

Minutes
Homeless Taskforce
MEETING DATE: October 18, 2006
United Way
7:00 – 8:30 am

Taskforce Members

Rev. Cheryl Jefferson Bell Sue Castile Gypsy Claar Connie Dietz
Jack Focht Patrick Hanrahan Lou Heldman Bernie Hudspeth
Bishop Michael Jackels Bishop Scott Jones Steve Martens Janet L. Miller
Tim Norton Marsha Stanyer Mary K. Vaughn

Ex officio members: Winston Brooks Bill Buchanan George Kolb Ron Holt

Welcome

Jack Focht called the meeting to order at 7 a.m. Focht discussed the retreat scheduled for October 26, 2006. Several nationally acknowledged have made themselves available to speak to the members during the retreat.

Minutes

Focht asked if any changes to the minutes were necessary. The minutes from the September 20 meeting were approved.

New Business

Inter-Faith Ministries

Sam Muyskens and Sandy Swank of Inter-Faith Ministries made a presentation about the organization and its services to the homeless. Activities of Inter-Faith Ministries are supported by a network of 80 local congregations. Inter-Faith offers 12 programs in its continuum of care.

Inter-Faith operates programs in street outreach, emergency shelter, transitional shelter and permanent housing. Inter-Faith Ministries has broken ground on its newest permanent housing project, which will add another 40 bed nights to its capacity. All of Inter-Faith's programs have case managers who help provide services for homeless individuals. Providing individuals with case managers and associated wrap-around services result in fewer people returning to homelessness.

According to the presentation the primary causes of homelessness in the community are the lack of livable wage jobs and a lack of affordable housing. Swank noted that some members of the homeless community do not use the existing shelters as they fear the loss of autonomy. For individuals who fear the loss of such autonomy Inter-Faith operates a low barrier shelter. Those utilizing this shelter have fewer restrictions than other programs. The goal of the low barrier shelter is to move its patrons into permanent housing.

Muyskens highlighted some of the next steps to be undertaken by the community to address homelessness. One step would be to address the lack of affordable housing through the establishment of a housing trust. Such a fund could assist the homeless and those with extremely low incomes fulfill their housing needs. The presentation also highlighted the need for a 24-hour consolidated homeless resource center. As

presented the shelter would be a low barrier program operated around the clock. Those who utilized the proposed shelter would also be able to take advantage of a range of supportive services. It was estimated the annual operating cost of such a resource center would be in the range of \$500,000-600,000.

Wichita Police Department

Captain John Speer of the Wichita Police Department (WPD) spoke about law enforcement issues related to homeless populations. Approximately one year ago the WPD began holding regular meetings with agencies providing services to the community's homeless population. These meetings are meant to help both groups understand the challenges of addressing homelessness.

The WPD is working with Wichita Public Libraries to address some concerns raised by community members about homeless patrons. There are also issues of violence and theft among the homeless population. Such incidences may be underreported due to distrust of law enforcement. Speer noted WPD officers do not go to the shelters or other gathering places to sweep for those with warrants, or parole violations.

Police Officers are given brochures about resources in the community to distribute when they encounter homeless individuals. The brochures have also been translated into Spanish as the WPD is seeing an increase of transient homeless population in the summer months.

One of the biggest challenges the WPD faces in addressing homelessness are individuals who have been banned from the shelters. In some cases these individuals who are unable or unwilling to take their medications. A number of the calls it gets about homeless individuals are for either welfare checks or a business complaining about loitering, panhandling, and similar issues. Speer also noted a possible need for a shelter specifically for veterans.

Speer discussed the camping ordinance the WPD drafted for consideration by the City Council. The ordinance was not well received by those groups who the WPD asked for input. The ordinance is not being pursued the at this time.

Union Rescue Mission

Marsha Stanyer of the Union Rescue Mission (UMR) spoke of the services offered to the homeless men of the community. UMR is an exclusively male facility which can accommodate 130-150 bed nights. Each day two busses bring men to the facility. Those utilizing UMR must attend a nondenominational chapel service each evening.

UMR also offers a Life Change program to assist individuals dealing with substance abuse. The program takes approximately 10 months to complete. In addition to with substance abuse UMR has programs to aid with the job readiness, and assist with resolving legal issues like fines.

Adjourn

Having no other business the meeting was adjourned