

Coordinated Entry for Persons Experiencing Homelessness

As the cold weather is upon us in our upstate communities, attention has increasingly focused on quickly and effectively providing shelter for persons experiencing homelessness. In Monroe County, the Coordinated Entry process, a collaborative initiative facilitated by CCSI, has been implemented to streamline access to essential shelter and housing services. This system seeks to ensure those with the greatest needs are connected to appropriate housing options that will rapidly end their homeless episode, using a Housing First approach. As the facilitator for Coordinated Entry, CCSI has been working in partnership with the Rochester/Monroe County Homeless Continuum of Care, providing the support to bring together community stakeholders to develop, endorse, and implement operating practices and procedures that are based upon a vision to eliminate homelessness in the community. Additionally, HUD has mandated that all communities establish a Coordinated Entry process, helping to meet the goals outlined by HUD that homelessness would be rare, brief, and non-recurring. A critical component of this work is to engage community stakeholders in the culture and practice change necessary for the success of a Coordinated Entry process.

The scope of homelessness in Monroe County provides important context for the Coordinated Entry system and is captured through the annual Point-In-Time (PIT) Count that is conducted on a single night in January. In 2017, 817 persons were identified as living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or unsheltered or living in places not meant for habitation. Of those identified, 151 had a serious mental illness, 208 were children, 63 were veterans, and 111 were survivors of domestic violence. Those identified through the PIT Count are considered "literally homeless" per HUD standards and would be eligible for homeless services assistance including Emergency Shelters, Rapid Re-Housing, and Permanent Supportive Housing. The homeless system of care in Monroe County includes a significant number of organizations providing shelter, housing and supportive services for individuals and families, yet unsheltered persons continue to be identified and oftentimes persons return to homelessness after a shelter stay.

An effective Coordinated Entry system includes streamlined access to homeless services. Historically, access to services resembled a spider web with referrals coming from many different sources and people calling down a list until they found someone who could help. It was a first-come-first-serve process with no equity regarding who or how persons accessed different programs. The system was difficult to navigate for persons seeking assistance, as well as for providers seeking help for their clients. The first phase of Coordinated Entry in Monroe County was to establish a rational, user-friendly point of entry into emergency services to allow for quick access to shelter services for those in need. The system is now structured in a way that persons in need of emergency housing can simply call 2-1-1/LIFE LINE for help with locating emergency housing. A continuous quality improvement process is being used to modify practices as necessary.

Coordinated Entry has moved to the next phase – a focus on assisting persons to quickly move out of homelessness into permanent housing in the community. A prioritization model is currently being implemented across the homeless services system to ensure those with the highest needs are housed quickly and that the appropriate level of housing support is offered. Persons are prioritized for placement into HUD permanent housing based on criteria that includes a common assessment, length of time homeless, current residence (emergency shelter or unsheltered), disabilities, and age (with priority given to those 60 years and older and 20 years and younger). All vacancies for Rapid Re-Housing and

Permanent Supportive Housing programs are expected to be filled through the community-wide Priority List moving forward.

The utilization of a common assessment tool across emergency shelter and outreach providers has allowed for more uniform decision-making regarding appropriate permanent housing options. In an environment with limited resources, it is essential to focus on those who would be unable to identify and maintain permanent housing without the assistance provided. Persons with less critical needs are provided with the support necessary to obtain housing outside of the homeless system and linkage to community based supports.

As Coordinated Entry continues to evolve, mechanisms for stakeholder involvement in implementation and continuous quality improvement have been established. System change is complex and requires difficult conversations. CCSI facilitates weekly working group meetings that allow providers to consistently come to the table to help craft the strategies that will lead to effective implementation, operation and quality improvement practices for the system. The commitment of the group has been unwavering and has led to the significant progress that has occurred towards a truly coordinated system.

CCSI currently receives funding for Coordinated Entry through the City of Rochester Department of Neighborhood and Business Development and the Monroe County Office of Community Development through the Emergency Solutions Grant Program. Please contact Ryan McIntosh, Homeless Services Manager, at rmcintosh@ccsi.org or 585-613-7622 for more information or visit <https://www.ccsi.org/Programs/Coordinated-Entry>