

At Home In Lincoln County
Report to the Community
February 2008

It's been a little over three months since the official launch of "At Home in Lincoln County," a ten-year housing plan for the county with a special focus on chronic homelessness. Although the plan is broad and scope and ambitious in its goals, a number of developments point to positive initial momentum that we hope will continue throughout the life of the plan and beyond.

Project Homeless Connect: Lincoln County's first Project Homeless Connect was held in Newport Oct. 25, 2007, in conjunction with the launch of the TYP. An estimated 125 individuals received a variety of direct services (haircuts, hot meals, health screenings, vaccinations, foot and wound care, blankets, tents, clothing, bus tickets, thrift store vouchers) and connection to services. A second Homeless Connect in Newport is in planning for 2008, tentatively set for late summer. Additionally, the Lincoln City Homeless Faith Coalition is exploring the possibility of staging its own Homeless Connect event.

Runaway and Homeless Youth: The Lincoln Commission on Children and Families has taken the lead in addressing the county's growing population of homeless youth. According to Lincoln County School District figures, the number of students meeting the federal Department of Education's standard of homeless was 494 at the end of the 2006-2007 school year. *Lincoln County ranks first in the state for the percentage of homeless youth among the school-age population at six percent.* A task force established by the commission developed an application for state grant funding which was approved last month. This will provide almost \$80,000 to expand current outreach and services to homeless youth. The task force is now evaluating the feasibility of seeking a federal grant which would provide short-term shelter and additional services for runaway, homeless and at-risk youth.

New Domestic Violence Shelter: Last month, My Sisters' Place, the county's non-profit agency providing shelter and services to victims of domestic violence, opened its new 5,100-square foot shelter, replacing an aging facility that was in poor repair. At maximum capacity, the old shelter could house 23 women and children in two bedrooms. The new facility can house 30 women and children in six bedrooms, providing both increased capacity and a greater degree of privacy.

Permanent Supportive Housing: The Community Services Consortium's Regional Housing Center will submit an application to the Oregon Department of Housing and Community Services for grant funds to acquire a six-unit apartment building in Newport which will serve as Permanent Supportive Housing. The funds would come from a program approved by the 2007 Legislature to provide 150 new units of Permanent Supportive Housing statewide and include dollars for both buildings and services. Permanent Supportive Housing is the cornerstone of the federally-advocated effort to end chronic homelessness.

Rent Assistance Fund: Lincoln County will consider creation of a rental assistance fund to help qualifying individuals with up-front move-in costs (first and last month's rent and deposit). Participants would be required to complete a renter education program. County, state and local non-profit agencies would be solicited for referrals. Studies have shown rent assistance to be a very cost-effective method of helping the working poor achieve stable housing.

Planning and Zoning Policies: The County Planning Commission will review recommendations in the Ten-Year Plan addressing planning, zoning and fee issues related to housing creation and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners for potential changes. Each city in the county is being asked by the TYP Governance Committee to undertake a similar review. The Newport Planning Commission is the first to do so as part of a larger review of its zoning ordinances.

Health Services for Homeless Populations: The County's application for continuation of its Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) grant references the TYP. From time to time, the federal government has made FQHC expansion grant monies available specifically to serve homeless populations. If and when such funding becomes available again, the county will be better-positioned to access this funding source.

Community Housing Land Trust: An organizing committee has been making steady progress toward creating a community land trust for Lincoln County. Land trusts are an increasingly popular mechanism for creating workforce housing. The trust builds or acquires homes and sells them to qualifying buyers, but retains ownership of the land, which is leased to the homeowner. The current timeline calls for the land trust to be legally established by late spring. At that point, active efforts will begin to secure grants and land donations.

Workforce Housing Group: A Workforce Housing Group has been established to provide an information-sharing forum for existing groups already seeking to increase the supply of workforce housing as well as serving as an additional forum for advocacy and generating solutions.

Additional Work Groups: Two additional groups will begin meeting soon. One will seek to establish a day service center in Newport to provide service information and referrals, laundry and shower facilities, a mailing address for homeless individuals, and storage for their personal belongings. Another group will attempt to address barriers people face in entering rental housing and will seek to promote enhanced communication and cooperation among the many public and private non-profit agencies now working to find placements for people needing housing.

The Local Public Safety Coordinating Council (LPSCC) will consider taking an active role in some of the issues related to homeless populations and public safety. This will include direct interactions between officers and homeless individuals, alternatives to the justice system for individuals with mental illness and successful reentry of those released from jail and prison into the general population.

The Ten-Year Plan Governing Committee continues to meet monthly and is serving as a planning and communication mechanism for these efforts. The committee is looking at additional projects, including conducting a one-night count of local homeless populations.

The reality of homelessness in the county was once again brought home to many by the Newport Police Department's December sweep and cleanup of several illegal camp sites, which was driven by concerns about public health and safety. Twenty-two adults were living in those camps; efforts by the police led to two of those individuals being placed in housing. Crews removed 12,480 pounds of trash from 19 sites. Numerous hypodermic needles and drug pipes were found in the refuse. The city posted advance notice of the cleanup in English and Spanish and provided information on accessing available services.

Although the national housing market has slowed dramatically, it has only cooled in Lincoln County. Home prices continue to rise, although not at the spectacular levels of recent years. The demand for rentals still exceeds the available supply.

Our initial progress has been encouraging, but the work has only just begun. If you have an interest or expertise, want more information, or would like to become involved in these solutions, please contact:

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