

Led by Steering Committee: Pastor Tim Suttle, Brian Hogan, Carla Oppenheimer, Amy Cox, Pat Hotze, Diane Conner, and Jan Allerheiligen

Background

Homelessness became a top priority of the Good Faith Network in the fall 2021 community-wide listening process. We heard stories such as:

- “The difference between being able to stay in my apartment and being homeless came down to \$50. I was right on the edge.”
- “Angered by the ‘out of sight, out of mind’ attitude toward homelessness (NIMBY)”
- “There is nothing for homeless single people with addictions and mental health issues.”
- “I have a friend who can’t get a job because she can’t get a driver’s license/valid ID because she doesn’t have an address. She’s trapped in the cycle of homelessness.”

For a summary of the 2021-2022 research meetings, see Appendix A.

At the 2022 Community Problems Assembly, the network reaffirmed its commitment to the ending homelessness campaign. The conclusions from our research held up, but we had to raise the heat and find a pathway to implementation. Thus, the 2022-2023 research process was much more action-oriented than the year prior. For a summary of the 2022-2023 committee meetings, see Appendix B.

The Problem (statement adopted Spring 2022)

The stakes are life-and-death for those experiencing homelessness in Johnson County. McKinney-Vento data shows that, in a given year, 1,000 students in our community are precariously housed or homeless. Recent HUD Point in Time counts indicate at least 180 individuals are homeless in Johnson County on any given night.

While Johnson County has numerous programs attempting to manage services to the homeless, we have no coordinated strategy to end homelessness. A lack of accountability for ending homelessness, an over-reliance on temporary, volunteer-operated shelters with limited support services, and a failure to invest in supportive housing for the most vulnerable create cycles that trap and imperil hundreds of lives each year in Johnson County.

The Solutions (statement adopted Spring 2022)

We seek a full commitment to ending chronic homelessness, to be accomplished through:

- A comprehensive, time-bound plan to end chronic homelessness that addresses emergency shelter as well as ongoing housing and support needs.
- Prioritized direction of local, state and federal funds to activities that end chronic homelessness.
- Creation of a single entity with the authority and responsibility to implement strategies that end chronic homelessness.
- Provision of a year-round emergency shelter co-located with support services to function as a navigation center out of homelessness.
- Creation of permanent supportive housing to provide stable living opportunities that combine housing assistance with services for people with serious mental illness and other disabilities.

Core Concepts

Chronic Homelessness:

- A HUD term used to describe people who have experienced homelessness for at least 12 months (or in episodes totalling 12 months) and have a disabling condition.¹ Those struggling with chronic homelessness face a tougher climb out of it compared to those who are situationally homeless. Thus, this population is often the most underserved.

Managing vs. Ending Homelessness

- There are many excellent agencies providing direct services to the homeless population of Johnson County; most are stretched thin and struggling to help people navigate the complicated array of available resources. In short, our system is perfectly designed to produce its current result: over 220 people are homeless on any given night. Johnson County is currently managing homelessness - not ending it. This goal of "ending homelessness" sounds impossible, but it's not. Many communities have achieved just that with Functional Zero.

Functional Zero

- 14 communities around the nation have achieved what is called "functional zero," meaning that rates are kept below the system's capacity to ensure positive exits from homelessness. When homelessness does occur within these communities, it is rare and brief.
- Functional zero is not a one-and-done accomplishment. Homelessness is a dynamic problem which requires dynamic solutions that can be sustained over time, even when local conditions change. We can conceptualize functional zero like a well-functioning hospital. That hospital will not necessarily prevent people from ever becoming sick, but it will ensure people are triaged, receive prompt and appropriate services, and address the underlying illness.²

Housing First

- When executed with fidelity, Housing First is an extremely effective, evidence-based program for lifting people out of homelessness. There are 5 principles to Housing First:^{3,4}
 1. Immediate access to housing with no pre-conditions
 2. Consumer choice and self-determination for their own future
 3. Recovery-oriented service philosophy (working toward flourishing/wholeness)
 4. Individualized and person-driven supports (not one-size-fits-all)
 5. Social and community integration (relationships sustain recovery and health)

Comprehensive Plan

- As stated in our 2022 Solutions Statement (see above), the Good Faith Network seeks a robust, time-bound plan that unites all stakeholders behind the goal of reaching functional zero in Johnson County. Such a plan should address not only emergency shelter, but also ongoing housing and support needs in a manner consistent with a Housing First model.

¹ Defining Chronic Homelessness: A Technical Guide for HUD Programs. Accessible from: <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/DefiningChronicHomeless.pdf>

² Learn more about functional zero at <https://community.solutions/built-for-zero/functional-zero/>

³ Housing First: Principles into Practice. Video playlist available via: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGx3f1PiutI&list=PLn2dcn1mdW4oAhzNDRcrl0AGx11FJ_ukC

⁴ 3/23/22 interview with Dr. Sam Tsemberis, founder of Housing First

2023 Actions

Winter Witness: A Prayer Rally to End Homelessness

On the day of Project 1020's opening, the Good Faith Network gathered people and the media to lament the need for emergency shelters when there are better solutions out there. We repeated our call for a comprehensive plan to reach functional zero in Johnson County.

Testifying against Kansas House Bill 2430

In March, a piece of legislation emerged in the KS Legislature's Committee on Welfare Reform that would criminalize camping (unsheltered homelessness) on public lands. Furthermore, any jurisdiction that doesn't comply with this law would risk losing state funding for homelessness. Pastor Ali Haynes, on behalf of the Good Faith Network, testified against this bill alongside many of the service providers and allies we have been working with over the last 2 years.

2023 Progress Update: Coordinator Position

On April 28th, 2022, the Board of County Commissioners voted to immediately establish a Housing Coordinator position, outside of the regular budget cycle. At our May 3rd Nehemiah Action, there was audience confusion about the negotiation happening on stage. We went in asking for a *Homelessness Coordinator* who would direct the creation of a comprehensive plan and be given all authority necessary to implement said plan. We left that night with assurances that the Housing Coordinator would have responsibility for the homelessness side of the housing continuum, but would not solely focus on homelessness.

This was a compromise. Every community that we have seen reach functional zero has a dedicated coordinator exclusively focused on homelessness. This position is a key ingredient in their success. Thus, the Good Faith Network firmly believes that the spectrum of affordable housing and homelessness is so broad that it warrants two coordinators who can work together from both ends:



Above: Housing continuum from the Board of County Commission's Housing Subcommittee report.

Megan Foreman was hired as Housing Coordinator and began on January 23rd, 2023. Our committee has met with her and will continue to seek clarity on what can be done to lift the chronically homeless into recovery.

Ongoing Services and Services in Development

Currently, Johnson County is home to a patchwork of programs and services that receive funds from the county and/or federal government. Below is a non-inclusive list of some of the highlights:

- American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) - State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds
 - Johnson County has allocated \$2M (out of \$117M total) of these funds to programs such as utility assistance, cold weather emergency response, Project 10♥20, food pantries, and Homeless Management Information Software.
- The Dignity Project
 - Included in the ARPA allocation was a \$60,000 grant to support a planning process for a year-round shelter. The planning process will produce recommendations for a property plan and service provision for a year-round, low-barrier, non-congregate shelter. The Dignity Project, led by Lee Jost and Joe Karlin, is currently interviewing stakeholders and conducting focus groups.
- Problem Solving Beds
 - To those exiting the justice system, the Dept. of Corrections offers a 60-day, rent-free stay during which program participants can secure housing, employment, and more.
- Programs through the Johnson County Mental Health Center (JCMHC) include:
 - Two full-time street outreach workers, 21 units of permanent supportive housing for adults with severe/persistent mental illness, 10 set-aside Housing Choice Vouchers through the Housing Authority, and 2 transitional beds for individuals exiting an institution (hospital, nursing facility, jail) into homelessness

For a thorough list of current efforts, explore the county's new webpage at:

<https://www.jocogov.org/county-services/guides-residents-and-businesses/housing-and-homelessness-assistance-guide>

Good work is being done! However, we still need a comprehensive plan and a dedicated coordinator position. People are still falling through the cracks and the numbers continue to rise. Our current system is perfectly designed for the results we are currently getting - *over 220 people are homeless on any given night*. It is time to stop managing homelessness and start ending it.

Intervening with KDADS

The Good Faith Network has been fostering communication between the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) and the Johnson County Board of Commissioners in the hopes that a comprehensive plan to end homelessness in Johnson County comes to fruition!

Thanks to the work of our sister organization (Justice Matters in Lawrence), KDADS has already established contracts with both Julia Orlando and Dr. Sam Tsemberis - experts with a proven track record of reaching functional zero via Housing First. Recall that last year, the Good Faith Network brought together these experts in front of commissioners and local service providers at our Homelessness Summit on April 4th, 2022.

Appendix A

The 2021-2022 Homelessness Research Committee held the following research interviews and meetings leading up to the 4/4/22 Solutions Briefing:

- 12/13/21 - Barb McEver - Project 1020
- 12/15/21 - Tim DeWeese - Johnson County Mental Health Center (JCMHC)
- 01/05/22 - Krysten Olson - Metro Lutheran Ministries
- 01/06/22 - Julie Brewer, Rita Carr, Kristy Baughman - United Community Services
- 01/10/22 - Jessica Murphy - JCMHC Co-Responders, Sgt. Robert McKeirnan - Olathe Police Dept, Sgt.

Stewart Brought - Overland Park Police Dept

- 01/11/22 - Vicki Dercher - JoCo IHN
- 01/24/22 - Review of the United Community Services Johnson County Housing Study
- 01/26/22 - Angie Walker - Rockford, IL
- 01/31/22 - Kar Woo - Artists Helping the Homeless
- 02/03/22 - Review of Justice Matters' 2020 interview with Bergen County, NJ
- 02/09/22 - Tour of Veterans Community Project
- 02/14/22 - Susan Lewis - Mental Health America of the Heartland
- 02/18/22 - David Ward, Jessica Hotaling - Johnson County Housing Services
- 02/24/22 - Doug Brown - Metro Lutheran Ministries
- 03/04/22 - Rita Carr and Kristy Baughman - United Community Services
- 03/07/22 - HOME-ARP presentation - KS Housing Resources Corporation
- 03/09/22 - Andy Brown - KS Dept of Aging and Disability Services
- 03/14/22 - Review of Bergen County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness
- 03/15/22 - Julia Orlando - Bergen County, NJ
- 03/16/22 - Tim DeWeese, Jessica Murphy, Shana Burgess - JCMHC
- 03/22/22 - Commissioner Janee Hanzlick
- 03/22/22 - Rob Santel, Susila Jones - CrossLines
- 03/23/22 - Dr. Sam Tsemberis - Pathways to Housing
- 04/04/22 - Hosted Homelessness Summit at Church of the Resurrection, ft. Julia Orlando and Dr. Sam Tsemberis
- Pre-meetings with officials:
 - 04/20/22 - Commissioner Janee Hanzlick
 - 04/22/22 - Commissioner Becky Fast
 - 04/25/22 - Chairman Ed Eilert
 - 04/28/22 - Commissioner Shirley Allenbrand
- 05/03/22 - Nehemiah Assembly

Appendix B

The 2022-2023 Ending Homelessness Action Team held the following meetings and actions leading up to the 3/21/23 Solutions Briefing:

- 12/01/22 - Winter Witness: A Prayer Rally to End Homelessness (Project 10♥20 opening)
- 12/09/22 - Housing First study session
- 12/16/22 - Heather Bradley Geary - Vecino Group
- 12/19/22 - Vecino Group tour of permanent supportive housing developments
- 12/20/22 - Chairman-elect Mike Kelly
- 01/10/23 - Bergen County comprehensive plan and Zero KC study session
- 01/12/23 - Josh Henges - Homelessness Coordinator, KCMO
- 01/17/23 - Chairman Mike Kelly
- 01/18/23 - United Community Services meeting for 2023 PIT count
- 01/26/23 - Volunteer for 2023 PIT count
- 02/05/23 - Commissioner Andy Brown, KS Department of Aging and Disability Services
- 02/14/23 - Heather McNeive - Director of Housing Services, and Megan Foreman - Housing Coordinator
- 02/27/23 - KS Statewide Homeless Coalition - information session on HB 2430
- 03/02/23 - KS Legislature Committee on Welfare Reform Committee
- 03/05/23 - Commissioner Andy Brown - KDADS
- 03/09/23 - Board of County Commissioners study session on crisis stabilization and homelessness
- 03/20/23 - Megan Foreman - Housing Coordinator