inspected apartments to meet the needs of the HPRP clients.

Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority

The Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority is investigating the possibility of allowing the HPRP program to access housing vouchers for entry into the BMHA system. Another option may be to give HPRP clients added points on the application to assist them in locating housing.

Belmont Shelter, the Rental Assistance Corp. and BMHA would also consider a common application for entry into their systems.

Infrastructure/Managing the Rental Fund

A consensus of opinion suggests that having one Central Financial Agency (CFA) to manage the rental payments would be the best model to utilize. This model is used by the Emergency Food and Shelter Board (FEMA funded) to distribute and coordinate activities and will also be used in this program.

In all of the outreach sessions, service providers said repeatedly that the rapid availability of rental funds was the key to success for this program. Designating one agency to be fiscally responsible for the funds would allow for rental payments to be made within 24 - 48 hours. The agency will also be responsible for the input of data into HMIS which makes data collection streamlined, more accurate, ensure the timely filing of quarterly reports and will prevent the duplication of services in the program. Other agencies will be responsible for inputting follow up data into HMIS. The City will have only one source to go to for their reporting requirements rather than several. It will also ensure consolidated IDIS reporting and allow for a more flexible funding mechanism to respond to unforeseen trends in the use of funds once the program is operational.

There would be a Project Monitor assigned to the CFA that would review all applications for funding to ensure all the required documentation has been submitted including income verification, intake forms and assessments are filled out correctly, referral to Housing Case Managers, etc. The Project Monitor would have the authority to approve the payment of funds once the file has been completed. The Project Monitor's will submit each application to the "but for" test. An appeals process will be developed to respect the rights of the potential clients.

Once a Case Manager has submitted a file to the CFA, the file would be reviewed for Benefit Analysis to ensure the person is receiving or applying for all applicable housing, income entitlements (TANF, SSI, SSD) and others such as food stamps.

Only a Continuous Case Manager or a Prevention Case Manager/Housing Court Lawyer could access the CFA. This ensures an initial assessment has been done and the proper HMIS data has been collected.

Citizen Participation and Collaboration

The Homeless Alliance of WNY, the local Continuum of Care agency, has been consulted throughout the planning process and this plan is consistent with the goals of the Buffalo and Erie County 10-year Plan to End Homelessness (PRISM). The local FEMA program provider (American Red Cross) has also been consulted and has provided information that was used to model our Central Financial Agency. The County of Erie has participated in all of our planning sessions and may use the CFA model as part of their HPRP funds. The City and County are discussing the use of the same agency and collaborating on the selection of the CFA. The Town of Tonawanda has also been consulted and will be invited to be part of the RFP process. The AIDS Network has also been consulted as part of this process. Over 50 agencies have attended two working sessions and two public hearings on the drafting of this plan.

Coordination with other Stimulus Funds

The City of Buffalo will utilize neighborhood-housing agencies that we fund through the CDBG program as part of the housing location and landlord identification efforts. The Matt Urban Center also operates a weatherization program funded with state and federal funds. The Section 8 providers in Erie County, Belmont Shelter, Rental Assistance Center and the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority will also be consulted on the development of this list.

The City of Buffalo will also consult with the BMHA on the use of their capital funds and the availability of housing options for HPRP clients.

The City of Buffalo will provide of complete list of previously funded Low Income Housing Tax Credit, HOME, CDBG, HUD 202 and 811 rental projects that can be part of a potential rental-housing list that is Section 8 “friendly.”

Any funding for training and employment that is provided to the City of Buffalo and County of Erie will be funneled through the Buffalo Employment and Training Center (BETC). Any person identified through the HPRP process will be made aware of the services available to them through BETC. Poverty is the main cause of homelessness so this referral will be key to providing clients with the opportunity to end the cycle of homelessness.

The Benefits Analysis is designed to ensure that all public entitlements and public assistance are being utilized including unemployment, TANF, food stamps, food banks, WIC, Meals on Wheels, SSI, SSD, Veteran’s benefits, etc.

The Case Managers will refer clients to Community Health Centers for any medical or dental issues. They will also be able to refer clients to any HOPWA agencies if these services are necessary.

The Case Managers will also coordinate education efforts with the Buffalo Board of Education's homeless program. They will also ensure clients are aware of Head Start programs for childcare and education.

The Creating Assets Savings & Hope (CASH) program funded by the United Way will help clients become aware and assist in filing for Child Tax Credits, Earned Income Tax Credit and other income tax related issues. They also conduct financial education services for the Greater Buffalo area.

Current and future Emergency Shelter Grant and HOPWA agency budgets will be reviewed to maximize the use of HPRP funds.

Application Process

Applications for funding will be made available to agencies by early June 2009 with their completed applications due in mid June 2009. The selection committee will make their recommendations and present them to the Mayor for final approval by June 30, 2009.

Approvals from the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency and Common Council will be sought before July 31, 2009. Once approved, staff will have two months to get successful agencies under contract to begin this program by September 30, 2009.

The City would take applications for:

Case Management Services
Referral Agency
Housing Location Assistance
Central Finance Agency
Legal Services
Access to Funds

Part of the application will ask what other services do you currently provide that are fully funded that can be part of this program.

An independent committee will be formed to review the applications and make recommendations on funding. Previous committees that have reviewed Emergency Shelter Grant applications have included professionals from homeless service providers who are not part of the application process,

