



Homelessness:

Break the Cycle

A Ten Year Plan for Adams County

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10-YEAR PLAN FOR ADAMS COUNTY

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UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS

Before the issue of reducing homelessness can be adequately addressed there must be a countywide understanding of homelessness' root causes, predicting factors, and at risk populations. In small and rural areas there are additional hurdles in the process due to a general disbelief that the problem even exists. Homelessness is often incorrectly viewed as an exclusively urban issue. For Adams County to successfully reduce the number of homeless people living and working inside its boundaries, public awareness has to be prioritized.

After increasing awareness of, and clarifying the broader social issues which contribute to homelessness there must be a multifaceted action plan put in place to address logistical issues related to providing direct services and improved resources for those most affected. The plan must take into consideration transportation, childcare, healthcare, chemical dependency treatment, economic conditions, and less tangible concerns such as cultural identity.

SUMMARY of ADAMS COUNTY

According to the Washington State Office of Financial Management, Adams County is the state's fourteenth largest county in terms of square miles (1,925 miles), but is home to only 17,000 people, ranking 31st of 39 counties. This low level of population means the county has a small tax base and fewer public resources than neighboring counties. Adams County is unique in the State in having a large concentration of Hispanic population with little diversity toward other ethnicity. In the year 2000 census nearly 48 percent of Adams County's population is of Hispanic background. Adams County is also home to one of the largest populations of farm workers (per capita) in the State. Farm workers are typically either seasonal workers who maintain a residence in the area, and are employed in multiple farming jobs throughout the year, or they are migrant workers that travel long distances from their homes, often outside their

country of origin, to work for a portion of the year. By definition, a migrant farm worker is an individual whose principle employment is seasonal agriculture. Few farm worker families residing in Adams County are considered migrant labor. They are referred to as seasonal labor, because they maintain a permanent residence despite spending four to twelve weeks in Mexico between November and January. According to the Washington Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers (MSFW) Enumeration Study for Washington State, there are about 4,200 migrant and seasonal farm workers, including family members, residing in Adams County.

The area's economic basis – agriculture, retail, and service industries – employs over 51 percent of the working population. Work in these sectors is traditionally low paying, is subject to seasonal employment, and offers little or no opportunities for upward advancement. Eighteen percent of workers over the age of sixteen earn wages below the poverty level, compared to 10.6 percent of workers statewide. Additionally, Adams County is considered a “Distressed County” according to the Washing State Employment Security Department. A distressed area or county is defined as an area with an unemployment rate 120% or greater than the state average of 7.0 percent. During the three-year period from January 2002 through December 2004, the unemployment rate in Adams County was 8.7 percent.

The depressed economy and limited job opportunities result in increased need for public health services and social welfare programs which are difficult to provide because of the limited tax base that creates the need.

HIGH RISK POPULATIONS and PERSONAL PREDICTIVE FACTORS

Unemployment, low wages, chemical dependency, mental illness, domestic violence, sexual assault, divorce, and insufficient income are established predictive indicators to homelessness. Bearing this in mind, all available indicators show that Adams County has the potential to have a

disproportionately large population (per capita) of homeless individuals and families. The goal of the Adams County Emergency Food and Shelter Board's Housing Task Force is to reduce all homelessness by more than 50% within ten years; however, the Housing Task Force recognizes that homeless families are of particular concern.

Homeless children have little or no ability to seek help for themselves and are more likely to experience health complications due to malnutrition or unsanitary conditions. When survival becomes a family's primary goal there is often no other option but de-prioritizing education. The cyclical nature of social problems is clearly seen in the example of a homeless child denied an education for the sake of his or her family's survival. Without a solid foundation of learning, the children of homelessness reach adulthood with the same limitations and lack of options as their parents before them. Those children who attend school despite their family's lack of housing or ongoing residency in housing unfit for human habitation often reap limited benefits. Most of these children have not had even their most basic needs met, making it extremely difficult to focus on concepts that seem abstract or theoretical when their living situation is considered as the backdrop. Forty-nine percent of all children enrolled in school districts countywide are eligible or receiving free and reduced lunches—the highest percentage of any county in Washington State.

Living In Poverty – The Office of Financial Management 2003 Data Book shows 13.6 percent of families live below poverty level in Adams County; this percentage is nearly double the state average of 7.3 percent. The county's personal income ranking is 32nd out of 39. The Washington State per/capita \$/person average income at \$30,300 is 144% higher than the \$21,000 average income per/capita in Adams County. The number of individuals receiving food stamps in Adams County is far higher than the state average (103.3 per 1000 compared to 72.3 per 1000), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits are

received at a higher rate than in most other areas, with Adams ranking 3rd of 39 counties. Living at the poverty level has secondary consequences to many of these individuals as well. The majority of low-income households receives no health insurance from their employers, and has limited alternatives beyond the state medical assistance program. In Adams County 287 out of every 1000 residents receives state funded medical assistance.

Chemical Dependency - County law enforcement agencies have stated that methamphetamine use is on the rise in Adams County, and the county was recently chosen to receive a Reducing Underage Drinking Grant due to its high level of alcohol related crimes among residents 18 years of age or under. In 2003 Adams County reported 145 arrests of 10-17 year olds for drug and alcohol related crimes (59.1 per 1000). By contrast the number of youth referred for treatment throughout Adams County is low.

2004 Adams County Chemical Dependency Treatment Inpatient Admissions				
<i>Primary Drug</i>	<i>Adults</i>		<i>Youth</i>	
	Number	Rate*	Number	Rate*
Alcohol	48	287.4	4	24
Marijuana	2	12	2	12
Methamphetamine	7	41.9	0	0
Cocaine	2	12	0	0
Heroin	0	0	0	0

*Rates are given as persons per 100,000

Mental Illness - Adams County Community Counseling Services reports an increase in clients. In 2004 there were 31 voluntary and involuntary commitments. Between January and October of 2005, the number of institutionalized clients rose to 39. Six of the patients who were hospitalized did not have a local residence but most

had addresses in other counties. From January through September 2005, three mental health clients were marked as homeless, 2 males and 1 female. One was in jail, one was detoxing from alcohol at the hospital, and one had been homeless for some time and had been living with friends. However, all mental health clients are at risk of becoming homeless. Nationally, 40 percent of homeless people qualify for disability payments due to mental illness.

Domestic Discord – Adams County’s marriage rate (6.33 per 1,000) is higher than the state average (5.85 per 1,000), and its divorce rate is much lower than average, with dissolution of marriages occurring nearly half as often (3.10 per 1,000 versus 6.05 per 1,000). However, domestic violence remains of great concern in Adams County. In 1999 there were 90 known cases of domestic violence in the county. For the same time period in 2002, 1,230 separate case referrals were reported. From January 2005 through September 2005, the shelter bed nights totaled 121. This breaks down as 35 adults and 86 children occupying beds in a shelter.

Victims of violence are much more likely to become homeless, and victims of domestic violence often have their children with them. Currently the only emergency shelter available to residents of Adams County is located in neighboring Grant County. Often the victims of these crimes and their children do not have transportation and are forced to travel between 30 and 65 miles for safe shelter with only the clothes on their backs. When children are involved, this lack of transportation necessitates missing school days, healthcare appointments, and after-school programs.

SECONDARY CAUSES of HOMELESSNESS

In many parts of Adams County, there is a severe shortage of affordable housing which plays a significant role in homelessness. In some areas of Adams County, such as Lind, Ritzville, and Washtucna housing is readily available, but often carries rents higher than two jobs at minimum wage can bear. As a result, individuals and families move frequently, trying to stay one step

ahead of their bills and keep a roof over their heads. In Othello low income housing is more available, but still cannot meet the demand. Despite nearly 1 in 5 residents of Adams County living below the poverty level less than 12.7 percent of housing is geared to low income people. A common solution to this problem is residing two or more families in a single family house. Commonly called “doubling up” this practice may involve as many as 20 people sharing a two or three bedroom home, and is often the last stop before homelessness. The number of residents in Adams County currently doubling up is difficult to calculate in any official way. Those living in this situation do not have separate telephone lines or utilities and may be reticent to open their lives to census volunteers due to status of their citizen documentation. Still many people working in the law enforcement, health, and social services sectors estimate the number of households with families or individuals “doubling-up” may be as high as 250 county-wide. (Housing Task Force Survey-Oct. 2005)

For many individuals, chronic unemployment, substance abuse, mental illness, minimum wage employment, or domestic violence, leads to reliance on charity from religious groups, family, and friends. The living situation of these individuals is commonly called “couch-surfing.” Whereas individuals or families who are “doubling up” most often rely on multiple incomes, “couch-surfers” may be unemployed, underemployed, or living off of state assistance. Similarly, “couch-surfing” is a short step away from homelessness and the numbers of individuals reliant on this charity is difficult to count.

POINT IN TIME COUNT

A point in time count of homeless individuals conducted on October 5 & 6th of 2005 revealed 17 confirmed cases of homelessness, but this number is not accurately reflecting the need for an enlarged direct service network or increased public resources. Many homeless people migrate

from one area to another in winter, searching for new agricultural employment and warmer climates. It is widely held that Adams County will show much higher levels of homelessness during late spring and summer months, when people are commonly seen sleeping in fields, tents, cars, and parks while they work in agricultural and general labor positions. Regardless, the point in time count has established that even at its annual low point, homelessness is a problem facing Adams County and individuals and families are falling through cracks in the system of care.

MISSION AND VALUE STATEMENT

The Housing Task Force's mission is "To advocate for the homeless and potentially homeless people of Adams County in order to improve their quality of life, increase public awareness of issues related to homelessness, impact public policy, and end homelessness." Ending homelessness is more than building shelters and affordable housing. It involves prevention and intervention in equal parts and relies on a community wide network of resources being made available to those in need.

The Housing Task Force of Adams County is committed to developing a common community vision and a set of common goals involving housing and service options. The Task Force will focus on realizable strategies to move homeless individuals and families beyond shelter to permanent housing and self-sufficiency by looking at a comprehensive range of needs and developing the local capacity to meet these needs. The Task Force will identify ways of coordinating and linking resources to avoid duplication by involving agencies and individuals currently involved with the homeless. The Task Force will involve stakeholders outside of the traditional homeless system with a shared goal of building a comprehensive system to end homelessness and prevent return to homelessness. The plan will focus on the impact of homelessness on mentally ill individuals, veterans, alcohol and drug addicted individuals,

individuals with dual diagnosis of mental illness and addiction, individuals involved in domestic violence, single individuals, families, youth, individuals currently at risk, and the needs of individuals who are leaving publicly funding institutions or systems or care: healthcare facilities, foster care, other youth facilities, or correction programs.

Decision making by the Adams County Commissioners shall be guided through the Housing Task Force board. The Housing Task Force board shall represent a wide spectrum of homeless-involved agencies, individuals, non-profit organizations, and community members. No decisions shall be made without first considering the impact of the decision on homeless people and the community with equal regard, and no actions shall be taken that are not obviously beneficial to the cause of reducing homelessness more than 50 percent by the year 2015.

The Housing Task Force acknowledges that some homeless persons are unable or unwilling to accept shelter services. Outreach efforts to people residing in places unfit for human habitation will identify and address a person's immediate needs and provide a link for ongoing support services.

PLAN of ACTION

After direct service providers and public agencies have established that homelessness is a problem within the community, steps must be taken to increase awareness among Adams County residents.

A Needs Assessment will be commissioned to address personal perceptions of homelessness, as well as gather concrete data for analysis by the board. This data will be used to guide the Task Force in creating a continuum of care by identifying which aspects of prevention and intervention are generally perceived as most important by public health officials, direct service providers, law enforcement, religious organizations, and other residents. A secondary benefit of

survey distribution is it creates awareness of the homelessness problem in Adams County with little or no added expense.

A Database will be created to ensure the data can be analyzed objectively. The database will break down information in terms of positive or negative responses. In cases where there are multiple answers, multiple categories will be used to show which responses are most widely held to be correct among survey participants.

A Continuum of Care will be organized by the Housing Task Force after the needs assessment is completed. The continuum of care will rely on existing direct service providers and public health organizations, including:

Organization / Association	Continuum Services Provided
Lind/Ritzville and Othello Ministerial Associations and Local Faith Based Organizations	Prayer, identification of homeless individuals, guidance, food bank referrals
New Hope Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services	Shelter for victims, food, clothing, transportation, legal advocacy, protection orders, medical assistance
Columbia Basin Health Association	Access to health care services, and home visits
Othello Community Hospital	40 bed hospital, emergency medical services
Othello Housing Authority	Eligibility Screenings, Permanent Housing
North Columbia Community Action Council	Rent Assistance, Transitional housing, Home Heating Assistance, general emergency assistance
WorkSource	Job placement
Othello Child Development Center	Childcare, education, health, parent training

Chemical Dependency	Treatment, referral, assessment, protective payee
Department of Social Health Services	Financial, basic food, medical and childcare assistance. Social Services, case management and referrals
Adams County Mental Health	Assessment, Community case management
Educational Service Districts	Identification, data, funding
Law Enforcement	Identification, referral to other providers, point of contact for homeless
County Schools	Identification, education
Cities and Towns	Planning
Food Bank	Food, identification
Legislature (9 th District)	Policy
County Commissioners	Funding
Building and Planning Commission	Ordinance, development, identification of condemned structures
Adams County Community Network	Facilitation, education, community building
Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC)	Training and education
Habitat for Humanity	Housing, prescription money
Othello Emergency Aide	Flexible funding, prescription assistance
Skill Source	Training and education

While organizing the continuum of care, the Task Force will give careful consideration to any gaps which exist due to services being unavailable locally, as well as any overlap between service providers, to create an efficient system which may be easily understood and navigated by Adams County's homeless population. For chemically dependent and mentally ill people in particular, the paperwork and required wait to enter into treatment facilities is often more than they are able to bear. The waiting list in Washington State for treatment under the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Treatment and Support Act has quadrupled since 1991. Additionally, in rural and agricultural areas it is necessary to plan for homeless people whose primary language is not English. If the Housing Task Force's mission is to be a success, accommodations must be made for these individuals.

TIMELINE and ACTION PLAN

The 10-year goal of the Housing Task Force is to reduce homelessness by 50% through the formation of a seamless continuum of care for homeless families and individuals. The care will begin with the homeless family's first agency point of contact and continue to emergency shelter and on through transitional housing. The continuum will include referrals to ancillary services such as medical, mental health and chemical dependency treatment. The family's development of self-sufficiency and achieving the ultimate goal of residence in permanent housing will be encouraged.

2006 -- A network of providers will be organized to give evaluations and referrals into the current emergency shelter system, which includes motel vouchers, rental, power, heating and food assistance, for those in need. This network of referring agencies will be broad in scope, ranging from law enforcement agencies to churches, schools, and public health officials. Individuals within these agencies and organizations will receive training to identify and assist homeless people.

The Housing Task Force will develop the training and set standards for priority screening for individuals who qualify for homelessness prevention and intervention assistance. This prioritization of applicants is necessary to establish that each individual is treated in an equitable manner to assure that those perceived to be in the greatest need receive the most immediate assistance.

Memorandums of agreement will be entered into with existing point of contact agencies countywide. The agreements will allow for 24-48 hour stays for the emergency homeless or for travelers stranded inside Adams County.

Recognizing that no permanent emergency shelter exists within Adams County, and that a thirty day shelter with case management is a necessary first step toward stabilizing families and moving them toward permanent residence, the Housing Task Force will further assess the needs and resources for establishing a permanent emergency shelter in Adams County. There is a possibility that money collected in Adams County as a surcharge for document processing could be used to leverage additional funding from the Washington Housing Trust Fund for the construction of a four-unit emergency shelter. Emergency shelter stays (with few exceptions) will be no longer than thirty days. If the shelter assessment does reveal community need and readiness, Othello Housing Authority will build and manage the property and lease it to Adams County and/or the Housing Task Force, protecting the County from construction and building maintenance liability. The target date for completion of the Adams County Emergency Shelter will be January of 2009, if a shelter is needed.

2007 & 2008 -- While the permanent shelter is under construction the Housing Task Force will continue a program of responsible management of funds from RCW 36.22.178 and RCW 43.185b, while looking to resolve emergency housing needs whenever necessary.

The second priority of the Housing Task Force during this time of shelter construction is to strengthen social and health care service provider involvement in the continuum of care. Additional public agencies and community organizations will be enlisted to enhance current on-going support services such as motel vouchers, homeless prevention, rental and heating assistance, food assistance, counseling and treatment, advocacy, child care, and job preparation.

2009 -- After completion of the Adams County Emergency Shelter, consideration to have one of the four units be dedicated for use by victims of domestic violence and sexual assault will be determined through the needs and resource assessment. Memorandums of agreement will be left in place with commercial lodging facilities countywide to allow for emergency stays when the shelter lacks vacancies or homeless individuals do not meet the emergency shelter screening eligibility.

A shelter case manager position will be established prior to the shelter being put into service, if funds allow. Also prior to the shelter opening, client rules of conduct must be developed and implemented. These rules of conduct will be established by majority consensus of a quorum of Housing Task Force board members.

If the Housing Task Force's continuum of care is to succeed as a pass-through prevention and intervention system, and avoid warehousing the homeless population, action must be taken to guide individuals toward self-sufficiency and permanent housing.

Also in 2009, the first steps will be taken toward closing the gaps in county services that make it hard for families and individuals to establish permanent housing. One step the Housing Task Force will take is to aide/encourage local housing providers to acquire funding for housing construction. A second step is an assessment of need for transitional housing to be conducted between 2009-2011. If the assessment proves a need does exist for transitional housing in Adams County, a budget will be developed that includes timelines for fundraising campaigns and grant seeking. This timeline will be organized and coordinated by the Housing Task Force under the guidelines of the Adams County Commissioners.

Traditionally, transitional housing units are designated for stays not to exceed eighteen months. This time period allows formerly homeless individuals and families an opportunity to hone positive life skills in an environment that offers ongoing support while allowing residents to take responsibility for their decisions and consequences.

2010 – The Housing Task Force recognizes that the homeless population of Adams County is not static, and fluctuates according to climate and agricultural factors. The Housing Task Force also recognizes that prior to social support and health

services forming a continuum of care that is made readily available for homeless people, an accurate count of homeless citizens will be problematic.

As public awareness increases regarding the problem of homelessness, referrals of homeless individuals and families to service providing agencies will also increase. The end result of these improvements to the continuum of care will be an upward spike in the number of reported homeless people that will eventually level off. It is the goal of the Housing Task Force to have homelessness reach equilibrium by the October point in time count of 2010.

2012 – If the needs assessment supports a transitional housing unit, then the construction on transitional housing units would begin. The number of units will be determined by two factors. The first factor will be the financial well being of the continuum of care, with consideration being given to overall construction costs and ongoing annual maintenance costs in equal measure. The second determining factor will be a needs assessment and evaluation of the overall care continuum facilitated by the Housing Task Force. The purpose of this evaluation is to ensure transitional housing is not built at a rate that exceeds the level of need purely because funding is available.

2014 – Transitional Housing will be completed and made available to formerly homeless individuals and families who are ready to move beyond emergency shelter into a more independent living situation. These transitional housing units allow individuals and families to further develop the stability, confidence, and coping

skills needed to sustain permanent housing, while affording necessary access to health care.

2016 – The Housing Task Force will oversee an evaluation of the previous ten year’s efforts to reduce homelessness in Adams County by 50 percent. The evaluation will focus primarily on the continuum of care, noting improvements that have been made, areas where further improvements are possible, and problems which have not yet been resolved.

The secondary function of this evaluation will be identifying new homelessness issues facing Adams County which have only been made apparent after building a system to address the cyclical nature of homelessness.

Emergency Food and Shelter Board Housing Task Force Roster

Barbara Anderson	Adams County Community Network
Angelina Gomez	Othello Housing Authority
Alan Hanks	Othello Housing Authority
Dan Leary	Othello Emergency Aide
Steve Schofstoll	Lind Ministerial Association
Vicki Guse	Community Counseling Services of Adams County
Pat Burleson	New Hope Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services
Rosa Cantu	Othello Child Development Center
Karen Palmer	Othello Child Development Center
Luann Morgan	Othello Outlook Print Media Services
Kate Brueske	Integrated Health Care of Adams County
Sharon Kiehn	New Hope Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services
Leticia Garza	Othello Child Development Center
Rosa Cantu	Othello Child Development Center
Bill Cox	Ritzville Ministerial Association
Dennis Evans	Washtucna Ministerial Association
Bob Luhn	Othello Ministerial Association
Aimen Sheldon	Othello City Manager
Doug Barger	Adams County Sheriffs Department
Dennis Borgman	Adams County Emergency Food and Shelter
Chasity Krebs	Skill Source
Ken Sterner	North Columbia Community Action Council
Steve Lodahl	Formerly Homeless Person & 10 Year Plan Co-Author
Jeff Stevens	Adams County Commissioner
Anne Guerrero	Department of Social and Health Services