

## HOMELESS STUDY REPORT – 2005

In October, 2002 the Oshkosh Area League of Women Voters and American Association of University Women cosponsored a forum entitled “Sustaining Oshkosh: Sharing Visions.” Questions were raised at that time about the needs of people who found themselves to be homeless. Who were they? Who was providing services to that population? What were these services? Were the services adequately addressing their needs?

During the Annual LWV meeting in the spring of 2003 it was agreed that the League would undertake a new local study: *What Role Should Local Government Play in Providing Shelter for the Homeless.*

During the next two years a small group from the League has collected data, conducted interviews with service providers as well as with the City of Oshkosh Community Development Department.

It is not easy to come up with local statistics on homelessness. According to the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) the definition of the term homeless includes –

A person sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation **or** in an *emergency shelter*; a person in *transitional* or *supportive* housing for homeless persons who originally was living on the streets, in an emergency shelter or in a motel on emergency vouchers

ADVOCAP is required by HUD to collect information regarding the number of homeless individuals in the community as well as what needs and ‘gaps’ exist in meeting their needs. ADVOCAP gathers this data by performing a “point in time” survey of agencies that are in contact on one particular day with those who are homeless. Results of the past three surveys are:

March 11, 2004	Sept. 9, 2004	Jan. 27, 2005
72	85	83

These numbers include households with children and single individuals. Agencies report that in recent years the numbers of homeless families with children has been increasing and now outnumber the number of homeless single persons.

As a point of information, Father Carr's Place 2B, the emergency homeless shelter in Oshkosh does not provide information for the above quoted survey, so the assumption is that the numbers of homeless is probably more than the published results.

Some homeless may remain unsheltered due to the fact that they are unwilling or unable to comply with shelter behavior requirements. For instance, no emergency shelter in this area is able to provide care for someone who is acutely mentally ill or who is actively using alcohol or drugs.

### INVENTORY OF HOUSING OPTIONS FOR THE HOMELESS

#### EMERGENCY SHELTER

	Family Beds	Individual Beds	Total
Christine Ann Domestic Abuse Services	27	8	35
Father Carr Place 2B			
Bethlehem Inn (single males)		75	75
Holy Family Village	75		75
	<hr/> 102	<hr/> 83	<hr/> 185

#### TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

	Family Units	Family Beds	Individual Beds	Total
Christine Ann DSS Siena Apartments	6	13	2	15
Labor of Love			8	8
ADVOCAP	1	3		3
	<hr/> 7	<hr/> 16	<hr/> 10	<hr/> 26

It is not known how many homeless people were sheltered at Father Carr's Place 2B. When interviewed Father Carr stated that he sees no need to keep that information. The Place 2B is licensed as a Charitable Organization. It receives no government funds, operating solely on private contributions. In 2003, 190 persons from Winnebago County were housed at the Emergency Shelter of the Fox Valley located in Appleton. Some were also referred to Bethany House in Fond du Lac.

The Christine Ann Domestic Abuse Shelter housed 152 Winnebago County residents in 2004. The average length of stay was 41 days. It is important to note that 111 persons were turned away in 2004 because, although homeless, they were not victims of domestic abuse.

People who reside in transitional housing are also considered homeless. Labor of Love is available to homeless pregnant teens. CADASI runs the Sienna apartments where domestically abused families and individuals may stay up to 2 years with services provided which are aimed to helping them to become self-sufficient. ADVOCAP has one 3 bedroom home in Oshkosh which is also used by a family who needs education and support in the journey toward obtaining subsidized or market place rental or home ownership.

In addition to these emergency shelters several community agencies have services that help homeless persons and those facing potential eviction. The American Red Cross administers the "Bridges" program, which can help families with rental assistance for one month's rent if the applicant meets certain eligibility requirements that include some form of regular income. This assistance is available once per year. In 2000 the Winnebago County Department of Human Services Emergency Assistant Program for homeless/impending homelessness provided grants to 19 families with minor children. In 2003 grants were issued to 102 families. Each eligible family may received up to \$150 per family member. This program is limited to one occurrence in a 36 month period. The Salvation Army has historically helped homeless individuals and families with short-term motel vouchers, but federal funding for that program has been severely cut, so that resource is extremely limited at this time. St. Vincent de Paul is also available for some emergency assistance. In addition to the transition housing, ADVOCAP helps homeless individuals and families with case management and supportive services and is often called upon to help people access emergency shelter.

Other community agencies address the needs of the homeless through providing ancillary services such as life skills budget counseling, mental health and/or AODA assessment and treatment, parenting/family strengthening, legal services, health care, literacy services, education/job training, employment assistance, disability services, child care, etc.

Those who are homeless have the basic need for shelter and food. When those needs are met and they feel some sense of safety they can begin to look at all the other issues that need to be faced and dealt with.

## **MAJOR GAPS IN SERVICE TO THE HOMELESS**

- Underutilization of the approximately 150 beds available for individuals and families at Father Carr's Place 2B. No consistent admission criteria. Little if any collaboration with other agencies offering assistance to the homeless. No case management availability at the shelter.
- Lack of Transitional Housing. Other than the Siena apartments sponsored by CADASI there is only one transitional housing option in Oshkosh. Many homeless people need to make use of the structure and programming available in transitional housing in order to move into more independent living situations.
- A general shortage of prevention resources. The Oshkosh Housing Authority has frozen applications for Section 8 rental assistance vouchers because the waiting list of eligible applicants is over 500. 81% of those on the waiting list are classified as extremely low-income applicants: people who make less than 30 percent of the county's median income.

## **OPTIONS TO ADDRESS GAPS**

- Encourage Father Carr to become more actively involved with the other agencies involved with the homeless. His isolation and reluctance to collaborate is the major stumbling block in providing the coordinated services needed for the homeless to become self-sufficient.
- In a true continuum of care for the homeless, transitional housing is a service that is needed by many. With the lack of public housing available, that need is even greater because extremely low-income persons cannot find affordable housing in the current private market. The Salvation Army in our community has recognized that need, but does not have the funds at this time to address the problem.
- The Housing Authority has reduced Section 8 voucher payments by 10% per recipient in order to prevent cutting 40 families or individuals currently on the program.

## **CITY GOVERNMENT PARTICIPATION**

The City of Oshkosh has just completed the 2005 – 2009 Consolidated Plan. This is a plan that is required in order to receive Community Development Block Grants from the

Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. Oshkosh expects to receive over \$900,000 to implement projects and activities identified in the Consolidated Plan. Some money has been earmarked for the Christine Ann Domestic Abuse Services facility (\$7,426) and some for the Siena Transitional Living Apartments (\$5,000). This money will directly impact the homeless.

In response to a HUD request for a 3-5 year Homeless Strategic Plan the Oshkosh Consolidated Plan states:

The City of Oshkosh Community Development Department and the City of \ Oshkosh/Winnebago Housing Authorities are members of the WinnebagoLand Housing FOCUS Subcommittee Continuum of Care. ADVOCAP is the local non-profit agency taking the leadership role in actively pursuing, obtaining and administering federal funding to address local homeless needs and is very effective in that role. For that reason, the City sees no need to develop a Separate Homeless Strategic Plan.

### **RECOMMENDED LEAGUE ACTION**

While researching the issue of homelessness one of the study group members joined the *WINNEBAGOLAND HOUSING COALITION*. This group is made up of representatives from most of the agencies in Oshkosh who are involved with housing issues. A representative of the City Department of Community Development and of the Oshkosh/Winnebago Housing Authority also participate in this group.

In addition, while researching we realized that the problem is much greater than homelessness because some of our extremely low-income population are living on the brink of being homeless every single day. Rentals keep going up in spite of a fairly high occupancy rate. The National Low Income Housing Coalition calculates that Wisconsin workers need a job paying \$11.63/hour to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment that rents for \$605/month. Wages are not going up for the low-income population. Affordable housing will continue to be a major problem. Currently 2338 households (over 6000 individuals) in Oshkosh have incomes of less than 30% of the County median household income. Another 3881 households are between 30 – 50% of the County median household income. The City Council, when it approved the Consolidated Plan, urged the Department of Community Development to pay close attention to these figures and to focus on how to help these people now and in the future.

The study group sponsored a forum in April of 2004 where representatives of ADVOCAP, the American Red Cross, the Christine Ann Center, the Housing Authority, the Salvation Army, The Place 2B and the County Department of Human Services discussed resources available to people who experience a crisis of homelessness or who are unable to find affordable housing. It was well attended by League members and by the interested general public.

The study committee urges that a member of the League remain on the Housing Coalition in order to keep up with what is happening and to participate in efforts to better both the services for the homeless and to improve the housing opportunities for the low-income population of the city.

The Oshkosh Area LWV has a Local Position on HOUSING which supports the recommendations of the 1993 Comprehensive Plan that includes 'promoting and supporting affordable housing', and 'providing housing opportunities for all segments of the population, including provision of housing to meet emergency needs'.

Also the League has a Local Position on COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION that lists 'Low-income housing' and 'Elderly housing' as high-priority goals.

Both of these positions are very broad and probably do not need to be changed at this time.

Study Group Participants:

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