

1 PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

Preventing homelessness is an important part of any plan to combat homelessness in a community. Prevention efforts should focus on residents that would otherwise become homeless or re-enter homelessness without the intervention. The CoC should explore implementing the following actions to prevent homelessness in OKC:

- 1.A Eviction Diversion and Mediation Program
- 1.B Discharge Planning Liaison Program
- 1.C Transitional Housing for Ex-Offenders
- 1.D Increase and Expand Low-Barrier Employment Options
- 1.E Advocate for Tenant Protection Legislation like HB 3710 and/or Similar Legislation

1.A) EVICTION DIVERSION AND MEDIATION PROGRAM

Recent studies show that evictions can cause homelessness. Eviction is a legal procedure used by landlords to remove tenants from their home. Tenants typically face eviction due to their failure to pay rent. Landlords must follow certain steps in an eviction for non-payment of rent including providing the tenant with written notice and a five-day grace period. After that, the landlord may file a suit and the tenant is served with a summons for a court hearing. If the judgment supports eviction, the tenant is provided a 48-hour move-out period before the landlord takes back the property.

According to research compiled by the Eviction Lab at Princeton University, OKC ranks as the 20th worst in the country for evictions with an eviction rate of 6.14%. OKC saw 6,433 evictions in 2016, or about 18 households each day. Oklahoma County saw about 14,000 eviction cases filed in January and February of 2020 alone. Legal experts in OKC worry that the COVID-19 pandemic will accelerate eviction filings.

Eviction impacts a person's credit score for years following the event. Renters who experience eviction are more likely to continue experiencing housing instability over time, as well as other economic and social impacts like job loss, family instability, physical and mental health challenges, and decreased school performance in children.

The Oklahoma Residential Landlord Tenant Act of 1979 provides the legal framework for leases and relationships between landlords and tenants. Landlords must keep residences safe and livable. Tenants must comply with the lease and all proper rules. Tenants must give their landlord written notice of any needed repairs that are necessary to keep the rental unit safe and healthy. If a landlord does not make the required repairs, then the tenant can either make the necessary repair, terminate the lease early or seek damages for the reduction in value of the unit. Landlords may evict tenants for nonpayment of rent, material breaches of the lease and criminal activity.



Strategy Description

In their efforts to address homelessness and the need for affordable housing, many communities have started to look at enhancing eviction intervention programming through collaborations with their local governments, the courts, legal service providers, social workers and landlords. Some communities have established a right to legal counsel for tenants facing eviction. A pilot program in New York City demonstrated that the costs to expand legal services are offset by savings on temporary shelter costs for evicted tenants.

Through discussions with relevant stakeholders at the strategic planning sessions and best practices from other communities, the City should seek to develop an Eviction Diversion and Mediation Program. This program should include the following interventions:

1. Eviction Court Diversion Program
2. A flexible, multi-year grant allocated to a single, existing organization through an application process. The recipient organization for this grant would determine the services to provide that would be most effective at preventing evictions, as well as quickly re-housing those that are evicted. Just a few of the services that could be evaluated are:
 - a) Short-Term Financial Assistance Program
 - b) Housing Navigators
 - c) Landlord/Tenant Mediation & Education Services
 - d) Landlord-Tenant Liaisons

Short-Term Financial Assistance Fund

Communities that embrace the Housing First approach to end homelessness typically establish a financial assistance fund to aid people exiting homelessness for placement into permanent housing, as well as to assist people from not entering or reentering homelessness. Financial assistance can be used for a variety of circumstances that could present barriers to housing for people experiencing homelessness including payment for rent arrearages, current or back utility payments, moving costs, security deposits and ongoing short-term rental assistance. Programs provide just enough financial assistance to ensure successful outcomes for people exiting homelessness.

The design of this fund needs to consider various parameters and challenges. The fund should be flexible and individualized based on the needs of the person or family exiting homelessness. When using the fund for rental assistance, the length of time assistance is provided and at what level will have to be considered. Several subsidy options for short-term rental assistance include:

1. **Income-based Subsidy:** Under an income-based model, a household pays a specific percentage of its income towards rent. Some programs set this rate at 30 percent.
2. **Fixed Subsidy:** May be based on the rent cost, household size, apartment size or some other factor. The subsidy amount stays the same regardless of any change in household income.
3. **Graduated/Declining Subsidy:** Whether income-based or fixed, the subsidy reduces in phases based on a fixed timeline or when certain goals are met until the household assumes full responsibility for monthly housing costs.
4. **Bridge Subsidy:** A bridge subsidy provides temporary assistance to help obtain or maintain housing until a longer-term or even permanent subsidy becomes available. Bridge subsidies may

be used for persons who have experienced homelessness chronically with substance abuse or mental health diagnoses who are on waiting lists for permanent supportive housing.

Most financial assistance programs include assistance with security deposits and utility payments. Utilities eligible for assistance typically include heat, electricity, water, sewer and garbage collection. Telephone, cable and internet services are usually not eligible.

Housing Navigators

Housing Navigators help individuals and families find and secure housing. They consist of well-trained individuals who are informed and knowledgeable of local housing processes and requirements. They provide step-by-step housing support to individuals who have been identified and assessed. Navigators must know the affordable housing and supportive housing programs available in the community, as well as the status of waiting lists, eligibility requirements, documentation requirements and the specific services available.

The navigator's primary function is to serve as the main point of contact for individuals and families experiencing homelessness due to eviction or housing crisis as they navigate through the housing process. Once a person or family is identified, housing navigators help them obtain all necessary materials and information to determine eligibility for various programs. This information is then used for a formal, comprehensive needs assessment and development of a housing plan for the person or family exiting homelessness. These assessments typically use the vulnerability scale and evaluate housing needs and strengths, as well as other needed resources such as health care, transportation and childcare. The housing plan provides the navigator with a sense of what type of housing is most appropriate and enables the navigator to target suitable and available housing units. Once an individual or family is determined to be eligible for specific housing, the navigator then assists with the housing search and application process as well as compiling and submitting all necessary documentation.

Navigators provide additional services to minimize housing barriers such as poor or no credit history, criminal record or incarceration, or poor tenant history. They can assist with acquiring furnishings and preparing clients for meetings with program representatives. Navigators also assist with connecting their clients with employment services, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and Social Security or other eligible benefit programs.

A core mission of housing navigators, in addition to locating and securing housing, is to ensure the sustainability of their client's success. This is typically accomplished through collaborative efforts and coordination with other providers, as well as continued support and follow-up visits once housing is stabilized. Navigation is best handled in conjunction with case management so that navigators can focus on tasks related to housing while case managers work to connect people experiencing homelessness with support services to meet their basic needs during the housing process. Follow-up appointments ensure that the person who exited homelessness continues to meet all requirements for housing and any other programs that they participate in.

Landlord-Tenant Mediation and Education Services

Mediation is defined as intervention in a dispute to resolve it. Two parties discuss a matter of conflict assisted by a neutral third-party or mediator. The mediator listens to both sides and guides the parties to discuss the issues, identify where the parties agree, develop possible solutions on areas of disagreement and help develop a mediation agreement. Landlord-Tenant mediation services would resolve landlord-



tenant disputes, as well as advocate for mediation clauses in leases and/or requiring landlords to go through lease agreements with the tenant before the lease is enforceable.

These services could be expanded to resolve neighbor conflicts as well. Mediation services would be voluntary and confidential. It is offered as an initial step to resolve a conflict and both parties must consent to any agreement reached.

While landlord-tenant mediation is a useful process for many conflicts, some matters are more appropriate for litigation such as tenant discrimination or persistent illegal behavior at the rental property site. Mediation may be more appropriate for issues like unpaid rent or property damage payments, managing tenant evictions, and arranging timely property repairs.

Landlord-Tenant Liaisons

The Landlord-Tenant Liaison's responsibilities would include identifying permanent housing units for rent in the community, developing partnerships with landlords to overcome barriers that prevent residents from obtaining permanent housing and working with tenants and housing navigators to ensure that participants can maintain housing stability.

Outreach and marketing to landlords through in-person meetings, presentations and community events would be a primary responsibility of the Landlord-Tenant Liaison with the goal of increasing landlord participation in affordable housing programs such as the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program. This program may also work to educate landlords and residents about their rights and responsibilities, as well as their legal rights and services available to them.

Liaisons may serve as a primary point of contact for both property managers and owners, as well as tenants for housing complaints. They should create and maintain a database of landlords and properties, as well as their selection criteria and eligibility requirements. This position may work closely in conjunction with housing navigators and the landlord-tenant mediation services described above.

Other duties may include developing and maintaining a network of contacts in the property management and real estate industry. Liaisons may assist the housing navigators by helping with the overall housing process such as reviewing eligibility criteria and helping program participants through the application, approval and lease signing process.

This is not an exhaustive list, but just some of the services that may be the most effective either when implemented in their entirety or by implementing elements of them. The grantee should evaluate other elements and use the elements it determines will have the most impact on preventing evictions. If evictions cannot be prevented, services must also be available to rapidly re-house clients.

Successful Eviction Court Diversion Programs

Many communities have begun to establish eviction court diversion programs as housing costs and eviction rates continue to rise across the country.

The city of Durham, North Carolina launched their Eviction Diversion Program in 2017 through a partnership between Legal Aid of North Carolina's Durham office, Duke Law's Civil Justice Clinic, the Durham County Department of Social Services (DSS) and the courts. The program provides information to tenants at the start of the eviction process. When tenants receive their court summons from the sheriff's office telling them the date of their eviction hearing, they also receive a program flyer instructing them to call DSS for help. A case worker at DSS then determines the tenants' eligibility for emergency rental assistance and refers them to Legal Aid. The goal of legal representation is to keep the tenant in their current home with a clean rental record. Program attorneys work to establish payment plans with landlords, or if the tenant is unable to return to their previous housing, the attorney negotiates with the landlord to convert an eviction into a voluntary moveout agreement. If these avenues fail, then the program seeks to delay the eviction process to give tenants more time to find another housing arrangement.

The Durham Eviction Diversion Program has helped its clients avoid eviction judgments 80% of the time and kept two-thirds of tenants in their homes. This success helped gain the support of Durham's mayor and city council, which awarded \$200,000 to fund two new program attorneys and one paralegal, doubling the program's capacity in 2018.¹⁰

KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN EVICTION DIVERSION PROGRAM

The Eviction Diversion Program was created after discussions with key stakeholders including judges, housing aid organizations, landlords and legal organizations. Tenants are referred to the program during eviction proceedings or through the area's 211 information hotline. Once in the program, staff from the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) meet with the tenants to work with them on ways to avoid eviction. Some households may receive emergency assistance.

Challenges: The program cannot help everyone. Lease violations or tenants who are more than three months behind on rent are not eligible.

Outcomes: In 2013, the program prevented 360 evictions, including 719 adults and 363 children. More than 800 people applied for state emergency relief through the Eviction Diversion Program in 2013 and 457 received it. In 2013, the average cost to clear back rent and avert an eviction for a household in the program was \$1,067 (combined state and local funds), compared to the estimated \$10,990 cost to evict and re-house the household.

Keys to Success: Support from landlords, the judicial system, service agencies and nonprofits have helped the program succeed. The program has continually reached out to landlords and emphasized the cost savings and benefits of avoiding costly eviction proceedings. Hosting a Community Housing Hour each week also provides the community with a consistent source of information and helps maintain relationships between participating organization.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/homelessness-programs-resources/hpr-resources/eviction-diversion-program>

¹⁰ <http://www.legalaidnc.org/Documents/durham-eviction-diversion-program.pdf>



The City should establish an eviction court diversion program that would consist of both legal assistance and legal outreach. Legal assistance would consist of a number of attorneys to represent tenants without legal representation. Ideally, these attorneys would be located at the County Courthouse to address unrepresented tenants as they appear. Additionally, the organization providing the housing services may consider having a case manager located at the courthouse as well.

Planning group participants also emphasized the importance and effectiveness of good tenant outreach. This would consist of development of materials and messaging on a tenant's right to council as well as available services. Materials and messages can be sent out through mailers, ads, social media, and any other means where it may be seen. This information could even be attached to evictions notices.

Recommended Actions

AI recommends that this program begin in Year 1 and 2, possibly as a pilot. By tracking outcomes and reaching performance measures, the program can gain leverage to expand in Year 3 and beyond.

1. Develop policies and procedures for the Eviction Diversion and Mediation Program to include client eligibility requirements, eligible services offered under the program, processes for service delivery, distribution methods and processes for outreach materials.
2. Determine initial funding necessary for legal services and services grant, determine funding sources to target and secure funding.
3. Develop application for legal diversion program and eviction prevention and housing services grant, hold proposals and determine contractors for both programs.
4. Develop trainings and possibly materials that can be distributed to inform courts, landlords, service providers and other parties about the program and how to refer clients. Determine regularity of trainings and locations as well as distribution methods and procedures for materials, if produced. (Work with Public Education and Engagement Committee).
5. Develop community outreach materials to inform tenants of services available and right to counsel and determine distribution methods and procedures for materials. (Work with Public Education and Community Engagement Committee).
6. Contracted organizations determine and hire necessary staff. If determined office space at County Courthouse is necessary for legal staff, work with courthouse staff to determine if space can be reserved.
7. Launch program and track outcomes.
8. If necessary, expand Eviction Diversion and Mediation Program.

Implementation Group

- OCU Legal Clinic
- Legal Aid
- Oklahoma City Housing Authority
- CoC Lead Agency (OKC Homeless Services)
- Homeless Alliance
- Arnall Family Foundation
- Community Cares Partners

Possible Performance Measures (may vary based on services offered)

1. Number of evictions prevented through legal intervention
2. Number of evictions prevented by services program prior to going to court
3. Number of evicted clients rapidly re-housed
4. Number/percent of people who maintained housing due to the short-term financial assistance
5. Amount of time the short-term financial assistance was provided for
6. Number of affordable housing units identified by liaisons
7. Number/percent of landlords providing affordable housing units
8. Number/percent of individuals or families housed
9. Demographics of the individual or family housed
10. Length of time the person or family stays housed
11. Number of tenants engaged in mediation services
12. Reason for the mediation services
13. Number/percent of successful mediation agreements reached
14. Number/percent of tenants able to retain their current housing due to mediation



1.B) DISCHARGE PLANNING LIAISON PROGRAM

Every coordinated homeless services system should incorporate discharge planning into the larger continuum of care to help prevent homelessness. Discharge planning identifies and coordinates services for people exiting hospitals, correctional facilities or foster care as they transition into the community and residential setting.

Discharge planning should begin immediately at the time of intake to assess the need for services and continue throughout the person's stay. A comprehensive initial assessment should assess all possible conditions including mental illness, substance use disorder or other medical conditions such as HIV/AIDS, cognitive impairments or trauma-related symptoms. Discharge planning for a person with a history of homelessness or residential instability should focus on housing solutions including the ability to reside in their prior housing, locating new housing or supportive housing options.

Discharge planning should also assess the person's economic status, including whether the individual can work, eligibility for entitlements like Medicaid, Social Security, Veteran's benefits or food stamps and proceed with applications for these benefits if possible while incarcerated. Many people experiencing homelessness need help securing documents such as birth certificates, Social Security cards or state identification. Discharge planners should ensure that their clients obtain all their necessary documents prior to discharge.

Discharging organizations and local service and housing providers should form partnerships and work diligently to establish effective relationships. Outreach to landlords who may feel reluctant to accept tenants with histories of mental illness, substance abuse or violence is needed. People convicted of sex offenses, arson or burglary find it difficult to locate housing. Discharge planners need to understand the housing options available in the community or partner with an organization that understands them, especially for these hard to serve populations.

In addition to securing suitable housing options, discharge planning must include services for basic needs like hygiene products, food and clothing, transportation, medical services and medication management, and mental or behavioral health services. If not done at the assessment stage, discharging organizations should work with case managers to ensure their clients have applied for all eligible benefits.

Strategy Description

Planning participants discussed the need to enhance discharge planning at hospitals, correctional facilities and for young adults aging out of foster care. Planning participants agreed that these institutions need to invest in discharge planning and ensure that people experiencing homelessness obtain the resources and community-based supportive services they need upon release.

The Implementation Group should work to determine contacts at local hospitals like Mercy Hospital and St. Anthony Hospital, correctional facilities like Oklahoma County Jail, schools throughout the Oklahoma City Public School system and the foster care system including Oklahoma Department of Human Services to coordinate discharge planning services for individuals and youth who would otherwise be discharged to the streets.

Participants in the planning sessions agreed that service provider organizations should not be responsible for developing discharge plans for people exiting these institutions and facilities. However, participants also agreed that these institutions and facilities may need assistance with developing their discharge planning processes and even forms.

Ideally, discharge planners should establish contact with those being discharged months in advance and have access to financial assistance to help secure stable housing prior to discharge. The CoC should also develop a coordinated entry process specific to people being discharged from hospitals, correctional facilities, foster care, and other locations and services. Once a discharge process is functioning, the Implementation Group should determine if new positions are necessary or if the process will function better with current staff.

Recommended Actions

AI recommends that this program develop in Years 1 through 3. The program could possibly start as a pilot and then by tracking outcomes and reaching performance measures can gain leverage to expand in Year 4 and beyond.

1. Implementation Group establishes contacts at hospitals, mental health facilities, Department of Corrections, Department of Human Services and other organizations that are responsible for discharge planning.
2. Determine which services discharging entities and service organizations are responsible for during discharge process and work with contacts at discharging organizations to develop a discharging process that all agree on. This may include helping develop forms and simple step-by-step directions.
3. Determine service organization and discharge entity staff to participate in a discharge specific coordinated entry program. Develop policies and procedures for discharge specific coordinated entry. Ensure policies include the specific discharge process for each entity, appropriate forms and client information, and include directions to connect service providers to their clients months prior to discharge whenever possible.
4. Add discharge specific coordinated entry processes to annual coordinated entry training.
5. Implement program and track outcomes.
6. After program has been operating for a year, determine if additional staff is necessary. Target funding sources for staffing and hire additional discharge positions.

Implementation Group

- Homeless Alliance
- Diversion Hub
- Mental Health Association Oklahoma
- Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse
- OU Health Sciences (Halley Reeves)
- OK Public Health Association
- CoC Lead Agency (OKC Homeless Services)

Possible Performance Measures

1. Number of participants
2. Reduced recidivism
3. Reduced hospital readmissions
4. Number/percent discharged into permanent, stable housing
5. Number of SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) applications



6. Number/percent of individuals or youth connected to benefits such as SSI, Medicaid or health insurance
7. Number/percent of individuals or youth connected to other community-based programs through coordinated entry
8. Number of individuals or youth who receive short-term financial assistance, the reasons for the assistance, the amount of funds provided, and the number/percent of people who maintained housing due to the assistance
9. Number of clients connected to services at least 5 months prior to discharge

1.C) TRANSITIONAL HOUSING FOR EX-OFFENDERS

About 10% of people leaving jails or prisons report experiencing homelessness in the months after their incarceration. This increases to 20% for those with mental illness.¹¹ Almost one in four (23%) of sheltered homeless reported having been incarcerated within the past two years.¹²

Most previously incarcerated individuals live in metropolitan areas. Cities need to ensure that adequate stable housing exists for previously incarcerated individuals to avoid a cycle of homelessness. A study of a Housing First model program in Seattle found that a criminal history did not impede successful housing retention and that jail bookings and jail days were reduced by more than 50%¹³. Creating a transitional housing program using a Housing First model can provide previously incarcerated individuals experiencing homelessness with stable housing and offer supportive services to maintain housing stability over time.

Certain populations within those exiting jails such as sex offenders and offenders convicted of methamphetamine production encounter even further barriers to housing upon their release. Most are banned from accessing public housing or vouchers for subsidized housing. Transitional housing programs should include these offenders, if possible. For example, Washington State implemented a Reentry Housing Pilot Program (RHPP) to reduce recidivism among prisoners considered high-risk and high-need who were discharged without housing. The pilot provided safe and affordable housing, as well as supportive services to 208 ex-offenders. The pilot's evaluation revealed that providing this housing and supportive services increased the likelihood of successful reintegration, significantly reduced new convictions and readmissions to prison for new crimes, and participants saw an increase in their income the longer they participated in the RHPP. The study also found that having a roommate positively impacted the offender's success in the program.

A study of the Colorado Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice, Sex Offender Management's Shared Living Arrangements (SLAs) found that high-risk sex offenders living in SLAs had significantly fewer violations than those living in other non-correctional living arrangements.

Locating housing for high-risk clients may be so difficult that its own separate study may be necessary. The development of transitional units for lower-risk clients should not be delayed as a result.

OKC police officers and other first responders like EMSA and Fire interact with people experiencing homelessness, often due to public intoxication or trespassing on public or private property. Therefore, the county jail houses a number of people experiencing homelessness. According to OKC's 2010 Cost of Homelessness study, the average jail count of individuals experiencing homelessness totaled 173. The highest jail count of 204 occurred in September 2009. Over the study period of April 1, 2009 to March 31,

¹¹ The Council of State Governments (2006). *Homelessness and Prisoner Re-Entry*. Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice; Re-Entry Policy Council & the National Alliance to End Homelessness. Accessed at:

https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/media/publications/homelessness_and_prisoner_reentry_council_of_state_governments_2006.pdf.pdf

¹² Metraux, S., & Culhane, D.P. (2006). *Recent incarceration history among a sheltered homeless population*. *Crime & Delinquency*, 52(3), 504–517.

¹³ Clifasefi SL, Malone DK, Collins SE. *Exposure to project-based Housing First is associated with reduced jail time and bookings*. *Int J Drug Policy*. 2013;24(4):291-296. doi:10.1016/j.drugpo.2012.10.002



2010, the cost of law enforcement (county jail and police) and first response (fire and EMS) was \$2,581,252.

Strategy Description

Planning participants discussed the need to establish a robust transitional housing program for ex-offenders. Transitional housing should be no shorter than 2-years and should ideally include communal housing with supportive staff that stay overnight or clustered units with or without supportive staff on-site. This will require either new construction of a structure or acquiring a structure that may require renovation.

The Implementation Group should determine the necessary services to be provided. Some services that should be considered are intensive case management, housing navigators, peer support mentors, SOAR representatives and discharge planning.

Recommended Actions

AI recommends that this program begin in Year 4 and 5. The program could possibly start as a pilot and then expand in the years beyond by tracking outcomes and reaching performance measures.

1. Implementation group should determine the structure of the transitional housing program or programs. This should at least include the length of client stay (2-years unless extended), number of units required, minimum level of services provided, and funding and staffing needs among other items. It should also be determined if housing will be new construction or an acquired structure with possible renovations required.
2. Secure funding for units, staff and ideally 3-years of operating costs.
3. Secure communal structure or acquire property and construct new units.
4. Develop policies and procedures for program to include client eligibility, eligible services rendered, length of stay, referral process to the program and others. Referral process should be included in the procedures for discharge planning coordinated entry when addressing clients coming from corrections institutions.
5. Hire all necessary staff, launch transitional housing program and track outcomes.
6. If necessary, acquire resources to expand transitional housing program and expand the program.

Implementation Group

- Diversion Hub
- Mental Health Association Oklahoma
- Homeless Alliance
- SSLM Development
- CoC Lead Agency (OKC Homeless Services)

Possible Performance Measures

1. Number of ex-offenders participating in the program and for what offense
2. Number/percent of ex-offenders who secure employment
3. Number/percent of ex-offenders that receive GED, college degree or other educational certificates
4. Number/percent of ex-offenders housed upon exiting the program
5. Length of time the ex-offender maintains housing stability

1.D) INCREASE AND EXPAND LOW-BARRIER EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS

Low barrier employment options are easier to access than traditional employment and require very little initial training. The programs both allow people to move out of homelessness as well as prevent them from falling into or back into homelessness. Typically, these programs also connect people to other services to help them end their homelessness and sustain their housing as well as provide an entryway into other, more traditional employment options.

Strategy Description

Low-barrier employment programs that could be expanded or added in Oklahoma City include:

- ❖ The Curbside Chronicle and Associated Curbside Businesses
- ❖ A Better Way
- ❖ Sasquatch Shaved Ice

The Curbside Chronicle is a street paper that was created to provide both a voice and employment opportunities for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Oklahoma City. The program also works with vendors to break down barriers to traditional employment and develop time management, money management and social skills. Additionally, the program helps chip away at stereotypes and stigmas surrounding homelessness. Curbside has now recently opened a flower shop to employ people who are ready to move into more traditional work environments. Each vendor completes a floral certification program at OSU-OKC and is trained in the retail shop. This helps vendors build job skills and gain experience to prepare them for other traditional employment opportunities.

A Better Way is a program currently operated in Tulsa by the Mental Health Association. The program gives people experiencing homelessness who panhandle an alternative to panhandling. The program van picks people up three days a week to work on community beautification projects. Additionally, a case manager and employment specialist serve as part of the Better Way team. This allows project participants to get connected to mental health and substance abuse services, health care, federal and state benefits, childcare and more. The employment specialist both builds relationships with employers and builds rapport with project participants to assess their strengths in order to make successful employment placements in the community.

Sasquatch Shaved Ice is a non-profit snow cone stand that employs low-income youth in Oklahoma City. As the name indicates, the business serves snow cones, but employees also receive financial literacy training. The business matches dollar-for-dollar everything they save towards higher education, transportation and other life enriching opportunities.

Working group participants recommended both expanding or adding these resources as well as exploring more options that could be incorporated. All options should not only employ people but also connect them to services and housing opportunities as well as provide them an opportunity to eventually move into more traditional employment in the future.



Recommended Actions

1. Develop funding to expand or add to these current, low-barrier employment options
2. Explore opportunities to add other low-barrier employment options
3. Cultivate relationships with local businesses that provide opportunities for more traditional employment to provide options for program participants who are ready to move into those types of jobs.

Implementation Group

- Curbside Chronicle
- Mental Health Association Oklahoma
- CoC Lead (Oklahoma City Homeless Services)

Possible Performance Measures

1. Number of low-barrier employment programs added/expanded
2. Number of people employed by low-barrier employment programs
3. Number of people employed by low-barrier employment programs who move on to more skilled employment
4. Number of people connected to other mainstream resources
5. Number of people connected to housing

1.E) ADVOCATE FOR TENANT PROTECTION LEGISLATION LIKE HB 3710 AND/OR SIMILAR LEGISLATION

2020 House Bill 3710 would have increase protections for tenants in rental properties and likely lead to a significant reduction in evictions in Oklahoma City and across the state. Among its provisions, 3710 would have allowed a tenant to withhold rent if a landlord fails to make repairs to a unit and would have discouraged retaliatory evictions when a tenant reports a violation by the landlord. Participants in planning sessions indicated that if there were going to be any lasting change in Oklahoma City's evictions situation then legislation of this type or similar would be absolutely necessary. 2020 HB 3710 should be evaluated to ensure it is not retaliatory against all landlords in cases where an eviction is warranted and lobby for its refiling and passage if so. If the bill, as written, is determined to be punitive towards landlords for taking actions that could be considered reasonable, then modifications of the bill should be encouraged prior to refiling and/or other legislation strengthening tenant rights should be encouraged and supported through appropriate actions by the implementation group.

Implementation Group

- City of Oklahoma City
- Oklahoma Coalition on Affordable Housing
- CoC Lead (Oklahoma City Homeless Services)
- All CoC housing services organizations

