**Building Upon Community Assets:**

***A 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in***

***Marquette and Alger Counties***

Revised and Approved 2.13.2013**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Alger-Marquette Continuum of Care (AMCOC) serves as the Advisory Board for the

*10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Marquette and Alger Counties*. The AMCOC **“exists to identify and address the short and long-term needs for emergency services, as well as housing and shelter needs of homeless and near-homeless individuals and families in Marquette and Alger Counties. The AMCOC continues to be a community-based body of concerned individuals and organizations operating within the Marquette and Alger County area.”** Organizations participating in the AMCOC and providing oversight in the development and ongoing progress of the plan include the following: Alger-Marquette Community Partnership, Women’s Center, Inc., Marquette Housing Commission, Alger-Marquette Community Action Board (AMCAB), Alger and Marquette Department of Human Services, MSHDA HCV Housing Agent, Veterans Administration, Superior Alliance for Independent Living, Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, Inc., Great Lakes Recovery Centers, Pathways to Independent Living, United Way, Child and Family Services, Room at the Inn, Janzen House, Salvation Army, Marquette-Alger Regional Educational Services Agency (MARESA), Regional Interagency Consumer Committee (RICC), St. Vincent de Paul, U.P. Commission for Area Progress (UPCAP), and the Marquette County Health Department. .

The AMCOC plan is entitled *Building Upon Community Assets: A 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Marquette and Alger Counties.*

The vision for our community is that **every individual and family has access to permanent, safe, affordable housing regardless of their circumstances.**

Our mission is to **eliminate homelessness in Marquette and Alger Counties by the year 2016.**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Marquette and Alger Counties have joined the national campaign to end homelessness within the next ten years. We support the movement of ending homelessness through the provision of permanent housing. Combating homelessness is not new for Marquette and Alger counties; we have a proud tradition of addressing the needs of people who are experiencing homelessness and the obstacles they face while trying to obtain housing.

It is the intent of the Alger-Marquette Continuum of Care (AMCOC) to end homelessness within the next ten years by preventing the entry of people into the homeless system and by providing rapid re-housing services to those who do enter the system. The AMCOC recognizes that through addressing the unique contributing factors that lead to homelessness, focusing on improving accessibility to affordable housing and increasing public awareness are the best methods for making our goals a reality. The AMCOC is dedicated to ending homelessness for everyone and seeks to create a solid foundation from which no individual or family will become homeless.

II. HISTORIC RESPONSE

Service providers in Marquette and Alger Counties have historically addressed the problems of homelessness by providing a broad range of services to their targeted populations. Funding initiatives and pilot programs provide opportunities for collaborative efforts and over time, a strong community network has flourished.

The initial Continuum of Care Work Group consisted of the following agencies:

* Lutheran Social Services
* Marquette-Alger Regional Educational Service Agency
* MSHDA’s Marquette-Alger Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Rental Assistance Agency
* Pathways Community Mental Health
* Women’s Center, Inc. (initial lead agency)

The AMCOC serves as the central organization, with representatives of agencies who are generally responsible for meeting the numerous needs of homeless individuals and families. A detailed description of some of the key programs addressing homelessness can be found in the Appendix.

III. HOMELESSNESS IN MARQUETTE AND ALGER COUNTIES

It is difficult to quantify the level of homelessness in Marquette and Alger Counties, as is the case in most rural communities. The homeless are not typically visible on the streets or park benches, although many can be found sleeping in cars or campgrounds. Emergency shelters for the homeless include the Harbor House, a shelter for victims of domestic violence; Voices for Youth Shelter, a shelter for unaccompanied youth; and the Janzen House, a shelter for single men and women. There is no specific shelter available for homeless families, who must access motel vouchers through the Salvation Army or other agencies where they receive services.

Add Room at the Inn and when it was started.

Despite the difficulty of achieving a reliable count of those experiencing homelessness in Marquette and Alger Counties, the AMCOC has gained a sense of the scope of homelessness through actual counts, various agency reports and by inference from national data. This data is highlighted over the following two sections.

* 1. Scope of the Problem

MSHDA’s Marquette-Alger HCV Rental Assistance Agency currently administers 345 total vouchers. There are 83 vouchers specifically designated for the homeless population for permanent housing which are currently filled. However, there is a freeze on new HCV vouchers at this time. In 2006, 50% of the homeless referrals were from shelters and 50% were from transitional housing.

A market study conducted on August 10, 2006 for Marquette’s Affordable Housing, Inc. (MAHPI) in Marquette County states, “Population estimates and projections for the Proposed Market Area (PMA) show that declines witnessed during the 1990s are expected to reverse through 2011. Between 2000 and 2006, the PMA’s population increased by 2.2% rising from 30,088 to 30,738. The PMA’s population is expected to continue its increase through 2011. By then, the population is expected to be 31,280, a change of 4.0% from its 2000 Census population. The city [of Marquette] is projected to grow at a slightly higher rate, while the county [Marquette County] will fall further.” Occupancy rates in the market in this same area are quite high, despite the age of the construction. Across the market, the occupancy rate was 99.5%. Add the Marquette study and new numbers.

As of 2010, the population in Marquette County was 67,884.

The two Tax Credit establishments in Marquette County, Lost Creek and The Preserve at Orianna Ridge, had an occupancy rate of 98%, while the six subsidized projects had a 99.7% occupancy rate. Meanwhile, median household incomes in Marquette County for 2006 were $42,212. The average one-bedroom rent in this market niche was $390 and the two-bedroom average was $472.

The AMCOC conducted a point-in-time survey on January 26, 2011. The results of this survey indicated there were 125 homeless individuals and persons in households without children. There were 18 homeless adults with a total of 33 children. The total number of homeless surveyed was 143. Of those 143, 32 were in emergency shelter, 42 in transitional housing and 3 unsheltered. Also of note, 39 were unemployed with no income whatsoever and 5 were receiving unemployment benefits.

Of the 143 homeless persons counted in the point-in-time survey, the following subpopulations were identified:

Chronically Homeless 10

Severely Mentally Ill 45

Chronic Substance Abusers 45

Survivors of Domestic Violence 15

Veterans 21

Add 2012/January numbers

The Point in Time Survey that was complete January 25th, 2012 and counted 74 sheltered people from Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, and DV shelter. The populations included:

Adults 62

Children 12

Female 23

Male 51

The subpopulations that were identified include:

Chronically Homeless 22

Mentally Ill 12

Substance Abuse 4

Survivors of Domestic Violence 15

Veterans 7

The numbers clearly show us a snapshot of the homeless that were counted at that time. What it does not show so clearly are the “hidden homeless” and those who are precariously housed. Within our rural area, the face of homelessness is often hidden and undocumented. Due to economic hardship and severe winter weather, some families share housing or are “doubled up” with friends or relatives.

Another issue common to rural areas is one of homeless who “couch surf.” This group constitutes a large portion of unaccompanied homeless youth and adults who survive just under the radar screen of local service agencies. Many homeless youth run away from home to escape unsafe/unhealthy living environments and half of them are victims of abuse. Some of the other unaccompanied youth are homeless because, for one reason or another, their families choose to no longer provide them shelter. They are cast out of their homes to fend for themselves.

* 1. Contributing Factors

There are numerous reasons why individuals, youth and families become homeless. The nationwide economic recession and subsequent loss of jobs are the most recent factors contributing to homelessness. Other contributing factors in Alger and Marquette Counties are unique due to our geographic isolation, lack of highway infrastructure and proximity to major cities. There are also unique seasonal factors present in our region due to the long, harsh winters, where the homeless must be housed as quickly as possible because exposure to the elements could mean death. It is imperative that we make this distinction from other regions in the State of Michigan. Our point-in-time surveys reflect very unusual changes due to this effect.

Factors contributing to homelessness include domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, unemployment, lack of job training, physical disabilities, serious illness, lack of reliable transportation and family crises, just to name a few. Domestic violence is the number one reason that women and children are homeless. The victims of domestic violence are stuck between two living nightmares: abuse or homelessness. Individuals addicted to drugs find that their chronic and progressive disease trumps everything. Consequently, they fall behind on rent, utilities and eventually face eviction. Many homeless are unemployed or underemployed. Some cannot escape poverty because they lack the education or skills to find suitable employment. The working poor may be working full time at a minimum wage job, yet still be unable to afford housing at fair market rental rates. Many people with disabilities lack the supports and services they need to live independently and be productive members of their communities. Some may lack suitable housing options due to affordability and accessibility. Veterans may be combating post-traumatic stress and other forms of mental illness. Individuals being discharged from correction, mental health, healthcare, and substance abuse treatment facilities, as well as youth aging out of foster care, may not have a place to “go home to.” These factors are complex and often interwoven deeply into an individual’s or family’s lives.

The contributing factors of homelessness can most effectively be addressed through a coordinated response. The AMCOC is committed to creating the necessary network of exchange that is imperative to coordination of services for the homeless. The bi-monthly meetings allow for everyone who provides services to the homeless to exchange ideas and resolve many of the problems associated with obtaining housing in Alger and Marquette counties. The AMCOC feels it is important to begin by addressing the contributing factors to homelessness, followed by the need to increase accessibility to affordable housing and raising public awareness of the issues of homelessness.

* 1. Systematic Issues

Budget cuts at the federal and state levels have limited the resources for many mainstream programs. The length of time needed to qualify for Social Security Income or other public benefits create additional barriers for the homeless. In particular, most do not have the appropriate documents needed to qualify for public assistance, or by the time they obtain the needed documents and actually receive benefits, many have returned to the streets or other unsafe living situations. Furthermore, most of our mainstream institutions do not have discharge policies that ensure that the homeless will not be returning to the streets. The AMCOC has made headway towards these issues and additional efforts will continue.

In addition, the federal poverty income level that MSHDA utilizes in order to qualify an applicant for services is precariously low. An individual and household of two who makes minimum wage and works 40 hours per week is over the income limit and does not qualify for assistance. Under the existing guidelines, a person who works 40 hours per week could only make $4.71 per hour (less than the current minimum wage) to qualify. Also, single people with no dependents do not qualify for assistance such as car repairs or are low on the list to receive heating/utility assistance. Yet according to the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC), rates for electric utilities, natural gas and heating oil are all projected to increase in the coming year. The Women’s Center often sees people who are trying to make ends meet, but are at extreme risk of homelessness or returning to unsafe living situations.

Michigan’s Unemployment Rate continues to dip into the double digits. In June of 2011, the State Unemployment Rate was 10.5%. The Unemployment Rate for that same month was 9.2% in Marquette County and 10.6% in Alger County. However, these figures also reflect seasonal employment opportunities. Given the state of the economy, it is suspected that unemployment rates will continue to rise over the coming year.

Poverty and a lack of affordable housing are intertwined as causes of homelessness. Perhaps most important is the fact that homelessness reflects the structural and dysfunctional nature of problems created by poverty and the rising cost of housing.

IV. TEN YEAR PLAN

1. Vision

The AMCOC is dedicated to ending homelessness for everyone and seeks to create a solid foundation from which no individual or family will have to face homelessness. Our vision for our community is that ***every individual and family has access to permanent, safe, affordable housing regardless of their circumstances***. Our mission is to prevent and provide services to eliminate homelessness in Marquette and Alger Counties by the year 2016.

Our plan includes streamlining entry into homeless services by establishing a Housing Assessment and Resource Agency (HARA) to act as the point of contact for central intake, addressing the factors that contribute to homelessness, increasing access to affordable housing and support services, and launching a public awareness campaign to engage landlords, business persons and key leaders in the community in the continuum of care process.

In 2011, Child and Family Services was established as the HARA.

1. Strategic Response
   * 1. Community Planning and Engagement

On September 6, 2006, approximately 45 people, representing a wide array of agencies and community organizations, attended the *Building upon Community Assets Forum*. The purpose of the forum was twofold: to gain an understanding of a strength-based framework designed to help communities build upon their strengths/assets and to consider the viability of using the framework locally. Robert Brown (MSU Office of Outreach and Engagement) gave a presentation entitled “Capable Communities: Building Assets to Support Positive Change.” This framework can be used by a single organization, a group or coalition working on numerous issues or a single issue. Robert Brown demonstrated how the framework could be used to end homelessness.

Using this framework as a foundation, the AMCOC, in collaboration with the signatories of our original MOU with the State of Michigan, served as the Advisory Group for the development of the 10-Year Plan. The AMCOC will continue to oversee and update the plan each year.

To engage the community, a variety of activities are scheduled throughout the year. These include, but are not limited to:

* Regular letters to the editor of the local newspaper regarding homelessness
* Bi-Annual Homeless Summits
* Candlelight Vigils
* Marathons & Community Walks
* Fundraisers
* Homeless Simulation & Poverty Simulation Exercises
* Backpack projects
* Televised interviews about homelessness
* NMU Homeless Awareness Forum

Members of the AMCOC will continue to develop ideas to raise awareness and engage community stakeholders in achieving the goals of the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. This includes meeting with local landlords and business people on a one-to-one basis in order to raise awareness about homelessness and encourage their participation in the continuum of care process.

* + 1. Progress and Achievements

Since the original development of the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, a coalition of local churches has created a revolving shelter for the homeless entitled Room at the Inn. From late fall into early spring, various churches host the “shelter” by providing a warm bed and breakfast in the morning for homeless adults who have no place to sleep. Volunteers take turns each night by conducting intakes and assisting those who seek a bed. Marq-Tran, the local public transportation provider, offers a free ride to anyone going to the Room at the Inn and posts a listing of the host sites in their buses. The Manager of this program is also a strong advocate for housing on behalf of the people she works with and is also a certified SOAR advocate. This program has been very successful.

The Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (Child and Family Services), Voices for Youth and Welcome Home programs (Lutheran Social Services) have also decreased the recidivism rate for households seeking homeless services. Through Case Management and coordination of support services, more individuals and families are successfully maintaining stable housing for up to six months after exit from these programs.

V. GOALS, STRATEGIES AND ACTION STEPS

Marquette and Alger counties seek to end homelessness in 10 years by working on accomplishing goals in the following categories:

1. Increase the Supply of Affordable Housing
2. Rapid and Permanent Re-Housing via Central Intake Process
3. Prevention
4. Public Awareness
5. Capacity Building

We intend to accomplish our goals through the delivery of early intervention for those who are precariously housed, by encouraging and educating developers to increase affordable and supportive housing to meet the needs of county residents, by facilitating entry to the Housing Assessment and Resource Agency (HARA) for those in immediate need of permanent housing and/or support services, and by increasing the availability of services and coordination among all service providers.

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| **Goals** | **Action Steps** | **Progress/Achievements** | **Target Dates** |
| **Goal 1: Increase the supply of affordable housing, that meets Housing Quality Standards in Marquette and Alger Counties by 50 units by 2016** | 1. Apply for federal, state and local subsidies to build new affordable housing units or rehab existing units.  2. Increase affordable housing by 10 units.  3. Continue to integrate permanent supportive housing into the general population to avoid the creation of isolated supportive housing units.  4. Collaborate with Superior Alliance for Independent Living (SAIL) to facilitate the development of targeted housing with public and private interests.  5. Work with local developers to utilize tax credits and other governmental incentives to build affordable housing.  6. Educate governmental councils about the need for affordable housing through the presentation of the 10-year plan and Point-In-Time results.  7. Address regulatory barriers presented by local and county entities encountered during development of affordable housing with local planning commissions.  8. Work with local governmental bodies to permit higher density housing in identified areas. -Vague  9. Develop mechanisms to regularly evaluate market demand for affordable rental housing throughout Marquette and Alger Counties.  10. Work with Region I to advocate for additional Housing Choice Vouchers for Marquette and Alger Counties.  11. Conduct periodic market analysis in both Marquette and Alger Counties to assure the Fair Market/Payment standards are realistic to the area. | 1. Lutheran Social Services (LSS) is working on a collaborative project with the Janzen House to rehab existing units for Transitional Housing in Marquette. ?  AMCAB pursuing development in Alger County; on-going..  Providing advocacy for new MSHDA housing development in Ishpeming with 25% PBV set-aside; on-going.  2. & 3. Lakeshore Heights (formerly Woodcliff) will soon have HCV’s available for three units in their complex.  Goal Met and ongoing  4. & 5. Ongoing  6. AMCOC has developed a PowerPoint Presentation to be used for this purpose.  7., 8., & 9. Marquette Affordable Housing Program, Inc. (MAHPI) continues to work on these issues. Ongoing through HUD  10. HUD VASH & MSHDA have used CoC information to advocate for vouchers. MSHDA waiting list opened.  11. Marquette Housing Commission conducts regular studies. | 2016 |

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| **Goals** | **Action Steps** | **Progress/Achievements** | **Target Dates** |
| **Goal 2: Homeless individuals and households seeking services to obtain permanent housing**  **by2016.** | 1. Support efforts of qualified businesses/organizations in the development of new permanent supportive housing units.  2. Improve coordination of homeless services among agencies.  3. Create and maintain a listing of rental units in Marquette and Alger Counties.  4. Create an AMCoC subcommittee to meet with Marquette and Alger County landlords on an annual basis to strengthen their relationship with the AMCOC. | 1. Ongoing by all member agencies.  2. Held first Project Homeless Connect event.  Soar Training held in U.P.  Developing HARA and centralized intake.  Goal Met and all agencies are participating.  3. & 4. HARA/Child & Family Services. | 2016  4/2011  2/2011  10/2011  10/2011 |

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| **Goals** | **Actions Steps** | **Progress/Achievements** | **Target Dates** |
| **Goal 3: Prevent the cycle of homelessness for individuals and families throughout Marquette and Alger Counties.** | 1. Establish and maintain a Housing Assessment and Resource Agency (HARA) to facilitate thoughtful referrals to programs and housing options specific to each household’s situation.  2. Provide financial counseling and information about good tenancy to individual and families experiencing homelessness  3. Ensure those seeking job training and employment education are referred to the appropriate agency. | 1. The AMCOC voted to elect Child & Family Services as the HARA in July 2011.  2. HARA and Case Managers will do so on an ongoing basis.  YMCA’s Blue Line Program in local schools educates children about financial management. (Question for Laura)  3. Voices for Youth has initiated an Apprenticeship Program with local businesses. (Question for Sara)  4. DHS and AMCAB developed the Navigator Program to match neighbors in need to trained Navigators who will help them access services and programs/navigate the system. Since funding has ceased, volunteers continue to meet and help those in need. | 2016 |
| **Goals** | **Strategies & Action Steps** | **Progress/Achievements** | **Target Dates** |
| **Goal 4:** **Position our community to competitively apply for available funding for rent support.** | 1. Regularly review notices of public and private funding opportunities and respond to those targeted to housing issues in rural areas.  2. Develop improved methods of documenting the extent of homelessness in Marquette and Alger Counties through comprehensive Point-In-Time Surveys and establishing a central intake agency.  3. Increase agency participation in HMIS documentation to reflect more accurate numbers.  4. Increase the capacity of Marquette  and Alger Counties’ homeless network  by soliciting the involvement of local,  state, and national public and private organizations. | 1. Child & Family Services has applied for a grant through the VA to assist homeless/at-risk veterans and their families.  This was denied in the spring of 2012. C&FS and AMCAB have submitted letters of intent to apply for SSVF 2013 funding  2. & 3. HMIS System Administrator has been working to assist agencies entering data & to collect additional data. HARA will also improve data quality.  4. HARA being developed.  Goal Met | 10/2011 |

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| **Goals** | **Strategies & Action Steps** | **Progress/Achievements** | **Target Dates** |
| **Goal 5: Increase public awareness of homelessness issues in Marquette and Alger Counties.** | 1. Maintain frequent contact with the county Board of Commissioners and local city commissions regarding homelessness issues.  2. At least annually, invite the county and local municipalities not already participating in AMCOC activities to appoint a representative to the AMCOC meetings.  3. At least annually, deliver a report on AMCOC and related activities to the governing boards of the county and local municipalities.  4. Prepare articles for publication in local media regarding the extent of homelessness in the county and activities addressing the issue.  5. Expand the AMCOC to include active participation of two additional stakeholders per year.  6. Assure public awareness of the activities of the AMCOC through the education of all agencies serving the homeless, including schools, churches and other human service providers about services available for homeless and precariously housed.  7. Homeless Awareness Month | 1., 2. & 3. PowerPoint Presentation developed to use for this purpose.  Goal met. The PowerPoint needs to be updated.  4. AMCOC members take turns submitting articles and have assigned a Media Contact Person for our CoC.  5. Some landlords have begun attending meetings on an occasional basis.  6. Project Homeless Connect events will be held, as well presentations to schools, churches and other human service agencies.  7. In 2011, the City Commission made November Homeless Awareness month in Marquette. | 4/2011  1/2012 |
| **Goal 6:**  **100% of agencies providing homeless services will enter data into the HMIS system.** | 1. Establish a Central Intake Agency to streamline entry into homeless services and increase data entry into HMIS.  2. Create a list of agencies that provide housing/shelter services to homeless families and individuals.  3. Speak with Agency Directors/Board of Directors to emphasize importance of HMIS and secure participation in entering data into HMIS and referrals to the Housing Assessment and Resource Agency (HARA), which will be the Central Intake Agency.  4. Set up trainings for agencies beginning to enter data into HMIS.  5. Present quarterly data from all HMIS participating agencies to CoC.  6. Implement upcoming changes to 2013 HIC and PIT inventory charts. | 1., 2. & 3. The HARA is being developed as central intake agency and will address these issues in the coming year.  Goal Met  4. & 5. HMIS System Administrator has begun assisting other agencies with data entry. Reports are run from HMIS to present data to CoC.  6. Implement changes. | 10/2011  2016  12/2012 |

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we will continue to build upon our Community Assets, focusing current and future community initiatives toward ending homelessness in Marquette and Alger counties by minimizing emergency shelter usage and maximizing access to affordable housing. The 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Marquette and Alger Counties is a dynamic and “living” document that is embraced by many. Under the leadership of the AMCOC, we continue to put the plan into action and expand our stakeholders to include all concerned citizens who live in this area. The plan will be reviewed and revised on an ongoing basis through AMCOC meetings, as well as annual and bi-annual meetings and community forums. This plan is but a “guide for progress,” which will translate our vision to end homelessness into a reality.