

# **Orange County Funders Roundtable Homeless Committee Position Paper**

## ***Eliminating Child Homelessness in Orange County***

*May 20, 2010*

### **I. Funders Roundtable Position**

*No child should be homeless in Orange County and the Funders Roundtable will work to support efforts and systems that strengthen homeless prevention efforts and expand emergency shelter resources for families with children.*

### **II. Background & Purpose**

In May 2008, the Orange County Funders Roundtable established a Homeless Committee to explore ways in which funders could work together to address the increase in homeless families with children (ages 0 to 17) in Orange County. This effort began when the Funders Roundtable learned that the Cold Weather Emergency Shelter at the Armory had been experiencing an increase in families with children. Recognizing that the Armory is not a safe emergency shelter option for families, Funders Roundtable members began examining options to ensure that no child would have to spend the night at the Armory. Also informing this process has been the *Orange County Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness*, which is intended to serve as a roadmap to ending homelessness within the next ten years.<sup>1</sup>

The Homeless Committee has been meeting regularly to identify its role and priorities in addressing child homelessness in Orange County. The Committee has conducted a series of activities aimed at gaining a better understanding of the challenges facing the homeless in Orange County, including a data review, meeting with homeless service providers, and review of the Ten-Year Plan goals and strategies. This paper outlines the four key issues and priorities for action that the Funders Roundtable will focus on in an effort to eliminate child homelessness in Orange County.

### **III. Overview of Child Homelessness Data**

The Homeless Committee has focused much of its analysis on reviewing current data trends to understand the scope of the problem and the underlying issues contributing to child homelessness. However, challenges exist with the current

---

<sup>1</sup> *Orange County Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness*, 2009. In January 2010, the Board of Supervisors approved a final draft of the Plan. Final Board approval of the Plan will occur in Summer 2010.

data collected on homelessness, including different research methodologies, differing definitions of homelessness, and lack of comprehensive data systems. As a result, it is often difficult to gain a complete picture of the scope and complexity of homelessness in Orange County.

### **A. Extent of Child Homelessness**

Homeless children in Orange County are often out-of-sight and living in precarious and unstable situations with their families. Data collected by the Orange County Department of Education revealed that in 2007-08, 788 students were living in motels, 385 in shelters, and 61 were unsheltered and living in cars, parks or campgrounds. In addition, there were 15,815 Orange County public school students that were identified as living doubled- or tripled-up with another family due to economic hardship, representing 3.1% of all K-12 students.<sup>2</sup> Overall, the County's Client Management Information System reports 11% of homeless served in Orange County are between the ages of 0-17. *[See Section III-B for a discussion on the limitations of the data currently available through CMIS.]*

Child homelessness is not unique to Orange County. The United States leads industrialized nations with the most homeless women and children, with one in five children experiencing homelessness throughout the United States each year.<sup>3</sup> California has also failed to adequately address its growing child homeless population. In a 2009 state report card issued by the National Center on Family Homelessness, California ranked 49 out of 50 in child homelessness. California has 292,624 homeless children, which represents 3.08% of all children living in the State. The majority of these homeless children are in Grade 8 or below.<sup>4</sup>

### **B. Leading Causes of Child Homeless**

According to the 2007 Hunger and Homeless Survey, conducted by the United States Conference of Mayors, the top three contributing factors for homelessness are lack of affordable housing, poverty and domestic violence.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Lack of Affordable Housing*

The Funders Roundtable recognizes that to end child homelessness, Orange County families must have access to affordable permanent housing. Currently, Orange County faces an inadequate supply of affordable permanent housing for

---

<sup>2</sup> Ten-Year Plan, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> The National Center on Family Homelessness Fact Sheet #4, April 2008.

<sup>4</sup> The National Center on Family Homelessness California Report Card, 2009. (For more information visit [www.HomelessChildrenAmerica.org](http://www.HomelessChildrenAmerica.org).)

<sup>5</sup> 2007 Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness, United States Conference of Mayors, page 12.

individuals and families with children, resulting in a large number of families living in precarious housing situations or homelessness.

- The gap between income and housing costs continues to widen, with Orange County's housing market being one of the most expensive in the nation.
- In 2008, an Orange County single family dwelling cost seven times the cost of the median priced American home.<sup>6</sup>
- Orange County has the second highest Housing Wage, the hourly wage a resident needs to afford "Fair Market Rent" in Orange County, compared to state and national peer metropolitan areas. The 2009 Housing Wage was \$24.92 to rent a one-bedroom apartment.<sup>7</sup>

### **Poverty**

- As a result of the national recession, the unemployment rate continues to be an issue in Orange County. In March 2010, unemployment was 10.1%, up from 9.5% in December 2009, and above the year-ago estimate of 7.5%.<sup>8</sup>
- The 2009 Orange County Homeless Census and Survey (also known as Point-in-Time Count and Survey or PITS) revealed that 30% of homeless individuals surveyed cited job loss as their primary reason for homelessness.<sup>9</sup>

### **Domestic Violence**

Violence in the home is one of the greatest predictors for family homelessness, with those fleeing domestic violence more likely to become homeless or have a problem finding housing because of their circumstances. In many instances, victims of domestic violence and their children may have difficulty finding apartments due to poor credit, rental, and employment histories as a result of their abuse or have few tangible social supports or limited ability to collect and/or enforce child support and alimony payments.

- National data reveals that more than 80% of homeless mothers with children previously experienced domestic violence.
- Approximately 13 percent of homeless families indicate that they left their last place of residence as a result of abuse or violence in their household.<sup>10</sup>
- The 2009 Orange County Homeless Census and Survey revealed that 12% of

---

<sup>6</sup> OC Ten-Year Plan, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> *Orange County 2009 Community Indicators*, Orange County Community Indicators Project, 2009 p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> State of California, Employment Development Department, Labor Market Information Division, May 14, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> The PITS is a federally mandated effort to count people identified as homeless at a single point in time during the last ten calendar days of January, every two years. Due to the specific methodology of the PITS process outlined by HUD, the count likely under represents families and children, as their homelessness is often episodic.

<sup>10</sup> Fact Sheet on Domestic Violence, National Alliance to End Homelessness, January 2010.

(<http://www.endhomelessness.org/section/policy/focusareas/violence>)

homeless female respondents were experiencing domestic violence.

### **C. Impact of Homelessness on Children's Well-Being**

Stable housing plays a critical role in maintaining the well-being of children and their families. When children experience homelessness, they are at risk for long-term, adverse emotional, physical, academic and economic effects. National studies have shown that homeless children suffer from emotional or behavioral problems that interfere with learning at almost three times the rate of other children. For example, 47% of children, ages 6 to 17, have problems such as anxiety, depression, or withdrawal, compared to 18% of other school-age children.<sup>11</sup>

The 2009 State Report Card on child homelessness for California demonstrated that homeless children in this state are more likely than middle-income children to have:

- Health and mental health issues, including asthma, traumatic stress, and emotional disturbances;
- Lower federal test scores in reading and math;
- Higher rates of school absenteeism, and
- Lower high school graduation rates, with less than 25% of homeless children in California graduating from high school.<sup>12</sup>

### **III. Key Issues & Action Priorities**

The Funders Roundtable recognizes the scope and complexity of the issues facing homeless children in Orange County, many of which are addressed in the County's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness. The Homeless Committee recommends that the Funders Roundtable focuses its efforts on four core issues it believes, if addressed, would contribute to improved services for homeless families and an overall reduction in the number of homeless children. The four issues, which are also goals within the Ten-Year Plan, include:

- ❖ Adequate emergency shelter resources;
- ❖ Effective leadership on homeless issues;
- ❖ Coordinated homeless prevention efforts; and
- ❖ A robust homeless information system.

#### **A. Adequate Emergency Shelter Resources for Families**

---

<sup>11</sup> Fact Sheet: Homeless Families and Trauma, The National Center on Family Homelessness. (Data from 2004.)

<sup>12</sup> The National Center on Family Homelessness California Report Card, 2009.

Emergency shelters are intended to provide immediate and temporary shelter for individuals and families in crisis. However, the demand for emergency shelter beds in Orange County greatly outstrips the supply, with only 30% of the 4,056 shelter beds in Orange County designated as emergency beds.<sup>13</sup> In fact, there are only two emergency shelters -- the Salvation Army and the seasonal Armory -- that have low thresholds, or in other words, will provide beds to most clients regardless of their existing situation (e.g. substance abuse, mental health, criminal background, etc.). Of particular concern to the Roundtable is the lack of sufficient, safe and year-round emergency shelter beds for homeless families in Orange County.

As a result of the deficiencies within the existing emergency system, motels have become Orange County's "de facto emergency shelter system."<sup>14</sup> In an effort to ensure that families with young children did not stay at the Armory during the 2008-09 winter season, Mercy House, the Armory operator, launched a Family Redirection Program that served families with children under age 5 by placing them in motels and providing case management in an effort to move them to transitional or permanent housing. While this program provides an important stopgap measure, it is expensive to operate.<sup>15</sup> In addition, families with no children under age 5 were redirected from the Armory to motels with the use of Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) funds.

❖ ***The Funders Roundtable is committed to ensuring that children do not sleep in the Armory, but are instead served by alternative emergency shelter programs suitable for families. The Funders Roundtable will continue to identify ways in which to strengthen the existing emergency shelter system and support efforts within the Ten-Year Plan to create year-round emergency shelters equipped to meet the demand of homeless families.***

## **B. Effective Leadership Around Homeless Issues**

Beyond an existing oversight committee known as the Continuum of Care (CoC), Orange County does not have an effective leadership body to manage and guide the coordinated efforts that are needed to address the systemic issues facing the homeless population. As a result, there has been no strategic, coordinated voice within the County to raise awareness about the issues facing the homeless, encourage greater coordination among homeless service providers, and to lead the charge to address the necessary system changes. The Ten-Year Plan seeks to address this leadership gap by developing a Governing Board of community leaders supported by paid staff to provide strategic leadership and coordination around implementation of the Ten-Year Plan.

---

<sup>13</sup> OC Ten-Year Plan, p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> The Family Redirection Program is funded by the Children and Families Commission of Orange County.

- ❖ ***The Funders Roundtable will be represented on the Ten-Year Plan Governing Board and Funders Roundtable members will be encouraged to work with and support as appropriate the leadership of the Ten-Year Plan.***
- ❖ ***The Funders Roundtable will convene homeless service providers to identify emergency shelter needs and coordinate emergency shelter planning for 2010-11 to ensure strategic utilization of resources.***

### **C. Coordinated Homeless Prevention Efforts**

Preventing homelessness requires a diverse and flexible system that can respond to the myriad needs of at-risk individuals and families. Prevention services include, but are not limited to: rent/mortgage assistance, food banks, workforce development, and transportation assistance. While many of these types of prevention services exist within Orange County, they are not sufficiently coordinated and are limited by inadequate resources to fully address emergency situations.

- ❖ ***The Funders Roundtable supports the efforts outlined in the Ten-Year Plan to develop a diverse, flexible and integrated prevention system and will work to ensure effective outreach to at-risk families through mobile vans, outreach fairs and information and referral systems.***

### **D. A Robust Homeless Information System**

Orange County is currently operating a federally mandated data system, known as the Client Information Management System (CMIS), that was intended to serve as a comprehensive and centralized repository for data on homeless and at-risk clients. However, at the end of 2008, only 26 out of 65 shelter providers were participating in the system. In addition, the County lacks a coordinated, well-utilized intake and assessment system for homeless families and individuals. As a result of these data system gaps, the County has been unable to implement an effective homeless information system that could capture key clients and agency data to support greater service coordination and data analysis.

- ❖ ***The Funders Roundtable recognizes the importance of developing a countywide centralized homeless information system for service coordination and data analysis and will support the County's efforts as set forth in the Ten-Year Plan.***