# Prism

Prevention · Resources · Independence · Services · Maintenance

**A Project of the Homeless Alliance of Western New York**

*A Community Solution to Homelessness*

*Buffalo and Erie County's 10-Year Action Plan*

# Open Letters to Residents of Buffalo and Erie County:

Dear Friends:

On any given night in Buffalo and Erie County 2,100 men, women and children are homeless; living in emergency shelters, and transitional and permanent homeless housing programs in our community.

The Homeless Alliance of Western New York is to be commended for developing a ten-year strategic plan – PRISM, A Community Solution to Homelessness – that represents a reorientation of the homeless service community and of the City of Buffalo toward ending, not merely relieving, homelessness.
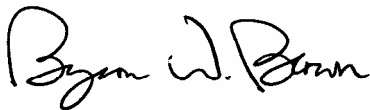
This type of community-based, strategic work grounded in sound local research and the voices of those the effort is intended to help is exactly what we want to see in our community.

One hundred twenty-five to one hundred fifty people sleep on the streets of this City of Good Neighbors on any given night during the year. This is absolutely unacceptable. No one should be without a home.

For the past two years, the Homeless Alliance has been gathering people together, examining national best practices and exhausting local expertise on the plight of the homeless. The product of so many people's efforts is an innovative, ambitious, and utterly achievable roadmap to end long-term homelessness in Buffalo and Erie County.

As we move forward as a city, as a community, we cannot forget the less fortunate among us, particularly the homeless. I applaud the Homeless Alliance of Western New York for working so diligently and with great dedication in their effort to end homelessness.

Sincerely,

Byron W. Brown
Mayor, City of Buffalo

Neighbors,

When developing a plan to end long-term homelessness in Buffalo and Erie County, one is easily humbled by the enormity of the task, excited by the challenge and saddened that such an exercise is necessary.

It is inspiring, however, to have been engaged in this process with so many committed and talented people. From elected officials to community groups; neighborhood associations to the low-income persons in whose voices this plan is grounded; all who contributed to this document deserve the thanks of the community for their efforts.

This plan is as revolutionary as it is unique, calling for a systematic addressing of community needs and seeking broad community alignment toward common goals, stressing information gathering, sound research, collaboration, cooperation, and a commitment to change.

Among many of its recommendations, it calls upon funders, government officials, and the community to come together to make collaboratively-informed decisions about funding and services based upon community needs and best practice data. It calls for education of the public, the not-for-profit sector, and low-income persons themselves about existing resources. It calls for an analysis of the current homeless service system to improve service delivery and seeks to address the root causes of homelessness and poverty. We in Buffalo know that cookie cutter approaches often lead to half-baked solutions; this plan is the recipe for success.

With over 2,100 homeless individuals in Buffalo and Erie County on any given night it is imperative that our work to implement this plan begin now with the help of the entire community.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention the incredible work done by Katie McHugh Connolly, the 10-year plan coordinator, who with the input of countless others authored this report and who has done an outstanding job of making all of this possible. Diane R. Bessel Matteson, the Associate Director for the Alliance must also be thanked, as her contributions to this plan and planning process have been invaluable. I wish everyone had the opportunity to work with such an outstanding team.

It is an exciting time for Buffalo and Erie County. It feels good to be a part of such an ambitious but truly achievable endeavor. Thank you all for your support!

Excelsior!

Bill O'Connell
Executive Director, Homeless Alliance of Western New York

# An Introduction to Buffalo and Erie County's 10-Year Plan to End Long-Term Homelessness

***Why a ten-year plan to end long-term homelessness?***
In 2000, the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) began an ambitious campaign to end homelessness in the United States within ten years. The organization emphasized the role that effective community planning efforts could play in reducing the number of homeless persons, with an overarching goal of ending homelessness completely. Concurrently, NAEH also began extensive outreach to various public, private, and nonprofit organizations in order to raise awareness and build necessary political will to address the issue of homelessness.

In the context of this gradual movement toward a more strategic response to homelessness, a newly-recognized sub-population of the homeless—the "chronic" or long-term homeless—became the subjects of a national push for strategic planning following a New York City study by Dennis Culhane, a leading researcher in homelessness and housing policy and University of Pennsylvania Professor.  This ground-breaking study found that the "chronic" ten percent of the homeless population exhaust half the resources set aside for the homeless generally, due mostly to their continued need for emergency services, including housing and expensive emergency medical and police services.  Captivated by the possibility for fiscal savings, new housing models targeted toward this population, and NAEH's ten-year plan effort, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the newly re-formed Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) quickly adopted the ten-year planning strategy in an effort to assist this specific subpopulation of the homeless known as the **chronic or long-term homeless**. Likewise, the Bush Administration and the U.S. Conference of Mayors set a national goal of ending chronic or long-term homelessness by 2012 and strongly encouraged the development of ten-year plans in cities, counties, and states across the country.

Though the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has defined this population very specifically as **an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has been homeless for one year or longer or four or more times in a three-year period**, it is sufficient for the purpose of this document to say that this population includes those persons who are homeless continuously (one long homeless episode) or continually (many homeless episodes) over a period of time.  Many who work in the homeless service field are all too familiar with this segment of the population, as recidivism is often what defines them as such.  Clearly, the status quo is not working for these hard-to-serve individuals.  This is evidenced by the fact that they—by definition—remain (or continue to become) homeless.  The planning process is an attempt to re-orient the homeless service system from merely triaging homelessness to ending it.  Clearly, this necessitates a paradigm shift.  In undertaking the planning process, the Homeless Alliance and its membership exhibited their dedication to this type of dramatic change.

Investigation of existing ten-year plans revealed that many were written with only a limited understanding of homeless or poverty issues, and did not specifically include current and formerly homeless persons in the planning process (See: A Review of National Ten Year Plans to End Homelessness, available at http://www.wnyhomeless.org). In addition, many communities used older data on homelessness (often problematic census data) instead of undertaking new efforts to gain an understanding of current issues.   The membership of the Homeless Alliance of Western New York made a serious effort to avoid these pitfalls.

### What is this document, and how will it be used?

Buffalo and Erie County's 10-year plan, *PRISM: A Community Solution to Homelessness*, is the product of a year-long planning process, working in concert with the national movement toward addressing and ending homelessness through strategic community planning.  (For more detailed information on the planning process, please refer to the following section, "Process: How did it happen?")  Input from community data collection efforts, local experts, concerned citizens, homeless and formerly homeless persons, and national trends and best practices all contributed to the final plan.

The Homeless Alliance of Western New York undertook this planning process with four guiding principles in mind:

### 1.  Ground the process in the voices of homeless and low-income persons
*Too many planning efforts forget to involve those whom the plan will most personally and intimately affect.  The Homeless Alliance of Western New York believes that the input of these individuals is just as vital as the involvement of service providers and community leaders.*

### 2.  Maintain an open and community-driven process
*Community planning must occur in the community; not behind closed doors.  This planning process has occurred with open doors and with every effort made to reach out and bring as many people around the table as possible.  This plan was not written in a conference room, by handpicked agency representatives; this document has truly come from the community.*

### 3.  Stay abreast of trends, policies, and best practices
*To create effective change, it's both useful and exceptionally important to pay attention to what is working in other areas of the country.  Whether it's Safe Haven models or Housing First initiatives, there are innovative housing and service programs in operation in communities across the US that may be helpful in identifying and piloting innovative new programs in the Buffalo and Erie County community.*

### 4.  Ensure continuing relevance of the plan
*Created with the most sincere of intentions, large-scale plans for dramatic community change can, without the proper support and coordination, sit on a shelf and gather dust.  A factor that can contribute to this sad end is when a plan is created in a vacuum, without the community buy-in and support necessary to carry the initiative through implementation.  From its inception, the Buffalo and Erie County effort has worked to avoid these pitfalls by involving as many diverse groups as possible, and setting up a long-term vision for the community.*

As the Homeless Alliance membership reviewed existing 10-year plans from around the nation, the group developed a deep desire to ensure that Buffalo and Erie County's 10-year plan would not be a document created in a vacuum and soon after placed on a shelf to gather dust.  It also became clear that a far-reaching plan to end long-term homelessness must recommend, instead of particulars (e.g. create a certain number of housing units) the development of a systematic approach to address the changing needs of the homeless and low-income population over the next decade.   More specific steps toward the plan's recommendations will be released in the coming year in a collaboratively-created Implementation Plan, including timelines and responsible parties.  PRISM's goals are broad and far-reaching in order to retain relevance and be effective change catalysts.

### What is the Homeless Alliance of Western New York?

The Homeless Alliance of Western New York works to coordinate the efforts of local service providers to enhance homeless services, identify gaps, reduce duplication, provide opportunities for agencies to work together on new and innovative projects, and increase communication and information-sharing for the benefit of consumers, funders, service-providers, and the community-at-large.  The Alliance also conducts original research in order to better understand the extent and nature of homelessness.

The Homeless Alliance was created in 1992 by the Erie County Legislature to find ways to reduce homelessness in Erie County.  By 2000, the Alliance had departed from its governmental roots, and now acts as an independent, not-for-profit corporation responsible for facilitating dialogue and strategic action between government, public, and private sectors to end homelessness. Projects of the Homeless Alliance include the PRISM 10-Year Plan to End Long-Term Homelessness and the Buffalo Area Services Network, or BAS-Net, Buffalo and Erie County's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

The Alliance is comprised of three paid employees, a nine-person executive committee, and over sixty active member organizations. Its membership includes representatives from Federal, County, and City governmental agencies and departments, local not-for-profit agencies, the business community, and current and formerly homeless individuals.  Alliance funding comes from governmental contracts, foundation support, and the support of generous private donors.

As the coordinating agency for the Erie County Homeless Continuum of Care (CoC), the Alliance is proud to have brought nearly 50 million dollars of competitive federal funding to Erie County over the past 6 years for homeless housing and services.  As the CoC coordinating agency, the Alliance membership made the decision to spearhead the 10-year planning process.

# Process:  How did it happen?

In the fall of 2003, the Homeless Alliance of Western New York decided to begin its own ten-year planning process within Buffalo and Erie County using a highly innovative strategy to address these concerns.  Termed the PRISM Project, the effort focused from its inception on five goals determined through exhaustive best practice research: Prevention, Resources, Independence through Housing, Services, and Maintenance (PRISM).  Already tasked with coordinating homeless services in the area, the Homeless Alliance felt it was critically important that the experiences of homeless persons directly inform the creation of the new plan. Likewise, the group felt that homeless advocates and service providers should play a large role in shaping the community's future direction. To that end, the Alliance launched a large-scale effort including a cross-sectional survey of at-risk, currently, and formerly homeless individuals as part of its PRISM Project.

> **Phase I: Data Collection**
> *Getting a better picture of homeless and at-risk populations in Buffalo and Erie County*
>
> **Phase II: Planning**
> *Collecting input from the community to find ways we can use our local expertise and resources to end homelessness*
>
> **Phase III: Implementation**
> *An ongoing process to cooperatively implement the plan's recommendations community-wide*
>
> **Phase IV: Evaluation and Monitoring**
> *Continuous evaluation and monitoring, concurrent with implementation, of the plan's progress to ensure relevance and success*

The survey was by all accounts a success, with over 165 community volunteers interviewing over one thousand respondents at 35 service sites and dozens of street locations throughout the community.

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# Phase I: Data Collection



Charles Lewis/Buffalo News  Peggy Nilson, of the Western New York Veterans Housing Coalition,  interviews Serafin Diaz in Durham Memorial African Methodist  Episcopal Zion Church's food pantry as part of a survey of the homeless.

*Short Form Surveys* were three pages long and completed at service sites, including food pantries, emergency feeding programs, drop-in and support centers, and other service sites.  Respondents were homeless and at-risk of homelessness.

*Long Form Surveys* were fourteen pages long and completed at emergency homeless housing programs. All respondents were homeless.

## PRISM PROJECT SURVEY METHODOLOGY

To better understand the needs and use of services among at -risk, currently, and formerly homeless individuals, the Homeless Alliance conducted a large-scale, 24-hour community survey on September 22nd 2004. As part of the survey planning process, the Alliance worked with its members and consulted various community resources to scout key locations, develop survey questions, and recruit and train volunteers.

Recognizing that many individuals at high risk for homelessness access a variety of community services, the team developed a survey to be given at area soup kitchens, food pantries, drop-in and support centers, resource centers, and service provider sites.  The three-page **short form** instrument enabled the Alliance to obtain information on the demographics, education, income, homeless status, need for services, and use of local programming among this group.

In addition, a **long form** was created to capture information from persons who were housed within the local emergency shelter network. This longer and more extensive survey included questions on personal characteristics, education and employment, income, physical and mental health, substance use, other disabling conditions, use of mainstream resources, and care networks. This twenty-minute survey allowed the Alliance staff to gain a deeper understanding of persons being served in community emergency housing facilities.

Prior to entering the field, the effort's 165 volunteers were given special training on how to administer the survey and about homeless populations and poverty in the United States. Volunteers approached individuals at the various community sites and inquired about their willingness to participate in the survey. Potential respondents were informed that their information would be completely confidential and no one outside the study team would have access to it. Likewise, respondents were told that their access to services would not be compromised if they decided not to participate in the survey. Participants had the option to complete the survey themselves, to read along, or to have the volunteer read the document to them. Respondents were compensated for their valuable time and information. They were also given a pocket resource card identifying a variety of services available in the local community.

## *Key findings from the September 2004 PRISM Project Survey include:*

**Need for Education and Job Training**: Over one-third of all short form respondents and thirty-nine percent of long form respondents did not have a high school diploma or GED. In addition, fifty-five percent of long form respondents indicated an interest in job training or education opportunities.

**Concern for At-Risk Individuals**: A large number of homeless or at-risk individuals stated that they did not live in a home of their own but stayed with family and friends. Additionally, many individuals residing in emergency shelters were not accompanied by family members, including their own minor children, suggesting a sizable number of persons who may be at high risk of homelessness due to a precarious housing situation (e.g. children temporarily staying with family members or friends).

**Presence of Disabling Condition Inhibits Ability to Work or Perform Activities**: Fifty-nine percent of short form participants and forty-eight percent of long form respondents indicated that they have a physical, emotional, or other disabling condition that inhibits their ability to work or perform activities. Employment among this group is greatly reduced.

**Median Incomes Fall Far Short of Poverty Line Incomes**: For short form participants, the median income was $500 per month while the median income for sheltered individuals was $303. Thirty-four percent of long form respondents indicated that they had no income.

**Use of Mainstream Resources:** Sixty-two percent of short form and sixty percent of long form respondents rely on mainstream resources as their main source of monthly income.

**Long-Term Homeless Identified at Emergency Programs:** One in ten persons accessing emergency feeding and services was homeless for one year or more.

**Ninety-two percent of currently homeless respondents found at short form locations were homeless more than once**.

**Experience of Homelessness Higher Than Expected Among At-Risk Group**: Sixty percent of short form respondents indicated that they had been without a place of their own at some point in their lifetime. Sixty-five percent indicated that they had stayed with friends and family.  Forty percent indicated that they were currently homeless. Only twenty-two percent of these individuals indicated that they had stayed in a shelter the night before. *This illustrates that the number of people who are homeless and staying doubled-and-tripled up with family and friends is alarmingly higher than previously imagined, and that at least some of this population can be reached by providers at service sites such as soup kitchens and food pantries.*

**Lack of Income, Work, Affordable Housing, and Benefits Key Reasons for Homelessness:** Most respondents (short or long form) indicated that lack of income was a major reason for their homelessness. Among first-time homeless persons, loss of work was a key factor. For individuals who were homeless two or more times, lack of affordable housing was more commonly discussed.

**Disconnect Between Service Need and Service Use:** Among short form respondents, there were fairly dramatic aggregate differences in permanent housing, financial services, education and job training, transitional housing, and health care with regard to services needed and services used. In other words, respondents indicated a need for these services, but did not indicate that they actually *used* them.  Most respondents who indicated needs for food and meals, emergency shelter, mental health care, and substance abuse services felt they were able to access these services.

**Homeless Persons Express Need for Housing and Services:** Sheltered populations identified greatest need for affordable places to live, lists of affordable housing, warm places to go when it gets cold, educational workshops for applying for housing, and places to camp

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# *Phase II: Planning*

Following the survey effort, five open community forums were planned to correspond with the five PRISM Project goals (Prevention, Resources, Independence through Housing, Services, and Maintenance).  To prepare for  the forums, several tasks were completed by Homeless Alliance committees, including an environmental scan, further outreach to the community, and best practice research in homeless housing and service provision.  Best practice information was compiled into useful matrices for further examination by forum participants.

Forums were activity-based and drew on both the expertise and creativity of participants.  Challenges to the Buffalo and Erie County Continuum of Care were illuminated and cooperative problem-solving was encouraged.  Participants gave the forums outstanding evaluations, and many noted that they felt these events "got people talking about solutions" in the homeless service provider community.

> ### *Spotlight: Transportation Task Force*
>
> *A topic that repeatedly surfaced during the 10-year planning process was the difficulty many clients have accessing transportation.  Sprung from the PRISM Project Maintenance Forum and Writing Committee, a group of concerned advocates gathered to form the Transportation Task Force.*
>
> *The group is currently strategizing ways to help homeless and low-income persons access affordable transportation and completing a transportation needs assessment for low-income residents of Erie County.*



Concurrently, "Homeless Think Tanks" or focus groups with homeless persons, were held at various service locations throughout the community.  These Think Tanks were a valuable mechanism that allowed the Alliance to share the results of the data collection effort and use the groups as a sounding board, asking "does this seem true to you?"  The Think Tanks were also used to share national best practices in homeless housing and service provision with those who are currently experiencing homelessness.

Volunteers were culled from each forum to be a part of "Writing Committees," groups that pored over the notes from the meetings and identified themes, areas for further exploration, and key ideas.  These writing committees organized what would become the PRISM Project's Goals and Strategies—taking into consideration not only the input from the forums, but also that from the local data collection, homeless think tanks, and consultation with key community players, and national best practices.

Though facilitated by the Homeless Alliance of Western New York, the plan itself very much belongs to the community, and reflects the community's experiences, concerns, and vision of the future.

# How is the plan structured?

The plan, made up of fourteen goals, is broken into four sections, *Education and Empowerment*, *Continuum of Care Coordination*, *Community Supports*, and *System Change*.

*Education and Empowerment:* The three goals in this section highlight the need for wider awareness and use of mainstream resources (e.g. Veteran's Benefits, SSI, TANF, etc.) and existing community services. Educating consumers, service providers, and the local community empowers people to better access the benefits and services for which they or their clients are eligible. Tapping into existing resources will reduce the burden on the homeless service system and may prevent homelessness for those at-risk in the community.

*Continuum of Care Alignment:* This section includes six goals that all aim to improve Buffalo and Erie County's homeless service system, or continuum of care. The goals range from developing and codifying systematic approaches for addressing obstacles and meeting gaps to improving data collection and performance measurement efforts.

*Community Supports:* The three goals in the Community Supports section illustrate concrete measures—safe, adequate, and affordable housing and employment—that are crucial in helping formerly homeless persons maintain housed status and preventing further homelessness in the community.

*System Change:* The final two goals in the plan articulate the need for a unified effort to build coalitions and public will to institute policies, programs, and campaigns that will end homelessness.

Working from the ground up, these four sections represent the four layers of action that must be taken to end homelessness:

1. **Educate and empower clients, service providers, and the community to advocate for needed benefits and services.**

2. **Work to ensure that the homeless housing and service system is aligned across the community for maximum impact.**

3. **Increase mainstream community supports that decrease poverty and increase self-sufficiency.**

4. **Collaborate to bring about needed policy changes that address the root causes of homelessness.**
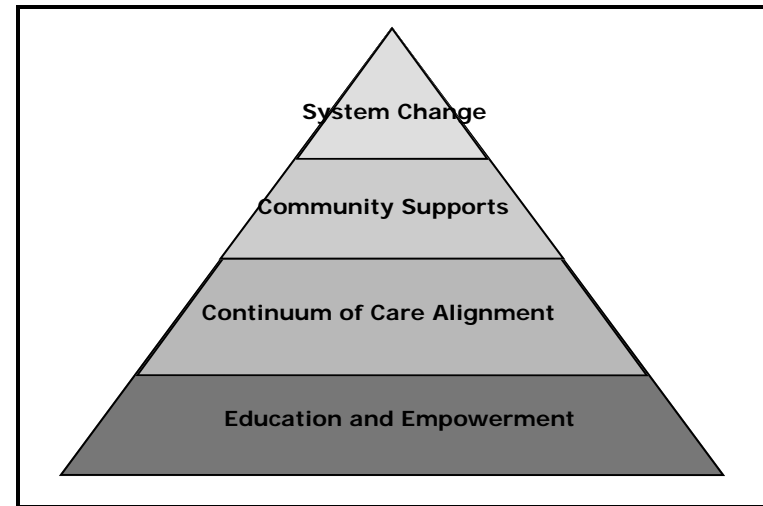
# Goal: Empower consumers with the tools to self-advocate to secure mainstream resources and services
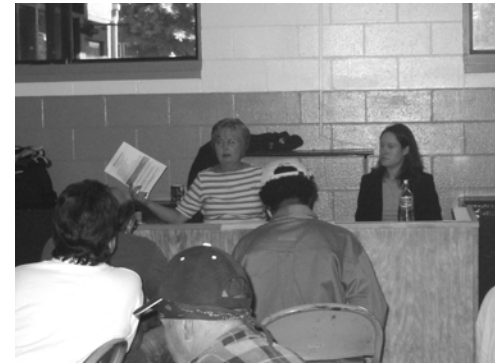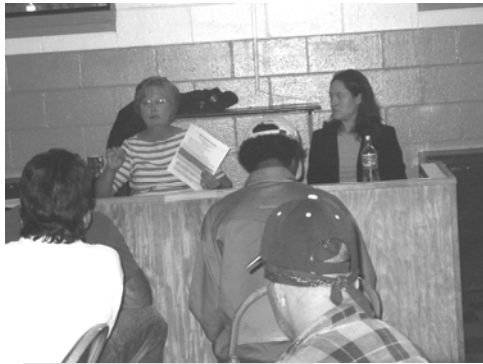
Advocates from Crisis Services and Neighborhood Legal Services provide an orientation on mainstream benefits and housing to men at the Buffalo City Mission.

One of the grounding principles of the PRISM plan development was to ground the process in the voices of homeless and low-income persons.  This means listening to the suggestions and stories of those who have actually experienced homelessness personally.  In examining plans from across the country, it was all too common to find little or no involvement in the planning process by homeless persons.  Often, if there was involvement at all, it was after the plan had already been developed.  PRISM refused to follow this trend, making a concerted effort to involve homeless and low-income persons at each stage of the planning process.

It only makes sense, then, that part of the solution to end long-term homelessness is empowering homeless housing and service consumers with the tools and knowledge to act as their own advocate for referral services and public benefits.

*Data from the PRISM Project Survey suggests a mild "protective" effect from securing mainstream resources. Individuals who received governmental supports were less likely to be homeless at the time of the survey and had fewer instances of homelessness over the past three years.  Perhaps more importantly, the median income for those individuals receiving mainstream resources was $587 per month.  While still well below the poverty line, this figure is more than double the income of those who had not secured this assistance.*

# Strategies

### Homeless Clients and those at-risk of becoming homeless

- Expand current training and education opportunities to empower homeless persons, including workshops detailing how to access benefits or apply for housing.

- Provide educational materials and workshops on housing issues, from tenants' rights to home ownership.

- Continue to provide easy-to-use, compact resource guides.

- Provide access to phones and the Internet for increased self-referral.

- Provide accessible, affordable transportation which will increase consumers' ability to get to scheduled meetings, appointments, and interviews.

- Initiate a "Don't Wait Until It's Too Late!" campaign designed to outreach to the at-risk population through media work, food pantries and dining rooms, health clinics, churches, and neighborhood groups.

### Community-at-large

- Create an online resource guide with educational materials about poverty, homelessness, and related topics.

- Maximize usage and awareness of upcoming 211 phone referral system.

*Spotlight: Neighborhood Legal Services and Crisis Services*

*In a partnership between Neighborhood Legal Services' Homeless Task Force and Crisis Services' Homeless Program, advocates began a weekly orientation program for residents of the Buffalo City Mission, the area's largest emergency shelter. The orientation informs clients of the mainstream benefits for which they may be eligible and how to apply, and highlights some of the limited housing options open to those receiving public assistance. There are plans to begin a similar orientation program in the City Mission's sister organization, Cornerstone Manor, which serves women and children.*

*The orientation empowers clients to self-advocate—especially important when many people are unable to access needed case management services.*



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# Goal: Raise awareness and use of available services and mainstream resources by service providers and community groups

The PRISM Project Survey asked respondents to identify which services they needed and which services they regularly accessed. The aggregated responses suggest a disconnect between services that are needed and those that homeless and at-risk persons are able to access. Information from the survey and from the five PRISM Project Community forums suggest that permanent housing, health services, financial assistance, transportation, alcohol and drug treatment, child care, legal services, integrated MICA (Mentally-Ill and Chemically-Addicted) treatment, and job training are all particularly difficult to access.

Certainly some of these types of services are not readily available to all that need them in the community, but others *are* available, but not readily known to all helping professionals. By utilizing and expanding connections to existing coalitions that work with homeless and low-income service providers to disseminate resource information, the entire provider community can improve its knowledge and its clients' use of the community's "mainstream" resources.

Along with more traditional workshop opportunities, coalition-building, and resource guides, technology should also be utilized to improve access to services. With growing usage of Buffalo and Erie County's Homeless Management Information System, BAS-Net, and development of online tools such as the Self-Sufficiency Calculator, a benefits calculator for service providers, efforts should be directed towards ensuring the widest possible participation in such resources.

## Spotlight: VA Homeless Program

*In 2003, the Department of Veterans Affairs examined how homeless veterans were gaining access to VA benefits. Results indicated that the area covered by Buffalo's Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Program and the Buffalo Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Regional Office processed a higher rate of claims for homeless veterans than in other geographic areas. In the Buffalo area, applications for financial benefits submitted by homeless veterans were flagged as such and given priority review, thereby ensuring that homeless veterans in Western New York receive timely screening for veterans' financial and healthcare benefits. This process, established by the local VA, was adopted across the Upstate New York VA Network. This has been identified by the VA as a best practice and is being studied as a demonstration project.*

**Section One: Education and Empowerment**

## Strategies

### First-ring responders (groups that see those in need first—churches, neighborhood groups, block clubs, food pantries)

- Provide specialized resources, trainings, and educational materials to these providers.

- Create an online resource guide with educational materials about poverty and other relevant topics, information about 211 phone referral service, and a universal referral form.

- Perform outreach to encourage these groups to join collaborative work to end homelessness.

### Service providers

- Create cross-training opportunities to improve interagency communication and collaboration.

- Maximize usage of BAS-Net online service lookup and referral.

- Continue to provide trainings to direct service workers on available services and accessing mainstream benefits.

- Increase usage of the Self-Sufficiency Calculator, the online public benefits calculator.

> **Spotlight: Western New York Coalition for the Homeless**
>
> *Educating clients, service providers, and the community about community resources is key to ending homelessness. Only through educational efforts can people learn how to advocate for themselves and how to best help others.*
>
> *The Western New York Coalition for the Homeless has been organizing free and low-cost workshops for homeless service providers for the past 10 years. The workshops give area organizations opportunities to increase their staff knowledge and skills in such areas as housing, public benefits, utilities, communication, and domestic and elder violence.*

# Goal: Build public will to end homelessness through increasing awareness and knowledge



The road to Buffalo and Erie County's 10-year plan has been a truly collaborative effort, with the Homeless Alliance's over sixty member agencies—including representatives from the public, private, foundation, and nonprofit sectors—collaborating to learn more about long-term homelessness in our community, brainstorm solutions, and commit to change. This broad buy-in was enough to formulate the PRISM plan, but it's not enough to end long-term homelessness.

This movement must be extended throughout the community with strategic education and media work, including outreach efforts to targeted groups and creative strategies to engage the community as a whole. Keeping the plight of the homeless and at-risk in the forefront of local, state, and federal decision-makers minds is key to the success of this plan.

Information about homelessness must also be made more readily available to community members in useable formats and promoted to those who may find it useful. Boosting the public's knowledge of homelessness and its causes, as well as the PRISM-proposed solutions to these causes will build momentum toward completion of the goals of the ten-year plan.

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## *Strategies*

- Publicize information about homelessness and the 10-year plan to the community through media campaigns, educational materials, and awareness events.

- Provide ready-access to a publicized online registry of speakers, educational material, affordable housing lists, and links to related websites.



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## *Voices from the Forums*

*PRISM Project Forum participants suggested many community-awareness-boosting activities. Creative examples included:*

- *Go into the schools to educate students about homelessness*

- *Hold letter-writing campaigns to local legislators to support pertinent legislation, and include consumers in these campaigns*

- *Work on eliminating homeless stereotypes through education and media campaigns*

- *Use media efforts to spotlight area service providers and the 10-Year Plan*

- *Reach out to religious groups*

- *Encourage consumers and formerly homeless persons to speak out about their experiences*

- *Create online resources for teachers about local homelessness and poverty*

- *Challenge local politicians to live on $306 a month, just like those surviving monthly on public assistance*

- *Hold sleepouts in support of homeless awareness*

# Goal:  Maximize effectiveness of local homeless continuum of care

The term "continuum of care" has dual meanings.  The Department of Housing and Urban Development's Continuum of Care (CoC) funds are part of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Program.  McKinney-Vento funds, administered through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), can be block granted to municipalities (as in Emergency Shelter Grant funds) or can be disseminated via a competitive process.  These competitively-awarded McKinney-Vento funds are termed "Continuum of Care," as evaluators examine a community's progressive breadth of services for assistance to homeless persons, also known as a community's continuum of care.  The Homeless Alliance of Western New York coordinates this yearly competitive application for Erie County.

Programming offered in the continuum of care ranges from emergency housing, transitional housing, all the way through to permanent supportive housing, with supportive services utilized throughout.  Part of the competitive process is to analyze this system of care to find gaps in services and housing for a variety of subpopulations, including domestic violence survivors, those struggling with mental illness and/or chemical addiction, those with HIV/AIDS, military veterans, youth and families.

Recent changes in the local CoC competition have responded to the community's call to prioritize identified gaps in service.  The changes put in place for the 2006 competition ensure that all projects forwarded to HUD are filling targeted gap areas.  Though this was often true in practice, the new policies codify this important priority.  These types of policy changes, partnered with growing use of the BAS-Net HMIS to measure outcomes system-wide and pinpoint specific areas for improvement, will move the continuum toward maximum effectiveness.

***Current challenges identified in the PRISM Project Planning effort include:***

- *Waiting lists are necessary for some types of homeless housing, delaying services and stabilization.*
- *Some agencies appear to "cream," by refusing hard-to-serve clients access to their programs.*
- *Problems continue with foster care, jails, hospitals, and 28-day programs discharging clients into the homeless care system.*
- *Homeless clients often leave permanent supportive housing without being prepared for financial self-sufficiency (learning budgeting skills, addressing debt and credit issues).*

***Section Two: Continuum of Care Alignment***

Two participants in the Continuum of Care Policy and Measurement Committee help make policy decisions and changes to the Continuum of Care process.

**Identified gaps in service for the 2006 CoC Competition include:**

**Permanent Housing for:**
- Clients dealing with Mental Health Issues
- Clients dealing with Substance Abuse Issues
- Dually-diagnosed Mentally Ill/Chemically Addicted (MICA )Clients
- Chronically Homeless Clients

**Permanent Housing for Families**

**Transitional Housing for Youth**

**Transitional Housing for:**
- Clients dealing with Mental Health Issues
- Clients dealing with Substance Abuse Issues
- MICA Clients
- Chronically Homeless Clients

**Client-Specific Case Management** (follows the person through the continuum, not attached to participation in a particular program)

*For more information on gaps areas and the Erie County Gaps Analysis, please refer to Understanding Homelessness: A Report to the Community available at www.wnyhomeless.org.*

## Strategies

- Continue policy that prioritizes Continuum of Care funding toward gaps in the continuum.

- Use local Homeless Management Information System, BAS-Net, to track performance on community benchmarks and re-orient service and housing providers toward outcome-based measures.

- Codify a systematic continuum-wide process—which includes the input of homeless and formerly-homeless individuals and service and housing providers—to identify, address, and strategically problem-solve issues that may surface.

# Goal: Increase opportunities for case management

As stated previously, the PRISM plan is intended to construct a systematic and ongoing approach to end homelessness. For this reason, goals addressing specific gaps in service ("we need so-many housing units") are not included in the plan. One necessary exception is this particular goal, "Increase opportunities for case management."

A clear message from each of the five PRISM Project Forums was that the importance of case management should not be underestimated. In fact, a recommendation for increased case management services was the most common suggestion made at each of the forums. Case management can help clients access mainstream benefits and services, work towards cooperatively-set goals, secure housing, and assist in maintaining that housing. All of these facets of case management were found by the group to be vital in preventing and shortening stays in the homeless service system. It was acknowledged that there are varying levels of intensity of case management, and that each type of case management, from one-time visits to intensive daily or weekly interaction, is useful.

Besides this overarching theme emphasizing the general importance of case management, there was significant concern that many people who are currently in need of case management support are unable to qualify for existing programs. Many of the programs that serve the homeless are targeted toward those with mental health issues. This population is certainly in need of increased case management services, but many people who do not qualify for this type of assistance are not able to link with appropriate services. In addition, case management within homeless housing providers, most notably within emergency shelter, varies widely in quality and intensity.

In the current system, clients may receive limited case management while in an emergency shelter program, but if they were to break the rules or choose to leave the facility, that support would be discontinued. Often, it is during these periods of upheaval or crisis when case management and continuity of support is needed most. For this reason, PRISM is recommending, among other strategies, case management that follows a person through the continuum to many programs in which they may participate.

**Section Two: Continuum of Care Alignment**

## *Strategies*

- Provide access to preventative case management and services *before* crisis situations arise.

- Concentrate preventative efforts to emergency feeding programs and other at-risk locations.

- Provide greater opportunities for case management for those without mental illness.
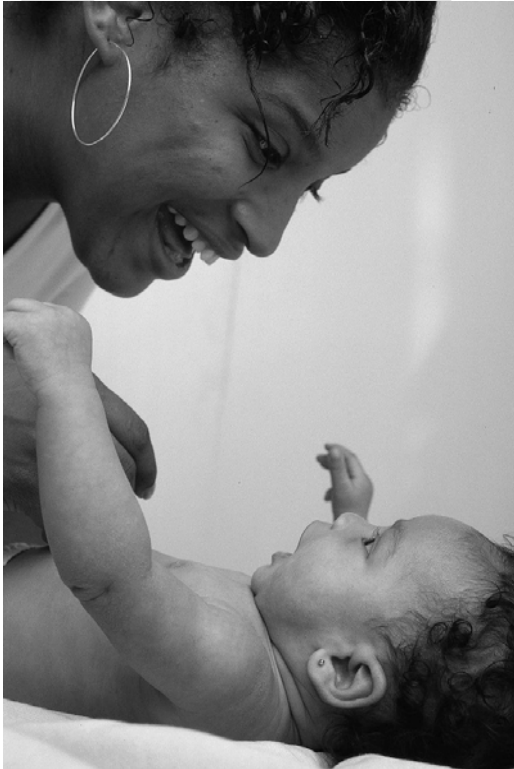
- Provide aftercare or "maintenance" support to ensure that those leaving the homeless service system can retain their housing. Incorporate a wider use of peer support and peer mentoring.

- Provide case management opportunities that are attached to the client, not to a program in which they participate. Target this type of case management toward the long-term homeless.

- Provide educational trainings to service providers to explore funding options for supportive service projects and creative collaborations.



**Suggestions regarding the importance of case management for each of the five PRISM goals included:**

*Prevention: Ensure the availability of and access to case management services prior to a homeless episode, linking clients with the services they need to remain housed.*

*Resources: Arm case managers with the knowledge and experience necessary to navigate the public benefits system and advocate for client receipt of benefits.*

*Independence through Housing: Improve options for case management for those who are placed in housing.*

*Services: Develop case management programs available to all via referral.*

*Maintenance: Provide aftercare case management support to those who have moved out of the homeless service system, thereby decreasing recidivism.*

*A Community Solution to Homelessness*

# _Goal:  Shift local funding priorities toward meeting existing gaps, with a continued focus on developing permanent housing_

## *A United Front: Solving Problems as a Community*

*Though the local Continuum of Care competition has recently codified its longtime commitment to filling local gaps in service, dedicating that pool of funding alone to these gap areas is not enough. Funding for programs that house and serve the homeless and at-risk populations comes from many sources: Erie County, the City of Buffalo, and local foundations.*

*Unless all of these entities make the same commitment to base funding decisions on sound local research that details which types of services and housing are needed, our community is in danger of spending these all-too-valuable and all-too few dollars on programs that may not be the most necessary for the Buffalo and Erie County community.*

*All groups that make funding decisions for these types of dollars must strategize together and come up with systematic and coordinated responses to the community's needs. With increasing focus in the funding community, a greater emphasis on strategic problem solving will be passed along to potential grantees, creating a culture of increasing collaboration across the community and improving the knowledge of the local housing and service provision system.*

*Simultaneously, in order to open doors to fund innovative new programs, both funders and grant-seekers can be educated about exciting and successful best practice models from across the country.*

## Strategies

- Continue the new Continuum of Care policy that limits new applicants to seeking funding only for projects that meet demonstrated gaps in housing and services.

- Provide trainings and educational materials to potential grantees and local funders on the goals of the 10-year plan, local gaps in housing and services, and national best practice models to ensure that those providing services and those funding services are aligned with the community's goals.

# Goal: Boost knowledge and use of cutting-edge best practice housing and service models

*Some successful models examined during the PRISM Planning Process include:*

**Housing First:**
*A housing model that has been proven successful in many locations around the country, Housing First places homeless families or individuals directly into housing units—bypassing or significantly shortening stays in emergency shelter; services are offered following "stabilization" in housing. Programs that utilize this model for families often require employment eligibility and are generally partially funded through Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) dollars.*

**Permanent Supportive Housing:**
*This type of permanent housing offers some onsite services such as case management, AA/NA meetings, or GED classes and provides any necessary referrals to offsite services. This type of housing is useful for persons who may require more intensive support and follow-up, and has proven very successful particularly with mentally ill populations.*

**Safe Haven:**
*Intended as a permanent or semi-permanent living space, safe havens offer—but do not require as a condition of their stay—supportive services to residents. This is considered a good model for the "chronic" or long-term homeless population who may not be suited to abstinence-focused planning or housing.*

**Client-Centered Case Management**
*This type of case management program has been effective for the "chronically" homeless population. It is case management support that follows the client, not a program that client may be a participant in.*

For more best practice models, visit the website for the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) at www.naeh.org and the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) homeless page at www.hud.gov/homeless.

**Section Two: Continuum of Care Alignment**

*Pathways to Housing, a cutting-edge New York City program, provides housing first opportunities to persons who are both homeless and diagnosed with severe mental illnesses.*

*A commitment to learning about, funding, and developing programming that has been proven successful across the country, partnered with openness to changing the way the homeless service and housing system does business will bring those identified as the very hardest to serve off the streets and out of the emergency shelters into their own permanent housing.*

## Strategies

- Provide trainings and educational materials for funders and service providers on new housing and service models and strategies.

- Provide workshops and educational materials on exploring funding options for these new strategies.

- Allow organizations currently pioneering new approaches to support others in implementation.

# Goal: Institute new service programs that address and strategically problem-solve identified needs
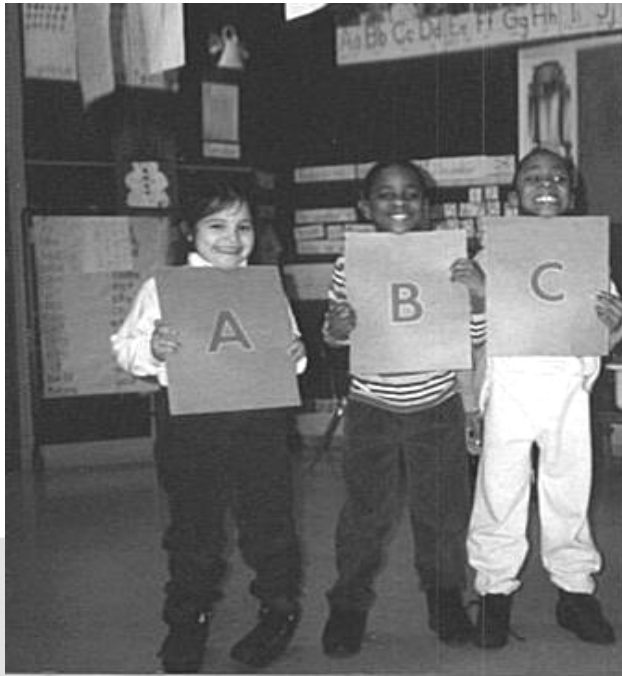
*Supportive services, though vitally important and depended upon through referral by homeless housing programs, are becoming more and more difficult to fund as the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) continues to heavily prioritize permanent housing.*

*Clearly, many services exist in the community and are available for mainstream use. Sometimes these programs are underutilized or unknown to homeless care providers, and greater education and guidance could easily fill a service gap by linking persons in need to appropriate aid. Occasionally, though, it is not that easy, and new service programs need to be developed—to specifically target the homeless population.*

*As federal Continuum of Care funds grow more and more competitive, with growing numbers of groups seeking dollars from a seemingly ever-shrinking pot, HUD's emphasis on permanent housing grows more and more important. Due to this emphasis, however, it is harder to fund vital supportive-services-only projects.*

*Creative funding opportunities and partnerships must be sought out to continue to meet the community's need for supportive services. One suggestion has been to create collaborative projects between supportive service agencies and housing providers.*

**Prism**
Prevention · Resources · Independence · Services · Assistance

Prevention · Resources · Ind

*Section Two: Continuum of Care Alignment*

*Spotlight: SSI Homeless Outreach Program*

*Innovative collaborations, or creative partnerships between service providers, remain beneficial to clients and the community, and are becoming more and more necessary in today's competitive funding market.*

*One excellent example of a local collaboration is the SSIHOP, or Social Security Income Homeless Outreach Program. Neighborhood Legal Services forged a partnership with Lake Shore Behavioral Health to assist people in the process of applying for SSI. The project was funded in the 2006 Continuum of Care Competition, and will be an excellent example of interagency cooperation, as well as our community's dedication to linking homeless persons to mainstream benefits and case management.*

*Spotlight: MICA Core Competency*

*The Regional Council on Integrated Treatment, a group of Western New York mental health and substance use providers, have assembled materials for a Core Competency Training Series after finding that many practitioners in both the mental health and substance use systems do not have skills to assess, screen, and treat co-occurring disorders. This type of collaborative problem-solving, education, and service-planning is a great example of the types of trainings and opportunities Buffalo and Erie County should be offering on a broader basis.*

## Strategies

- Codify a systematic continuum-wide process—which includes the input of homeless and formerly-homeless individuals and service and housing providers—to identify, address, and strategically problem-solve issues that may surface.

- Continue policy that prioritizes Continuum of Care Funding toward gaps in the continuum.

- Explore and educate service providers on funding opportunities for supportive services programs.

## Goal: Maximize usage of the Buffalo Area Services Network (BAS-Net), Buffalo and Erie County's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

**BAS-Net**
**BUFFALO AREA SERVICES NETWORK**

HUD is now requiring all homeless continua of care that receive HUD Continuum of Care dollars to create Homeless Management Information Systems, computer systems that track and collect data on the area's homeless population. HUD has mandated all agencies and programs that receive HUD funding to enter data into the system.

BAS-Net or the Buffalo Area Services Network, is Buffalo and Erie County's HMIS and a project of the Homeless Alliance of Western New York. It is an Internet-based system which allows authorized homeless housing and service provider personnel to keep client records as part of a community-wide database. In compliance with confidentiality and security requirements, BAS-Net is designed to help providers collect real-time, accurate data about the persons they serve. With permission, client information can also be shared across agencies to improve care coordination and reduce intake time.

Information gathered via BAS-Net can be shared with advocates, funding sources, and policy-makers to better understand and respond to client needs and gaps in the local continuum of care.

**Prism**
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*Prevention · Resources · Ind...*

*Section Two: Continuum of Care Alignment*

## *Strategies*

- Bring all shelter, transitional, and permanent housing providers onto the BAS-Net System.

- Bring service-providing agencies, food pantries, health clinics, and governmental agencies (i.e. police, Department of Social Services) onto the BAS-Net System.

- Encourage information-sharing between agencies.

- Promote use of BAS-Net online resource guide and online referral system to increase awareness of available services and streamline the referral process.

- Create community benchmarks for homeless housing and service provision.

- Utilize data collection efforts to measure progress toward the goals of the 10-year plan and to improve housing and service delivery.



**Improvements in service through maximized use of BAS-Net:**

- *Real-time knowledge of bed availability, cutting down on the time it takes to place an individual or family in shelter.*
- *Reduced time spent on intake due to shared data, reducing burden on a client needing to repeat a traumatic story over and over again. It also acknowledges that both the client and the intake worker's time is valuable.*
- *Better care coordination, with agencies more fully aware of the services that are available for clients and the services that their clients have accessed.*
- *Better accountability for outcomes, by providing tools to measure how persons are moving through the continuum into permanent housing. It will enable the community to measure progress on identified goals and target areas for needed improvement.*

# Goal: Enhance knowledge of existing housing stock in Buffalo and Erie County

*Housing forum participants agreed that there was a dramatic disconnect between community-based affordable housing developers and homeless service providers in Buffalo and Erie County. This disconnect, partnered with a lack of communication with housing developers and landlords, suggests that further work needs to be done to understand the types and availability of permanent housing in all areas of Erie County.*

*Once there is a better understanding of what housing is available, there may be more housing that can be accessed by homeless populations. It will also detail what types of housing are lacking.*

## Strategies

- Complete a housing inventory detailing the types and numbers of affordable housing units.

- Encourage community-based affordable housing developers, larger development groups, and home ownership programs to join collaborative efforts with homeless service providers.

# Goal: Increase availability of safe, adequate, and affordable permanent housing for all populations in all areas of Erie County

## Strategies

*Section three of the PRISM Plan is called "Community Supports." The purpose of this section's goals is to build up mainstream supports that increase the community's self-sufficiency. These supports, such as a safe, adequate, and affordable housing stock and self-sufficient wage jobs, are the assets in a community that prevent homelessness from occurring and, importantly, allow a person to remain housed once exiting the homeless continuum of care. If these County-wide supports are not in place, a person may exit the homeless continuum of care only to become someone at high risk of becoming homeless again.*

*This goal is vital to the success of the plan, as evidenced by the PRISM Project Survey data that suggests that once a person in Erie County becomes homeless, there is an alarmingly high chance that person will become homeless again.*

**Inclusionary zoning** is the establishment of regulations by a public agency which require that a specific percentage of housing units in a project or development remain affordable to low-income and very low-income households for a specified period. Cities like Boston, Denver, Sacramento, and San Francisco have adopted mandatory inclusionary zoning laws.

- Work to increase government funding for housing development and subsidy programs.

- Educate housing providers on locally untapped or under-tapped funding streams (e.g. Low-Income Housing Tax Credits).

- Work with similar groups to create a National Low-Income Housing Trust Fund.

- Work to ensure that consumers are able to choose where they live by having affordable housing available across Erie County.

- Institute an inclusionary zoning policy.

- Target the development of homeless housing to meet current gaps.

*Section Three: Community Supports*

*A Community Solution to Homelessness*

# Goal: Support the development of local jobs that pay a self-sufficient wage

New York State recently raised the minimum wage from the national rate of $5.15/hour to $6.00/hour, with provisions to raise the wage rate to $7.15/ hour by January of 2007.

Though $7.15/hour may be a self-sufficient wage for a single adult in Erie County, a single adult with just one school-aged child requires an hourly wage of $9.93, according to the New York State Self-Sufficiency Standard. An Erie County adult with an infant and a school-aged child requires an hourly wage of $15.20. Even with the planned wage increase, many people will be at high risk of becoming homeless—perhaps a high heating bill, an illness, or an accident away from the streets.

As industry has left the Rust Belt over the past thirty years, family-sustaining jobs for those without access to college educations have also left. Once, it was possible to raise a family on minimum wage, but the minimum wage rate has far from kept up with the cost of living. Some economists note that if the minimum wage had kept pace with inflation, it would be up to $18.00/hour.

As noted in a recent *USA Today* news story, the national rate of homeless employment is about 30%. Amidst Buffalo's difficult job market, this community's employment rate for the homeless tops the national average, with approximately 40% of homeless persons reporting full-time, part-time, or temporary work. Even with this comparatively higher rate of employment, these people are unable to remain housed.

Sources: The Self-Sufficiency Standard for New York, September, 2000 (available at http://www.fiscalpolicy.org/selfsufficiency.htm)

The **Self-Sufficiency Standard** measures how much income is needed for a family of a given composition in a given place to adequately meet its basic needs—without public or private assistance. The New York State Self-Sufficiency Steering Committee is distributing the *Self-Sufficiency Standard for New York State*.

## Section Three: Community Supports

**Spotlight: Living Wage Commission**

*The Living Wage Commission, a project of the Coalition for Economic Justice, was brought into existence following the passage of Living Wage legislation by the Buffalo Common Council.*

*The legislation requires companies that contract with the City of Buffalo to pay employees a living wage rate.*

*The Commission monitors these activities, ensuring that the city is staying compliant with the legislation.*

## Strategies

- Support community economic development that will create self-sufficient-wage jobs.

- Support community groups working to create and sustain self-sufficient-wage job opportunities.

- Institute a livable minimum wage by harnessing the strength of existing coalitions to lobby for the interests of homeless and low-income persons and partnering with like-minded coalitions on the local, state, and national levels to create change.

- Bring employers around the table to encourage the hiring of homeless and formerly–homeless persons.

# Goal: Strengthen existing local homeless- and poverty-related coalitions

The PRISM triangle pictured at right represents the sections of the ten-year plan, and how each section builds on the other. The sections build from the bottom up, culminating in the creation of large-scale system change to address those policies that perpetuate the root causes of homelessness: poverty, lack of affordable housing, lack of affordable health care, and lack of access to education and living-wage jobs.



System Change

Community Supports

Continuum of Care Alignment

Education and Empowerment
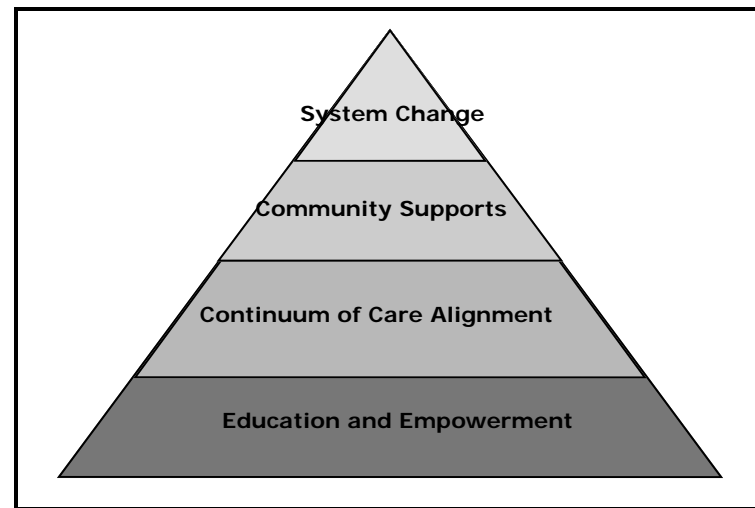
To work toward these kinds of large-scale, systemic changes, groups who advocate for homeless and low-income persons must band together to increase their numbers and the strength of their voices. Not only must these sometimes diverse groups be unified to accomplish any of these ambitious goals, they must be unified to implement any and all of the goals of this ten-year plan. Local groups must increase their ability to educate, motivate, and mobilize for change, while simultaneously holding agencies accountable for program outcomes. Together, we must cooperatively move forward to overcome agency— and continuum-wide obstacles.

**Section Four: System Change**

## _Strategies_

- Improve outreach to and involvement from:

  - Community-Based Affordable Housing Developers

  - Other Development Groups

  - Religious Groups

  - Police

  - Community-Based Organizations and Neighborhood Groups

  - Hospitals and Medical Groups

  - The Private Sector

  - Homeless and Formerly Homeless Persons

  - Homeless-related Groups

- Find and secure funding for community planning and coordination activities
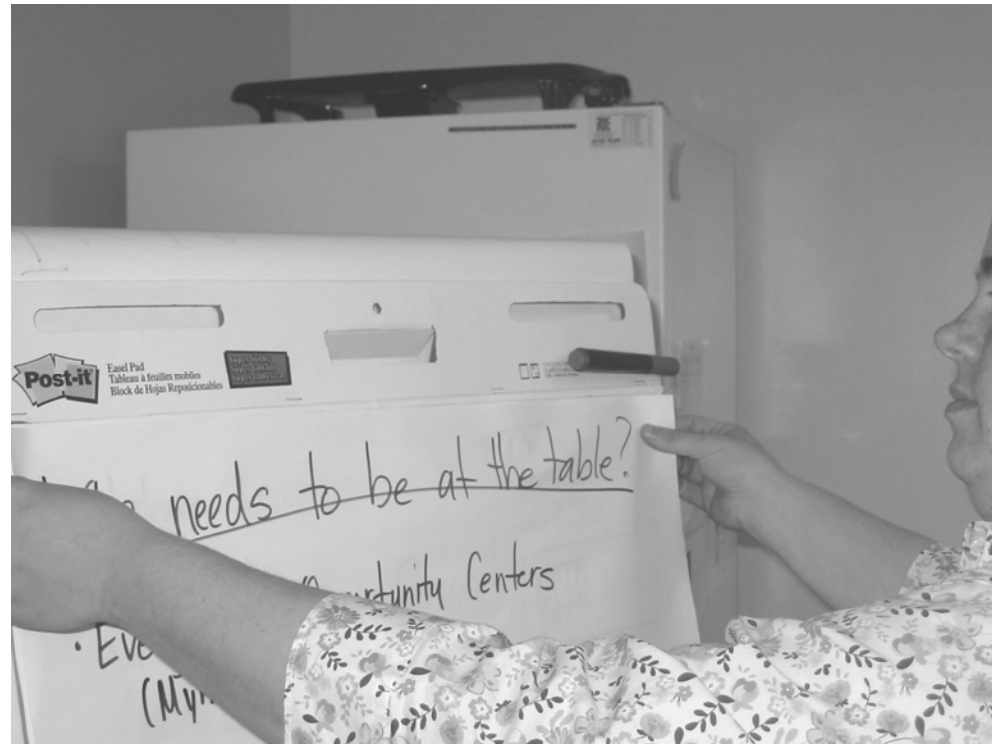


The ten-year planning process has dramatically deepened and broadened the scope of the Homeless Alliance by not only drawing new people and ideas to the table, but by reenergizing and reorienting this dedicated group of service providers towards a commitment to system-wide change and accountability.

The effort will continue to build momentum as the community shifts into the implementation phase of the PRISM plan, bringing increasingly diverse partners on board as more and more positive results speak for themselves in the community. Additionally, strengthening the Homeless Alliance and other local coalitions through targeted outreach and through exploring new funding options for community capacity-building work will ensure success and encourage growth as PRISM moves through its next phases.

# Goal:  Expand governmental funding for homeless housing, services, and other safety-net programs

*Though the current Administration has been vocal about its goal to end "chronic" homelessness, and has offered important additional funding opportunities to projects targeted toward serving this population, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Funds have declined as a share of the federal budget over the past four years.*

*Low-income advocacy groups estimate that—if current trends continue—by 2009, Homeless Assistance grants will be cut by $110 million, or 8%.  These cuts presumably would occur simultaneously with large cuts in housing programs—especially Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers— which would likely increase the homeless population.* Source: The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, www.cbpp.org

*Without federal, state, and local support for homeless assistance programs such as the Continuum of Care and Emergency Shelter Grants; community development programs including Community Development Block Grants; and Safety-Net programs like Medicaid, Food Stamps, Section 8, and Public Assistance; many people would find themselves without housing, services, jobs and job training, health care, food, and income.*

*As highlighted earlier in the plan, data from the PRISM Project Survey suggests a mild "protective" effect for those who access safety-net programs.  Individuals who received governmental supports were less likely to be homeless at the time of the survey and had fewer instances of homelessness over the past three years.  Perhaps more importantly, the median income for persons receiving mainstream resources was $587 per month.  While this falls well below the poverty line, it is nearly double that of those who had not secured this assistance.*

**Section Four: System Change**

## *Strategies*

- Harness the strength of existing local coalitions to educate policymakers about the interests of homeless and low-income persons.

- Work to ensure that available funding be targeted toward needed efforts using sound local research.

- Collaboratively identify and work to change flaws in the public benefit system that force dependency rather than encouraging self-sufficiency (e.g. some TANF recipients are forced to decide between accepting a pay raise or retaining health care coverage).

- Partner with other coalitions at the local, state, and national levels to create broad system-wide change that addresses the root causes of homelessness and poverty.

# *What's Next?*

As previously stated, the intention of this plan was not to set forth band-aid solutions narrowly focused on current gap areas, trends, and challenges, but to set goals that create a community-wide culture that systematically examines and solves problems within the homeless continuum of care itself and beyond.  Homelessness is a complex social problem, both for those who experience it (as it's seldom one particular issue that leads to the situation) and for those who work to end it.

**Education, interventions, community supports and a larger shift toward ending poverty are all necessary to end homelessness.**

Through PRISM's ground-up planning philosophy, beginning in sound local research and the voices of low-income and homeless persons, and continuing through the five open community forums and ongoing consultation with community leaders, the plan never "belonged" to the coordinating agency, the Homeless Alliance of Western New York:  the plan is a collection of the hopes, knowledge, and commitment of those in Buffalo and Erie County dedicated to ending homelessness.

Following the release of this plan, PRISM will move into Phases III and IV, Implementation and Evaluation, phases that will run concurrently, as the intent is to continuously measure progress on PRISM's goals.  The move from the Planning Phase into Implementation and Evaluation will take three concrete action steps:

*Implementation Plan:* An implementation plan addendum to this document, including a detailed timeline and responsible parties, will be developed in committee with interested parties.

*Community Benchmarks:* Committees will establish community benchmark performance measures for homeless service provision and movement through the continuum of care.  Markers available through the Buffalo Area Services Network (BAS-Net) Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) will be examined to monitor progress on these benchmarks.  Data from BAS-Net will be used to understand current levels of performance, locate problem areas, and target outreach efforts to build capacity.  Where some benchmarks are not quantifiable in this manner, other research tools will be used such as focus groups and surveys.

*Education:*  Needed resource materials, media campaigns, and trainings will be developed to educate the community around the 10-year plan's goals.  **Three particular groups** will be targeted for more intensive outreach and collaboration:
- PRISM committees will create educational materials and workshops, develop media campaigns, and conduct targeted outreach to help **persons who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness** know how and where to access needed local services and mainstream resources.  PRISM will continue to engage homeless persons in the process through regular focus groups at area shelters and drop-in centers.
- Trainings will be offered to front-line homeless housing and service providers to maximize usage of available services and mainstream resources.  In addition, education, training, and technical assistance to program directors will be provided, helping re-orient programs to emphasize performance, while encouraging the incorporation of innovative new strategies to address their clients' needs.   These two tactics offer both bottom-up and top-down means for creating change in the **homeless housing and service provider community**.
- PRISM  will move toward community-wide alignment with the Ten-Year Plan by providing educational materials and trainings on local homeless data and national best practices to **government agencies, funders, and individual donors**.

**Momentum must continue to build, and collaboration must increase.  As we take our next steps, the community will truly be aligned as a single strong front to end homelessness in Buffalo and Erie County.**

**The Homeless Alliance would like to extend special thanks to the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo and the City of Buffalo for financial support of the PRISM Project's efforts.**

**Community Foundation**
FOR GREATER BUFFALO

PrisM

*A Community Solution to Homelessness*

## Homeless Alliance of Western New York Member Organizations

Action for Mental Health
Alcohol and Drug Dependency Services
American Red Cross
Belmont Shelter Corporation
Benedict House
Bissonette House
Buffalo City Mission
Buffalo Halfway House
Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority
Buffalo Psychiatric Center
Buffalo Public Schools
Buffalo Urban League
Catholic Charities of WNY
Cazenovia Recovery Systems
Child and Family Services
City of Buffalo, Dept. of Planning
Community Action Organization
Community Health Center of Buffalo
Community Services Board
Community Services for the Developmentally Disabled
Compass House
Cornerstone Manor
Crisis Services, Inc.
Erie County Department of Environment and Planning
Erie County Dept. of Mental Health
Erie County Dept. of Probation and Youth Detention Services
Erie County Dept. of Social Services
Erie County Youth Bureau
Everywoman Opportunity Center
Fleet Bank
Food for All
The Franciscan Center

Gerard Place
Greater Refuge Temple of Christ
Haven House
HELP Buffalo
Homespace Corporation, Inc.
Housing Options Made Easy, Inc.
Housing Unlimited
Interfaith Hospitality Network
Key Bank
Lakeshore Behavioral Health
Little Portion Friary
Living Opportunities of DePaul
M & T Bank
Mid-Erie Counseling and Treatment Center
Neighborhood Legal Services
Network of Religious Communities
New Life Residential
Paradise Opportunities, Inc.
Planned Parenthood
Rental Assistance Corporation
Restoration Society—Harbor House
The Salvation Army
Teaching and Restoring Youth
Transitional Services, Inc.
United Way of Buffalo and Erie County
Veterans Administration
Vive la Casa
Women for Human Rights and Dignity
WNY Veterans Housing Coalition
YWCA of the Tonawandas
YWCA of Western New York

# PRISM SURVEY VOLUNTEERS

## PHASE I COMMITTEES

### Initiative Steering Committee
Kelly Bobbit
Elresa Clark-Avery
Don Dauman
Louisa Frazier-Merritt
Jack Guastaferro
Gavin Kasper
Susan Potocki
Lora Warkentin

### Questionnaire Committee
Rosemary Duran
Susan Potocki
Charlie Scarpine
Chris Syracuse
Lora Warkentin

### Street Homeless Committee
Kelly Bobbitt
Jack Guastaferro
Jim Mahoney
Rachel Morrison
Joyelle Tedeschi
Eric Weigel

### Service Location Committee
Diane Cadle
Elresa Clark-Avery
Louisa Frazier-Merritt
Cathy McNaughton

### Volunteer Committee
Maureen Armstrong
Cathy Braniecki
Mary K. Comtois
Brad Dossinger
Rosemary Duran
Joan Dutchess Freidson
Louisa Frazier-Merritt
Pat Henry
Gavin Kasper
Jim Mahoney
Beth Saunders
Sarah Smith
Joyelle Tedeschi
Glenda Washington
Eric Weigel
Herb Wittmeyer

Sharon Ackley
Jeffrey Albert
Jeremy Allen
Maureen Armstrong
Joyce Atwell
Nabcey Austin
Mike Balk
Stephanie Barber
Stephanie Bartella
Kathleen Bauer
Fr. Joseph Bayne
Carrie Beyer
Kelly Bobbitt
Doug Braddock
Cathy Braniecki
Ronald Brantley
Tobias Brill
Deacon Anthony Brown
Peggy Burke-Thomas
Edward Cooper
Elresa Clark-Avery
Ethan Coe
Kathleen Collins
Jessica Colvin
Mary K. Comtois
Holli Cooper
Donna Crawford
Jewel Culverhouse
Sheri Czajkowsi
Danielle D'Abate
Shari Dailey
Rose Daniel
Shawntel Davis
Shannon DeOca
Diocesan Service Corps
Jean Dittman
Sue Divita
Brad Dossinger
Jeanette Drayton
Nick Drumsta
Katherine Dumpert
Rosemary Duran
Daniel Duryea
Joyce Erving
TC Ferrito
Amy Fleischauer
Louisa Frazier-Merritt
Jamar Funderburg
Jerry Evans
Allison Gamble
Renee Garneret
Dave Gicomazza

James Giles
Roger Glasgow
Natalica Gonzalez
Michael Gordon
Patrick Greenan
Stefanie Greisch
Bobbie Grodesky
Jacyra Guard
Jack Gualstaferro
Kelly Hair
Marie Hare
Stacy Harley
Mary Hayes-O'Brien
Michael Henry
Patrick Henry
Anne Hubbard
Bob Huff
Jeff Johnson
Tracey Johnson
Nicole Juzdowski
Trish Kamienowski
Gavin Kaspar
Darren Kempner
Tonya King
Mark Kraus
Alexandra Krynsha
Karen Kubasak
Christina Leed
Richard Leimbach
Eleanor Lewis
Gail Lonsbury
Cassandra Lorenz
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Marquita McGriff
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Mike Mohan
Rachel Morrison
Eric Nilson
Peggy Nilson
Ceil O'Brien
Barbara O'Connell

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Bill Zelazny
Sylvia Zielinski

## PRISM PROJECT SURVEY DONORS

M and T Bank
Tops Markets
Park School Students
Catholic Charities
Key Bank
Alcohol and Drug Dependency Services
Adrian Slocum
Trinity Episcopal Church

## PRISM PROJECT SURVEY SITES

AIDS Alliance of WNY
Alcohol and Drug Dependency Services Crisis Center
Buffalo City Mission
Cazenovie Recovery Systems
Central City Café/Durham Memorial AME Zion Church
Community Action Organization
Community Services for the Developmentally Disabled
Compass House
Cornerstone Manor
Eden United Methodist Church
Erie County Department of Social Services Rath Building
Feed My Sheep
Franciscan Center
Friends of the Night People
Group Ministries
Harbor House Drop-In Center
Hearts for the Homeless
Hispanics United of Buffalo
Interfaith Hospitality Network
LaborReady
Loaves and Fishes
Network of Religious Communities
Response to Love Center
Restoration Society Clubhouses (Elmwood and Friendship)
Salvation Army
South Buffalo Community Table
St. Luke's Mission of Mercy
Transitional Services, Inc.
Veteran's Administration Homeless Building/St. Vincent De Paul
Villa Maria Food Pantry
*Dozens of street sites were also utilized*

*A Community Solution to Homelessness*

Prism

## PHASE II COMMITTEES

### Environmental Scan Committee
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Rosemary Duran
James Giles
Chris Leed

### Best Practices Committee
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Jim Mahoney
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James Giles
Carolyn Hillman
Jeff Johnson
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| Ava Kemp | Herb Wittmeyer |
| Darren Kempner | Rick Wright |
| Donna Krzes | |

## FORUM PARTICIPANT AGENCIES

Alcohol and Drug Dependency Services
Belmont Shelter Corporation
Buffalo City Mission
Buffalo Urban League
Catholic Charities of Western New York
Cazenovia Recovery Systems
Compass House
Cornerstone Manor
Crisis Services
The Franciscan Center
Gerard Place
Group Ministries
Hillside Children's Center
Homeless Alliance of Western New York
Homespace
Office of State Assemblyman Sam Hoyt
Interfaith Hospitality Network
Erie County Department of Environment and Planning
Erie County Department of Senior Services
Erie County Department of Social Services
Erie County Office for the Disabled
Lake Shore Behavioral Health
M and T Bank
Neighborhood Legal Services
Salvation Army
Social Security Administration
Teaching and Restoring Youth (TRY)
Transitional Services, Inc.
United Way of Buffalo and Erie County
University at Buffalo Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth
Veterans Administration Homeless Program
Veterans Life Ops
Western New York Independent Living Project
YWCA of Western New York

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**Homeless Alliance** of Western New York
facilitating dialogue & strategic action to end homelessness