



Rebuilding Lives:  
New Strategies  
for a New Era

Report of the Steering Committee for  
the Rebuilding Lives Updated Strategy

## No place to go

Even though the amount of permanent supportive housing doubled, 1,400 housing units will be needed to meet projected demand for persons with a long history of homelessness and disabling conditions.

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The Community Shelter Board. Ending homelessness in our community through collaborations, innovative solutions, and investments in quality programs.

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# To the Franklin County Community

Persons facing a housing crisis in Columbus and Franklin County don't have to go it alone. Columbus is a generous community that invests substantially in the Community Shelter Board, a non-profit intermediary organization that creates collaborations, innovates solutions, and invests in quality programs in order to end homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County. Additional local support allows CSB's partner agencies to develop housing and provide health, employment and social services to get people back on their feet.

Through the process to create this Rebuilding Lives Report, more than 100 citizens volunteered their time to analyze research, evaluate Franklin County's housing and homeless services, and study best practices around the country. In fact, some of Columbus' housing programs are models for other American communities.

The result of our two-year planning process is a comprehensive and interrelated set of strategies to decrease the number of people who experience homelessness. Several themes emerged that are central to our recommendations:

Improving **collaboration** within the homeless services system and with community-based organizations.

Making better linkages to community services such as health care and employment during a housing crisis to **reduce demand** for emergency shelter.

Increasing homeless persons' access to **income and benefits**.

Advocating for **sufficient investment** to develop housing options.

For all the good that these strategies will do for the homeless services system, they will be limited in their impact without the community to tackle underlying social and economic problems. Eliminating homelessness takes individual commitment and collective resolve from all sectors of our community.

It is with pride in accomplishment that we present the **Rebuilding Lives Report**. It is now in your hands to embrace as leaders in business, government, philanthropy, faith, and health care. As you do, consider the decisions you make that influence a person's economic, physical and spiritual health also affect our community's ability to achieve the vision of reducing the number of people who find themselves without a home.

## THE STEERING COMMITTEE

Elfi DiBella  
Huntington National Bank  
Chair, Steering Committee

Barbara Poppe  
Executive Director  
Community Shelter Board

# Building on a Strong Foundation

One decade ago, revitalization along the Scioto River made way for exciting new developments. Extensive and long-awaited repairs were made to the Franklinton Floodwall, opening up an economically struggling area of the city to new investment. Nationwide Arena and COSI breathed new life into a moribund section of downtown Columbus, now brimming with entertainment, restaurants and housing.

This dramatic transformation had the consequence of displacing homeless people, mostly men, who lived at nearby shelters and in riverbank camps. The upheaval revealed the weaknesses in our community's ability to meet the needs of its homeless citizens.

The Community Shelter Board, with the support of local government, business and philanthropic organizations, seized the opportunity to develop a plan for coordinated, targeted, and cost-effective ways to provide shelter and services when and how they are needed. *Rebuilding Lives*, as the plan was named, called for making emergency shelter available for those in crisis and developing permanent housing linked to services for those with long-term needs.

## The face of homelessness

The median age of single adults in shelter is getting older and the income of families is falling.

## A decade of progress

Rebuilding Lives is now recognized as a national model. Since CSB launched the initiative, the overall capacity of supportive housing for homeless persons doubled from 825 units to 1,453 units by 2006. Additionally, Lutheran Social Services opened Faith Mission on 8th Avenue to replace shelter services in Franklinton, and Volunteers of America successfully relocated its former facility from the Scioto Peninsula. New shelter facilities, including the YWCA Family Center, provide emergency housing for homeless families. The Engagement Center at Maryhaven opened its doors in 2000 to treat publicly inebriated homeless adults. The most important result is to the people served. For them, Rebuilding Lives has meant new beginnings.

## Tackling new challenges

The community reached another critical juncture in 2006, just as it had in the late 1990s. Rebuilding Lives was in the seventh year of implementation and decisions had to be made about its future focus and sustainability. CSB was charged by the City of Columbus, Franklin County Commissioners, and United Way of Central Ohio with devising the Rebuilding Lives Updated Strategy.

CSB organized a Steering Committee of key community leaders and experts in homelessness, health care and social services to guide the process and make decisions about the future direction of the homeless services system.



# What We Learned

In order to update the Rebuilding Lives plan, the Steering Committee needed to learn more about people who are homeless, the programs that serve them, and trends that might influence program design.



Numerous research reports conclude with these findings:

What works and must continue	Challenges to overcome
<p><b>Family Shelter</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single point of access for homeless families at the new YWCA Family Center helps families find housing quickly.</li> <li>• “One-shot” rent assistance has prevented homelessness.</li> <li>• Families leave for stable housing at higher rates than before and are returning less often.</li> <li>• Prevention assistance has decreased family homelessness by 55%.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Length of stay in emergency shelter is increasing.</li> <li>• Families have experienced a significant drop in income over time, with more families arriving with few benefits and no income.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Single Adult Shelters</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two new men’s shelters have been created with improved living spaces and services.</li> <li>• Homeless single adults who are intoxicated have improved linkages to alcohol and drug treatment.</li> <li>• Certification standards have resulted in higher-quality facilities and services.</li> <li>• Shelter locations are more evenly distributed than at the start of Rebuilding Lives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although demand for men’s shelter remained flat after 2003, demand for women’s shelter has risen steadily and significantly.</li> <li>• There is no single point of entry allowing persons seeking shelter to be matched with housing and services.</li> <li>• The rate for exiting shelters for stable housing is low.</li> <li>• Many people could exit homelessness more quickly if shelters helped people better secure income and benefits.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Homeless Outreach Programs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People living outdoors have been assisted by the new Critical Access to Housing program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On a single night in January 2007, 114 single adults lived unprotected outdoors, despite efforts of nine outreach programs.</li> <li>• The homeless outreach system is fragmented among programs, causing duplication and gaps in coverage.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Permanent Supportive Housing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent supportive housing reduces the use of shelters significantly.</li> <li>• Permanent supportive housing programs have increased the number and types of housing options.</li> <li>• Programs increased income residents received from employment and mainstream benefits.</li> <li>• The cost of these programs is much lower than costs for stays in prison or inpatient psychiatric hospital care.</li> <li>• The current supply of supportive housing for families is sufficient if demand remains consistent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because permanent supportive housing is scarce, many homeless people cannot leave emergency shelter.</li> <li>• Current residents have no incentives to “move up” to more independent housing.</li> <li>• No coordinated system is in place for intake, assessment, or referral to permanent supportive housing.</li> </ul>

# Rebuilding Lives – Now and in the Future

The new Rebuilding Lives plan is broader in scope and more complex than the original plan launched nearly 10 years ago. Strategies that have produced proven results will continue to receive priority.

## Goals

The following new strategies to resolve homelessness were developed by the Steering Committee and prioritized in community meetings with key stakeholders. They are organized into four broad goals for system development: **access, crisis response, transition, and advocacy** (cost estimates and implementation details are in the full report).

### Access – Community resources are available to prevent homelessness.

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#### New Strategy 1: Coordinate emergency aid from community-based assistance programs.

Columbus and Franklin County have a variety of emergency aid and housing assistance programs that need to be better coordinated to reduce duplication, help prevent homelessness, and increase efficiency.

**Making it work:** A coordinated system for emergency assistance will be developed that shares a common method to determine a person's eligibility, assess their need, and link them to emergency aid programs. A common database system will document these emergency contacts, assistance and results.

#### New Strategy 2: Provide immediate and systematic access to mainstream benefits and services for persons who are homeless and served by the homeless services system.

Many homeless individuals and families do not have income, health care benefits or other resources to meet their basics needs.



**Making it work:** Programs will share a common method of assessment and linkage to mainstream benefits, including Social Security, Medicaid, veterans assistance, and TANF, and use common methods of tracking outcomes. Agencies also may receive incentives based on reducing the length of stay in shelter and street homelessness.

#### BEST PRACTICE

The **Maryland SSI Outreach Project** in Baltimore helps homeless people with mental illness become enrolled in the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program by providing outreach and help with record gathering and application completion. In Columbus, the **Rebuilding Lives PACT Team Initiative** adopted this model to expedite access to Social Security, Medicaid, and other benefits.

#### New Strategy 3: Coordinate and expand access to community-based employment assistance programs.

Individuals and families must achieve greater economic independence in order to break the cycle of homelessness. For many, the support goes beyond merely finding employment; job coaching helps people succeed in the workforce and maintain their employment.

**Making it work:** Employment programs will be customized to match individuals' skill sets with employers' needs. Case managers will help people overcome the barriers to landing their next job, such as appropriate clothing, identification, transportation, child care, and criminal backgrounds. To increase job opportunities, individuals will be connected to adult literacy and other community-based vocational programs. Additionally, employers will be educated about the new pool of qualified and highly motivated workers who are eager to work.

## **Crisis Response – Prevent and resolve housing crises as quickly as possible.**

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### **New Strategy 4: Develop a single point of contact system, with stronger linkage to community resources, for adults experiencing a housing crisis.**

There is currently no coordinated system for adult shelter services, similar to the one that has proven effective for the family shelter system.

**Making it work:** A centralized point of contact system will be implemented for single adults experiencing a housing crisis to ensure more efficient and effective assessment, triage, diversion, and emergency shelter intake. A key feature is a user-friendly interface. Improved linkages will be made to prevention assistance programs and other services.

### **New Strategy 5: Create a collaborative system of outreach to persons who are not accessing shelter.**

A coordinated call and dispatch system, synchronized response, common documentation, and shared outcomes for all outreach programs will improve efficiency and results.

**Making it work:** “Street” homeless individuals and the community will have a single telephone number to call for assistance. Outreach services will be available 24/7 and ensure rapid response to requests for help. The primary focus will be on housing outcomes and linking people to services rather than providing assistance to enable people to continue living outside.

#### **Philadelphia’s Project**

#### **H.O.M.E. Outreach**

**Coordination Center** was developed in 1998 as part of the city’s commitment to develop systematic approaches to ending street homelessness. Its innovative aspects include a single entry and 24/7 access; hotline to respond to concerns; and, full cooperation from city health, mental health, and substance abuse agencies.

## **Transition – Guide exits from homelessness to stable housing.**

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### **New Strategy 6: Create a unified system for permanent supportive housing to better match people to programs and help tenants “move up” to more independent housing.**

The current process of determining who gains access to supportive housing is not well organized. Different organizations that operate supportive housing maintain multiple referral procedures and waiting lists. As a result, success in gaining access to supportive housing varies among eligible individuals.

**Making it work:** To ensure more efficient and targeted use of supportive housing, a centralized eligibility determination and placement system will be implemented. A common application and methods to assess prospective tenants will make it easier to match client needs with the appropriate program.

**New Strategy 7: Develop an additional 1,400 units of permanent supportive housing for single adults and couples and 150 family units for disabled adults and families.**

In order to meet projected demand for housing, additional units are needed to reach a total inventory of 2,700 units for single adults and couples. More units should help reduce future emergency shelter demand.

**Making it work:** Building on the successful implementation of Rebuilding Lives, additional units will be derived from a mix of newly constructed housing developments, renovation of vacant and underutilized apartments, and leasing of available private or public units.

**New Strategy 8: Develop 430 long-term rent subsidies for homeless single adults to meet annual need.**

The most effective way to end homelessness is to make sure individuals have adequate income and/or rent subsidy to pay for community-based housing.

**Making it work:** Long-term rent subsidy will need to be developed for single adults who use shelters on an episodic or long-term basis but do not need the structure of supportive housing to live successfully in the community. The subsidies will be long term but time limited, and decrease over time. Similarly, support services, designed to increase employment and income, also will phase out.

**New Strategy 9: Transition Tier II shelter from a fixed-unit approach to a flexible supply of housing with interim supports.**

Families currently served by Tier II programs stay in a shelter apartment and are required to move to another apartment in the community upon completion of the program. This is disruptive for the children and their parents. Direct housing placement would also reduce operating costs related to shelter apartment turnover.

Tier II programs will provide an apartment and supports for families to work on securing income, budgeting, and other concerns inhibiting housing stability. Under this approach, the lease will transfer from the program to the family, and services would taper off as family stability increases.

**BEST PRACTICE**

Local efforts in **Franklin County** to develop supportive housing under the original Rebuilding Lives plan have been very successful. About 70% maintained their housing over a five-year period. Fewer than 9% of tenants in permanent supportive housing have returned to shelter or homelessness.

## **Advocacy – Leverage public policy to work toward ending homelessness.**

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### **New Strategy 10: Launch a campaign to increase resources for affordable and supportive housing as well as rent subsidies.**

Creating more affordable housing units and rent subsidies for people who lack adequate income to pay for housing will prevent homelessness.

**Making it work:** An advocacy campaign will be initiated to increase the supply of affordable housing and access to rent subsidies. This effort will require involvement by low-income individuals and families, churches, non-profit organizations, philanthropic leaders, housing developers, and financial service providers. Strategies must connect housing policies with economic development to draw interest from both public and private sectors.

### **New Strategy 11: Advocate with other systems to improve and increase housing placements for people returning to the community.**

Systems that house people in such institutional and residential settings as state prisons, county jails, psychiatric hospitals, treatment programs, and domestic violence programs must provide housing placement assistance to avoid discharging people to shelters and homelessness.

**Making it work:** To start with, policies must prohibit discharge to shelter or homelessness for persons re-entering the community from institutions or residential programs. Working with community partners, institutions will develop pathways to housing, employment, subsidies, and benefits.

#### **BEST PRACTICE**

During the **New York City** mayor's race in 2001, an unusually diverse Housing First! coalition that included tenants, developers, and bankers came together to urge the next mayor to tackle the issue of affordable housing. Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg went on to do just that with his New Housing Marketplace plan, which included a \$3 billion commitment to produce and preserve 65,000 units over five years.

## **Strategies to Continue and Improve**

Although the Final Report draws attention to new approaches for Rebuilding Lives, numerous strategies in various stages of implementation will be continued and enhanced. The following should be viewed as essential priorities to realizing the mission of ending homelessness.

### **Access - Community resources are available to prevent homelessness**

- Implement the Stable Families Pilot to decrease family homelessness and prevent school mobility among homeless children.
- Continue and improve Resource Specialist and Resource Center services provided in shelters.

### **Crisis Response - Prevent and resolve housing crises as quickly as possible**

- Continue using the YWCA Family Center as a single point of access, triage, and diversion for the family shelter system.
- Limit adult shelter capacity to the smallest appropriate level.

### **Transition - Guide exits from homelessness to stable housing**

- Continue to provide direct housing through the Family Housing Collaborative.
- Continue to provide direct client assistance through the Transition Program.

# Moving Forward

The success of Rebuilding Lives rests on the commitment and collaboration of many non-profit organizations in Franklin County. Nearly 30 “key collaborators” will be involved in moving the plan forward.

The **Rebuilding Lives Funder Collaborative** will provide stewardship and oversight for the next phase of Rebuilding Lives. The **Community Shelter Board** will provide leadership to achieve the goals and strategies for the overall plan. **Provider agencies**, the cornerstone of success for the original Rebuilding Lives plan, will be called on to meet the challenges posed by new programs.

## Streamlining the system

The current system requires providers to engage with three separate but related local entities in order to receive funding, one of which is the Community Shelter Board. Each group has its own administrative requirements and procedures, resulting in a complex and cumbersome process for partner agencies and funders who want to develop and operate programs. The plan recommends streamlining and unifying the funding process.

## Implementing Rebuilding Lives

The Rebuilding Lives Report features a chronological overview of planning, implementation, and evaluation steps for each new strategy using a four-year time frame. Although no strategy will be “finished” during that time, implementation will be well underway. A Community Report Card will be issued each year to inform Franklin County residents of progress, challenges, and results.

## You can get us there

The new Rebuilding Lives blueprint is bold yet realistic. It is designed to improve access to community resources to prevent homelessness; respond to short-term housing emergencies; help families and individuals transition from homelessness to stable housing and independent living; and, advocate for adequate affordable and supportive housing. All 11 strategies recommended in this Report are tied to specific results to which the Community Shelter Board and homeless-serving agencies will be accountable as good stewards of public funding and private philanthropy.

Nearly 10 years ago, community leaders welcomed the introduction of Rebuilding Lives with remarkable financial and political support. We urge you to formally endorse and invest in the new Rebuilding Lives plan as a demonstration of your organization’s compassion toward those in this community who need a place to live and the stability to set their lives in new and better directions.

### CALL TO ACTION

“Preventing homelessness is a major focus of Rebuilding Lives. The entire community must work together to help our neighbors maintain income and family stability so they don’t become homeless in the first place.”

**Elfi DiBella**

Chair, Steering Committee,

*Rebuilding Lives*

*Updated Strategy*



# Thank you

The following is an “Honor Roll” of the many people who committed their time, energy, and ideas over the two-year planning process. We look forward to working together to rebuild lives and achieve the vision of ending homelessness in our community. The names of Rebuilding Lives Updated Strategies Steering Committee members appear in black.

Tom Albanese • James Alexander • Ron Baecker • Colleen Bain Gold • Owen Bair, *CSB Citizens Advisory Council* • Kevin Ballard • Lianna Barbu • Trudy Bartley • Kent Beittel • Lynn Bergstrom • Debbie Beyer • Anna Bianco • Karen Blickley • Jack Bowers • Jack Brown, *U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development* • Shon Bunkley • Rick Carrick • Patricia Cash, *CSB Trustee, National City* • Ruben Castilla Herrera, *Herrera & Associates* • Erika Clark-Jones, *City of Columbus, Mayor's Office* • Adrienne Corbett • Denise Cornett, *CSB Citizens Advisory Council* • Lisa Courtice, *The Columbus Foundation* • Michelle Covert • Lori Criss • Dennis Culhane • Dave Davis • Elfi Di Bella, *RLUS Steering Committee Chair, CSB Board Vice Chair, Huntington* • Laura Donahue • Terri Donlin Huesman, *Osteopathic Heritage Foundations* • Cathy Ensign • Patricia Eshman • Christin Euhlberg • Cynthia Flaherty, *Affordable Housing Trust* • Bobbie Garber • Doug Garver, *Ohio Housing Finance Agency, Interagency Council on Homelessness & Housing* • Mary Gillette • Steven Gladman • William Graves, *Ohio Department of Development, Interagency Council on Homelessness & Housing* • Sue Green • Dennis Guest, *Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority* • Elaine Haines • John Hardiman • Robyn Haycook • Deb Helber • Art Helldoerfer • Kara Hill • Shawn Hufstedler • Rick Isbell • Janet Jackson • Floyd Jones • David Kandel • Gloria Kilgore • Jenn Kowalski • Alana Krivo-Kaufman • Carl Landry • Mary Lou Langenhop, *CSB Trustee* • Douglas Lay • Cindy Lazarus • Susan Lewis-Kaylor, *ADAMH Board of Franklin County* • Sara Loken • Niki Lombardo • Douglas Lumpkin, *Franklin County Board of Commissioners* • Jeff Lyttle • Regina M. Lurry, *Huckleberry House, Africentric Personal Development Shop* • Mike Madry • Jim Mazzola • Keith McCormish • Wendy McCusker • Joe McKinley, *United Way of Central Ohio* • Edward Menge, *Southeast, Inc., Columbus State Community College* • Steve Metraux • Tim Miller, *CSB Trustee, Crane Group Co.* • Adnan Mirza • E. Hiba Nasser • Tiffany Nobles • Amy O'Dell • Virginia O'Keefe • Rita Parise • Lisa Patt-McDaniel • Jerry Pierce • Debra Plousha-Moore, *CSB Trustee, Ohio Health* • Barbara Poppe • Mike Preston • Amy Price • Phil Price • Sheila Prillerman • Molly Rampe • Zach Reat • Ben Robinson • Mark Rutkus, *Columbus City Council* • Emily Savors • Adrienne Selsor • Rollin Seward • Kerry Shaw • Linda Siefkas • Dave Simmons • Alicia D. Smith, *Community Housing Network, Health Management Associates* • Lauren Spero • Wil Spinner • Kim Stands • Angela Stewart • Angela Stoller-Zervas • Don Strasser, *Columbus Coalition for the Homeless* • Melinda Swan, *Member-at-Large* • Jim Sweeney, *Franklinton Development Association* • Tina Thacker • Gary Timko • Todd Tuney • Vanitia Turner • Mike Tynan • Beth Urban • Sue Villilo • Jan Wagner, *Homeless Families Foundation, Columbus State Community College* • Suzanne Wagner • Vic Ward • Jon Welty • Douglass White • Tiffany White, *St. Mary's Neighborhood Resident* • Rick Wholaver • Beverly Wilkes • Pete Wilkinson • Kalpana Yalamanchili, *YWCA Columbus, Ohio State Bar Association* • Adrienne Yeager

A copy of all the Rebuilding Lives Reports are available from the Community Shelter Board at [www.csb.org](http://www.csb.org) or 614.221.9195.

## **Rebuilding Lives**

While we can look back to our progress with pride, we realize that our work is far from finished. Nor will it be until we can achieve the vision that led to the foundation of the Community Shelter Board:

*“No one should be homeless, for even one night, in Columbus.”*

Letter to the Community Shelter Board,  
September 15, 2006, from the City of  
Columbus, Franklin County Commissioners,  
and United Way of Central Ohio



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