**Gaps and Needs Report 2015**

**Method:** Members of the HHC Operations Committee conducted focus groups at almost all Onondaga County homeless shelters: Catholic Charities Men’s Shelter, Rescue Mission, Catholic Charities Dorothy Day House, The Salvation Army Emergency Family Shelter, The Salvation Army Women’s Shelter and Vera House Emergency Domestic Violence Shelter. There were two questions asked: 1) What services would have prevented you from becoming homeless? and 2) What services do you need to become housed? Overall, the focus groups proved to be successful. The shelter residents felt appreciated that they were being asked these questions.

**Vera House, Inc. – 4/30/15**

*Services to prevent homelessness* – DV education in the schools early on to prevent unhealthy relationships, lack of shelter space; needs to leave county of origin to become safe; growing up in an abusive home; can’t prevent homelessness due to domestic violence, don’t consider themselves homeless because abuser is in the home.

*Services needed to become housed -* assistance with process of looking for an apartment, filling out applications, visiting apartments and then move into permanent housing; Section 8 was mentioned by many participants as being helpful; exceeding the financial guidelines and having mortgages but not being able to live in the home due to DV; computer literacy (as a means to find housing, employment, etc.); job search; bus schedule assistance; Section 8 transfer from county of origin; would like to live in the suburbs, good school district and not in the city; needs more assistance and doesn’t want to do things on their own to find housing; furnishings; moving assistance; security deposit; difficulty finding places that don’t take Section 8; needs Section 8 to move quicker with intake

**TSA Family Shelter - 5/4/2015**

*Services to prevent homelessness* - Consensus that there were “a lot of hoops to jump through” to get help before coming to shelter: Two of the moms had been denied assistance from DSS prior to coming to shelter (one lost ID and needed proof of identification). Have to go to shelter to qualify for most services. CCOC Practical Assistance program was helpful.

*Services needed to become housed:* assistance finding a job, child care, food stamps, cleaning supplies, hygiene items/feminine products, better connection with DSS (for staff and residents), services through just one agency – residents find it difficult to manage going to several different agencies to receive all needed services, transportation (helpfulness of the HIS team and trouble connecting with HIS team mentioned), follow-up – would like weekly follow-ups initially after moving out of shelter and then monthly for 6 months to a year (participants had high recidivism), assistance with outstanding utility bills, literacy, limited affordable housing options – forced to accept substandard housing, lack of activity (suggested having everyone cook together), safety of children and lack of parenting skills among parents in shelter.

**The Salvation Army Women’s Shelter – 5/22/15**

*Services to prevent homelessness:* No feedback – homeless due to family conflict and mental illness. Inpatient experience at Hutchings was not good.

*Services to become housed:* CNYS Gateway program helpful for people with mental illnesses. Satisfied with all of the services and case manager at the Women’s Shelter (Danielle), OCM Case Manager and therapist at Hutchings.

**Catholic Charities Dorothy Day House – 5/13/2015**

*Services to prevent homelessness:* Domestic and sexual violence prevention education.

*Services need to become housed:*Transportation (including unlimited bus passes and weekend availability for employment); transportation between the two counties is difficult; HIS Team helps sometimes but only available to them if group of them are going somewhere together;from another county and being accused of “double dipping;” finding resources and obtaining services (would like resource manual – they were informed of 211 on the computer and on the phone); housing, housing subsidies, transportation, employment, furniture, ID, eye glasses; lack of case management at the shelter (no one meets with them or helps them find resources); computer literacy; help with filling out applications; lack of halfway houses for women (commented that the one that is available is too easy to be kicked out of); more supports to stay clean; money to furnish an apartment; slow TA application process holding them back from moving out; driving lessons to get license to drive to work.

**Rescue Mission - 5/11/15**

*Services to prevent homelessness:* Jobs; hire homeless to fix up abandon houses that they could live in; need an opportunity to prove themselves; facing significant discrimination; temp agencies could work more with those seeking employment; volunteer to work programs (start as volunteer and work up to paid, f/t employment); transportation to job; money for public transportation; public transportation may not reach job area or correspond to work hours; financial literacy; easier to get paid work on the streets than a legitimate job; housing; can’t get housing with felony backgrounds; can’t afford housing on PA budget; shelters provide some with an opportunity to not do for themselves; information: where to go for help/where to start and resources; learned about Hale program from another client, not from staff (suggested a Resource Fair at the Day Center once a month).

*Services to become housed:* felony convictions prevent employability, housing opportunities, loss of Driver’s License prevents ability to find work/get to work; child support garnishment leads to loss of driver’s license, makes housing even less affordable, discrimination, not given opportunities, seeming lack of care/concern

*General comments:* sense of hopelessness comes from discrimination, lack of support/assistance, ease of access to drugs on the street, where there are housing options, they are slums, program/funding cuts

**Catholic Charities Emergency Shelter - 6/11/2015**

*Services to prevent homelessness:* job training, trust in shelter staff*,* better staff training, more dignity and respect from staff*,* 45 day shelter stay too short, lack of transportation*,* more privacy , more activities/physical/athletics*,* education, teach moral character*,* lack of housing, lack of rental based income landlords*,* weekly discussions groups like this for us to talk about our struggles

*Services to become housed:* moving help, physical, follow up services*,* employment, need accessibility to personal belongings at shelter more often*,* credit score help, criminal record*,* structure towards independence

*General comments:* need stages and steps for people to work through*,* need more SRO apartments*,* a pool just for homeless people*,* fighting the daily stereotypes of homelessness*,* better staff, “homeless services are like a piano with a bunch of keys missing,” “talk is cheap, hope something actually comes from this discussion”

**Summary:** Consistent themes –

* Transportation
* Lack of safe, quality and affordable housing options
* Employment
* Criminal history barriers
* Discrimination for a variety of reasons
* Lack of knowledge regarding resources
* Computer and financial literacy
* Desire for a higher level of case management and assistance
* Desire for better communication with and speedier services from DSS
* Strong need for more Section 8