

Community Snapshot

Norfolk



July 2008

National Alliance to
END HOMELESSNESS

Norfolk, VA, a city of approximately 240,000 people, is the urban center of Southeastern Virginia. On any given night, approximately 600 people are homeless in Norfolk, and many more are homeless over the course of a year. Single adults make up a majority of the city's homeless population (about 72 percent). In 2008, 88 percent were living in emergency shelters.

In September of 2005, Norfolk, VA launched its Ten Year Plan, *The City of Norfolk's Blueprint to End Homelessness*. By the second year of implementation, the City had over 70 partners including the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, Housing and Urban Development, and Veterans Affairs.

The key elements of the Norfolk plan are Housing First, a central intake process for families, and the creation of permanent housing units. Early results have been achieved by the sustained commitment of city leaders, the partnership of the many family shelter providers and other nonprofits, and the willingness to update the plan as needed.

Key Initiatives

Housing First. Housing First is based on the principle that the best way to end homelessness is to help people get back into housing as quickly as possible and keep people housed by providing the appropriate level of services based on each individual's needs.

To provide services, Norfolk created a Housing First Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team, a service intensive model that provides home-based care to chronically homeless adults. The program, called *My Own Place*, has achieved marked results. Among the 14 chronically homeless adults housed between May of 2006 and July of 2007, 92 percent maintained their housing for at least 12 months. Additionally, 40 percent reduced substance use, 86 percent participated in primary health care services offered by the program, and 71 percent participated in mental health treatment. Further, the consumers for whom data was available significantly reduced their mental health facility stays (70 percent), reduced prison stays by 100 percent, and reduced emergency shelter stays by 100 percent.

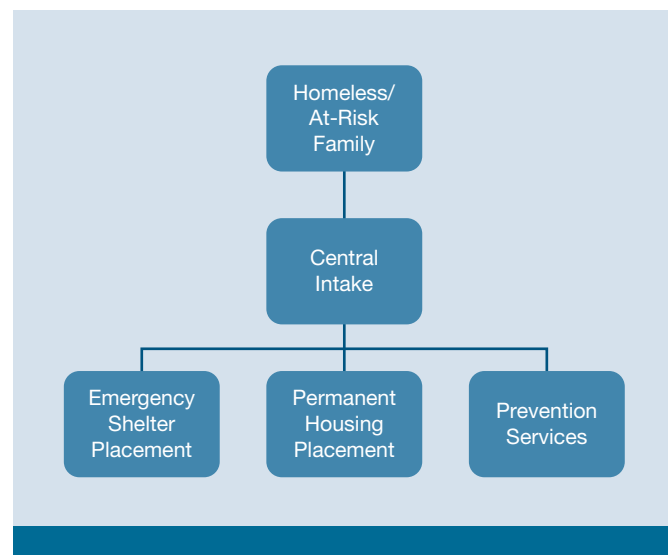
Norfolk's Housing First initiative is funded at \$1.8 million a year through a combination of Continuum of

From 2006 to 2008,
Norfolk reduced homelessness
by 25 percent.

Care, Section 8, Community Development Block Grant, local general funds, and private funds.

Homeless Action Response Team (HART). HART was established in Norfolk in 2004 and provides a multi-disciplinary team of social workers, mainstream caseworkers, and others to work exclusively with homeless families. In January of 2007, the HART team began performing as the central intake for homeless families and those families at imminent risk of becoming homeless. After initial screening, HART assesses all families using Structured Decision Making, a tool that determines if the family is in immediate danger of abuse or neglect and assesses barriers to housing. From the information gathered, the HART team determines if short-term homelessness prevention would be effective (for families who are already in housing and are risk of losing it); if the family needs shelter placement; or—for families with intensive needs—if they should be placed directly into permanent supportive housing (see exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1. Initial steps of Central Intake/Rapid Exit program in Norfolk





In 2007, HART provided prevention and rapid re-housing to 888 families. Only 26 families requested subsequent shelter placement within 17 months.

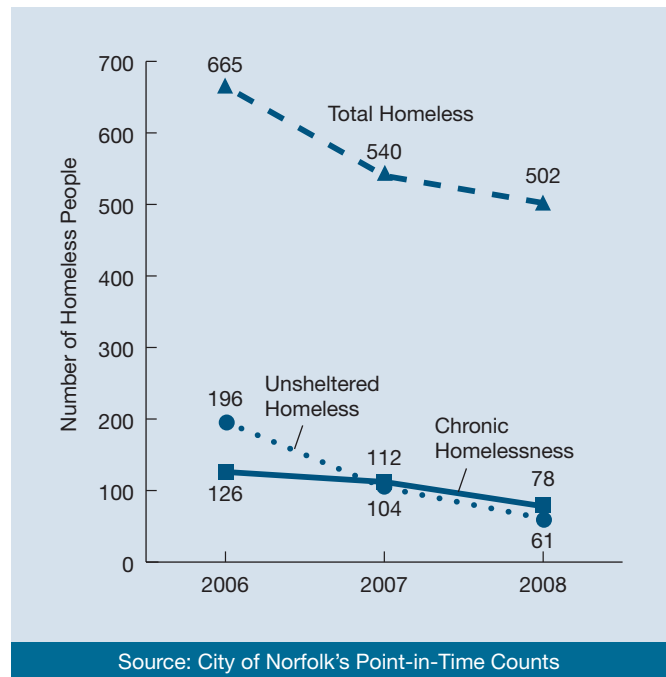
Additionally, for those families receiving case management, 97 percent remained stably housed after 6 months. In the first part of 2008, Norfolk experienced a decrease in the number of families needing emergency prevention assistance. Comparing the first five months of 2007 with the first five months of 2008, reveals a 70 percent decrease in emergency housing payments and a 9 percent decrease in shelter requests.

Permanent Housing. The focus on housing is reducing homelessness. An estimated 1,224 people have been placed in permanent housing since implementation of Norfolk's Ten Year Plan, with about 287 of them placed in permanent supportive housing. Overall, permanent supportive housing units increased by 65 percent since 2005. This increase was driven, in part, by the opening of Gosnold Apartments, a regional housing project for chronically homeless individuals which is owned and operated by Virginia Supportive Housing. This development includes 60 housing units with services attached, and is the culmination of the efforts of Norfolk, Virginia Beach and Portsmouth to find regional solutions to homelessness. Due to its success, a similar project is underway in Virginia Beach.

Outcomes

These initiatives are showing early results. Between 2006 and 2008 homelessness in Norfolk, VA decreased by 25 percent, from 665 to 502. Additionally, chronic homelessness decreased by almost 40 percent, from 126 to 78, in the same time period. Norfolk's count of unsheltered homeless people revealed a significant decrease from 196 in 2006 to only 61 in 2008, representing a 69 percent decline (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. Homeless Counts in Norfolk, VA



Across the country, communities are making progress in ending homelessness. The National Alliance to End Homelessness' *Community Snapshot Series* highlights strategies, programs, and innovations in these communities. To learn how to end homelessness in ten years, visit www.endhomelessness.org.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a nonprofit organization dedicated to solving the problem of homelessness and preventing its continued growth. Our mission is to mobilize all sectors of society in an alliance to end homelessness.