



HOMELESS NO MORE

putting families first

Homeless No More Presents to Columbia's Homelessness Task Force

On August 17, President and Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Lila Anna Sauls, was invited to present to the City of Columbia's Task Force to Prevent & End Homelessness and talk about how Homeless No More's decades-long experience in the field can inform the Task Force's important work. Below is a summary of the comments we made during that presentation and a link to the video recording of the meeting.

As the City's Task Force works to identify ways to help our community's unsheltered, Homeless No More stands ready to help meet the needs of those most impacted by homelessness and to offer its expertise to the community's efforts.

The questions listed below are key items for the Task Force's work and Homeless No More, along with other community providers, were asked to address them specifically:

Homeless No More has over 30 years of experience serving families at risk for and experiencing homelessness. We remain the only system of programs in the Midlands that keeps families together – including fathers and boys over the age of 12. Because of the support we provide in addition to shelter, 96% of our families go on to permanent housing. Our professional staff provides the support a family needs to achieve independence through case management, life skill programming, specialized children's programming and referrals.

Question 1: What are your recommendations for addressing the growing number of unsheltered homeless of the street?

This is an incredibly difficult and complex question – faced by so many cities across the country. AT HNM our work focuses on families rather than the chronically homeless men and women most think of in regards to our downtown areas or parks: we call families the “hidden” homeless, mostly because they will stay out of sight. Our friends at the City Police Department will find them in parking lots sleeping in cars with their children, or as they are being asked to leave motels because they can't pay the bills. Families fear losing their children...so they simply don't want to be counted or found.

- Our approach is a system of care designed to meet the needs of families anywhere they are on the continuum
- Our work, in many cases, prevents homelessness because we move families to stability
- We serve as a valued referral center

What's relevant about that in this conversation is the fact our work often serves to prevent chronic homelessness because in most cases—through housing and effective programming that addresses their needs, we move families to stabilization.

In fact, in many ways our work prevents chronic homelessness. According to our data, only 6% of those we have served in our programs are considered to be “chronic” and continue to seek services in our area after they leave our programs.

Even when we are unable to meet the needs of those seeking services, we are able to refer them to other agencies or providers (over 500 last year).

Question 2: The Taskforce has identified a lack of coordination and services after 5pm. What would you suggest on how to address this?

Certainly homelessness is a 24-hour concern, and funding any additional professional staff needed for 24-hour intake or expanding capacity of existing programs is a challenge.

- Temporary motel voucher program (and the inherent challenges)
- Small city outreach team that can assess and refer quickly
- Continued use of HMIS/data tracking

Our three suggestions are based on programs and services we have used at HNM. In regards to emergency motels, if the stay is kept to 24-48 hours and accessed by staff or CPD only, 89% of families will enter our shelter system. A City outreach and social work team that is educated in services available and shelter availability will be able to assess and provide long-term support to the unsheltered after hours. The continued use of the HMIS data system will guarantee all service providers have a formal way of communicating and sharing information about those we serve.

Question 3: What are the biggest challenges you see in this work?

- Need for affordable housing
- Need for support and wrap-around services
- Changing post-COVID environment

Our City must invest in affordable housing. Even as our families graduate from St. Lawrence Place with jobs, they struggle to find safe, clean housing. That's why we created Live Oak Place – our scattered site, mixed use housing model. Our income-based units are available for any

family across the City and County with an AMI of 30-60%. By the end of 2024 we will have developed over 200 units.

We have found over the years that our families need more than a roof – they need supportive services such as case management, life skill classes and job coaching. We also have school liaisons and after school programming and summer and school break camps. We provide the support so many of our families don't have – so they can focus on their task at hand - education, employment, credit repair and eventually true independence.

We have seen a shift in those we serve post-covid. Our families are more transient, and willing to leave if they find the rules of our shelters to be restrictive. And our homeless parents and children are suffering from more mental illness than ever before.

Question 4: The Taskforce has identified over 100 services addressing homelessness in the midlands. How can these services be better streamlined to address the needs of the unsheltered population? Where do you see your role?

This is a daunting challenge when you include the diversity of the agencies and groups working with the homeless population. Some have large teams and serve many while others are small groups without professional staff. We can say without any pause that we do work together - at all hours of the day, weekends and nights.

One thing we've done at HNM is develop our RoundTable initiative, where we have brought over 100 service providers together who work with the families we serve to discuss topics such as childcare, transportation and healthcare. These meetings include state agencies such as DSS, McKinney Vento coordinators from local school districts and outreach workers from other service providers. It's a space for open conversation about what we're seeing and how we can best serve those in our programs.

Whether it be through the RoundTable, the Midlands Area Consortium for the Homeless or other groups we participate in, we recommend City staff become an active participant. We can solve this problem – but only if we work together.

[Watch the recording >>](#)