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Housing Not Handcuffs: A CoC’s response to Tent City
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Summit County Population 541,787
Akron is the largest city in Summit County – Population 197,846
Entitlement Community - $4.6 million CoC funds
PIT Counts: 2015 - 760; 2016 - 679; 2017 - 507; 2018 - 587
Shelter System: 1 - DV Shelter; 2 - Family Shelters; 1 shelter serving individual men & women
Individual Shelter is Faith-based with related programming. It does not fit the definition of low-barrier.

OH-506 Akron/Barberton Summit County Continuum of Care

February 2017 – Private property owner allows tents
Encampment quickly grows to 30 tents.
Surrounding neighbors complain to City.
April 2018 – Property owner applies for re-zoning.
September 2018 – City Council rejects zoning change
Media coverage intensifies throughout 2018.
9/24/18 – City asks for CoC help in housing residents.
Continuum of Care Response

• CoC takes no position on question of zoning.
• CoC believes that tents are not a suitable alternative to shelter.
• CoC acts without political intent – Housing is our mission.
• CoC works with property owner to facilitate transitions out of tents.
• CoC achieved Functional Zero for Veterans in May 2017 – Brings same By-Name-List approach to housing the 46 residents at camp on 9/24/18.

The BNL Process

• Street Outreach and Centralized Intake begin active, daily outreach to residents.
• All CoC members participate in weekly meetings to document actions and housing offers to camp residents.
• Camp Operator is part of the weekly meetings.
• A pool of open beds is identified (PSH – RRH – AMHA vouchers).
• Housing plan established for each resident.
• 60 day deadline is set.

Barriers and Results

• Resident were reluctant to engage initially. The encampment was their own community and they often prioritized their role at the camp over working on their housing plan.
• Pressure from the camp operator to follow through with the CoC was necessary to motivate action from the residents.
• Some residents were reluctant to leave. Free food and housing helped facilitate use of personal resources for other desires.
• By 12/18/18 45 of 46 residents were housed. 9 self-resolved to other arrangements with friends or family. 1 was incarcerated. 36 others moved to their own units with PSH, Housing vouchers or RRH.
Conclusions about the Experience

- Residents were exercising personal choice. Absent a low-barrier shelter option, many preferred the encampment to the shelter choice in our system.
- More low-barrier shelter beds needed in our system. CoC must explore alternatives including adapting the TH-RRH program model.
- New programs must incorporate resident ‘ownership’
- CoC should use these opportunities to engage homeless persons in policy decisions.

Contact Information

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