

Milford Establishes Homeless Outreach Workgroup to End Unsheltered Homelessness

As we continue to make progress in meeting the emergency shelter, housing and subsequent needs of individuals and families experiencing sheltered homelessness through our Coordinated Access systems, we are met with emerging challenges specific to our unsheltered homeless population and the need to reinforce outreach and identification as vital components of a strong coordinated entry system. With internal and external barriers such as chronic mental health symptoms, substance misuse, complex trauma histories and stigma, those experiencing unsheltered homelessness are most often our community members who have isolated themselves from all traditional homeless services, requiring providers to develop new and dynamic systems that meet individuals where they are, both physically and emotionally. Recognizing the net benefit of addressing the health, safety and security needs of this specific population and the positive impact this innately has on the health and well-being of communities at large can motivate new partners to collaborate in innovative ways never before tested.

The problem and solution look marginally different in every community. In Milford, the unified response to support our unsheltered citizens initiated as a reaction to the development of an encampment on the property of the Milford Public Library. Suddenly homelessness and the barriers and needs associated with this status, became visible to all. With the desire and motivation to do more than "move individuals along" the Milford Homeless Outreach Workgroup first gathered as students to study this issue, then as change makers to take action. Over the past 9 months, the Milford Homeless Outreach Workgroup defined and tasked ourselves with the goal to effectively end unsheltered homelessness in Milford, CT through community education, data coordination and direct service. This multi-disciplinary team includes representatives from the City of Milford, Milford Police Department, Milford Health and Human Services as well as several non-profits including Beth-El Center, Inc., Bridges Healthcare and Milford Prevention Council as well as faith leaders (complete list of partners below). This Workgroup is co-chaired by myself as Executive Director of Beth-El Center, Inc. and Deepa Joseph as Director of Milford Health and Human Services. Presently our group has focused on leveraging the skills and resources of all of its partners to wrap supports and intervention tools around each unsheltered individual in the community, one-by-one. Through coordinated Outreach & Engagement efforts, jail diversion, medical intervention for high emergency room utilizers and flexible dollars to support diversion techniques, the workgroup meets monthly to critically case conference, develop and implement public education campaigns and to slowly close the gaps in how our unique systems speak to one another.

As the group matures, we acknowledge our place on the fringe of this work. With commitment from all partners to approach solutions through a collective impact model, we are optimistic that our ever evolving collaborations and strategies will yield sustainable progress. Next steps of our work include resource mapping to identify overlapping and gaps in resources and developing educational materials to engage the community as a whole in our efforts.

Milford Homeless Outreach Workgroup Partners Include: City of Milford, Milford Police Department, Milford Health and Human Services, Milford Prevention Council, Bridges Healthcare, New Reach, Inc. TEAM, Inc. Beth-El Center, Inc. Cornerstone Christian Center, Milford Public Library, Salvation Army, Milford Board of Education, Milford Economic and Community Development.

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