ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

IN

ST MARYS COUNTY

3-YEAR PLAN

Prepared by the St. Mary's County
Department of Human Services
October, 2009

Table of Content

INTRODUCTION

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a non-partisan organization whose sole focus is to prevent and end homelessness in the United States. The Alliance initiated this movement within the last decade and during that time has built collaborative relationships with public, private and nonprofit agencies and organizations to enhance the ability of state and local agencies to create more efficient policies and programs aimed at ending homelessness. One result of the Alliance's work is <u>A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years.</u> This guide identifies challenges and steps toward solutions on a national scale.

While the problem of homelessness has traditionally been considered an urban issue, in recent years the plight of the rural homeless has come to the forefront, as well. The challenges for rural homeless populations often mirror those of their urban counterparts, however, specific differences are often cited (i.e., transportation, wages, etc...). There are currently over 300 jurisdictions working on plans to address homelessness across our nation.

In St. Mary's County, the Department of Human Services was tasked with researching existing plans that address homelessness in other areas, reviewing local resources and services and providing a plan for this county. While it is advantageous to research best practices and what's working in other areas, it is imperative that local 'experts' be involved in editing and crafting a plan that meets the particular needs of any specific jurisdiction. This report, Addressing Homelessness in St. Mary's County, is guided by the work previously done at the Alliance to End Homelessness as well as the Plan to End Homelessness in Palm Beach County, Florida. Input was sought from local providers, as they are considered to be the most knowledgeable about the homeless population in this county. This report is a compilation of their data and reports and the analysis of that information by the Department of Human Services.

Many jurisdictions have developed a ten year plan; however, this is a three year plan. It should be acknowledged that this report is an initial, critical step in organizing a strategic effort for St. Mary's County. Unfortunately as the current economic plight and world affairs impact the community, the plan will continue to evolve as necessary. There is much work to be done and it takes time, resources and a commitment by the entire community (elected officials, providers, the private sector and citizenry). Next steps would be to actively engage all concerned agencies and organizations to moving forward in implementing a three year plan, monitor and edit it accordingly and expand it to cover a ten year period to work toward eliminating homelessness in St. Mary's County.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The St. Mary's Department of Human Services has been charged with developing a three year plan to address homelessness in St. Mary's County. Research was conducted and plans from other jurisdictions were reviewed as a guide. Data was compiled based on input from local service providers regarding their clients and services.

An important tool in counting and documenting the homeless is the annual point in time survey performed in January. The January 2008 survey revealed 1,884 homeless (sheltered and unsheltered) in St. Mary's County. This total reflects 883 households, over half with dependent children. Of that total, 111 individuals were classified as chronically homeless, 153 persons were assessed as severely mentally ill, 125 persons were assessed as chronic substance abusers, 7 individuals were veterans and 51 persons were found to be victims of domestic violence. Provider records show a large number of individuals referred to them for services were unable to be sheltered due to limited resources. Shelter providers report a significant need for housing among those with mental health and substance abuse problems.

Also revealing is the statistic from The Southern Maryland Tri-County Community Action Committee reporting a 50% increase in the number of clients seeking help due to foreclosure in St. Mary's, Charles and Calvert Counties. Furthermore, the St. Mary's Dept of Economic and Community Development reports the St. Mary's Foreclosure Index falls within the high category. One can conclude these previous homeowners may need immediate assistance but not intensive or long-term services, contributing to the growing number of individuals within the homeless population who are not chronically homeless or requiring extensive assistance. Low wages and the lack of affordable housing are major contributing factors to the current homeless situation in St. Mary's County.

Each of the three shelters for St. Mary's County residents has emergency and transitional housing plans. These plans consist of assessment, appropriate case management services and plans to access transitional and permanent housing. The most current national approach for addressing homelessness is Housing First. This model calls for re-housing individuals in permanent housing as soon as possible while providing the appropriate support services. Emergency or transitional sheltering are only temporary solutions for the homeless. Permanent housing is the only segment of the homeless continuum of care that will reduce the roles of the homeless in St. Mary's County. Likewise, permanent housing will reduce costs associated with hospitalization and emergency room care and detention center stays.

Review of local data supports additional funds are needed for various levels of support services. Most importantly, more affordable housing is critically needed. A move toward focusing on preserving existing housing, affordable rapid re-housing options and increased provision of support services may eliminate, or at least substantially reduce, the occurrence of homelessness in St. Mary's County. The attached 3-year Plan for Addressing Homelessness offers strategies to accomplish this goal.

DEFINING HOMELESSNESS IN ST. MARY'S COUNTY

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines homelessness as:

A. Persons who are sleeping in places not meant for human habitation(e.g. cars, tunnels, parks, sidewalks, bridges, streets, abandoned buildings or condemned buildings); or

B. Persons sleeping in an emergency shelter; or a family or individual living in transitional housing. Transitional housing is defined as a temporary housing program (usually up to 2 years) for people who are homeless.

The HUD definition of the Chronic Homeless is:

A. An unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition, who has been continuously homeless for a year or more; or

B. An unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition, who has experienced four or more episodes of homelessness over the last three years.

EXCLUSIONS:

A. The time an individual spends in an institution, i.e., jail or hospital is not considered as homeless and cannot be used to qualify someone as being chronically homeless.

B. A family (adult with child or a married couple) is not considered as chronically homeless by HUD.

The Point in Time (PIT) Survey is an annual, national homelessness count supported by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for the purpose of reporting homelessness in states and local jurisdictions. This data helps to determine HUD funding allocations. As a participant in the Calvert, Charles & St. Mary's Continuum of Care for the Homeless (a.k.a. COC) and a recipient of HUD funding, St. Mary's County organizations work together in the annual PIT survey. This activity is coordinated through the St. Mary's County Homeless Prevention Board, as well as the Regional Homeless Prevention Board and the count occurs annually, usually in the month of January.

According to the 2008 Point in Time Survey (PIT) there were 1884 homeless persons in St. Mary's County on the specific day of the count. In 2009, 1198 homeless individuals were counted in the PIT survey. *It is important to note PIT results are from the count observed on the specific day of the survey. The results may vary from year to year based on any number of variables ranging from severity of the weather on the day of the survey to the number of organizations participating in the count. PIT is only one tool to capture a snapshot of the homeless population in any given jurisdiction. The St. Mary's County Homeless Prevention Board is addressing ways to yield a more complete count in the upcoming 2010 PIT survey.

POINT IN TIME SURVEY HOMELESS POPULATION

St. Mary's County 2008

Homeless Population	Sheltered		Unsheltered*	Total
	Emergency	Transitional		
Number of households with Dependent Children	14	37	401	452
Total Number of Persons in these Households (adults and children)	52	120	1235	1407
Number of Households without Dependent Children	36	73	322	431
Total Number of Persons in these Households	36	80	361	477
Total Persons	88	200	1596	1884

Homeless Population	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total
Chronically Homeless	67	44	111
Severely Mentally Ill	96	57	153
Chronic Substance Abuse	54	71	125
Veterans	5	2	7
Persons with HIV/AIDS	1	0	1
Victims of Domestic Violence	29	22	51
Unaccompanied Youth (Under 18)	0	0	0

St. Mary's County 2009

Homeless Population	Sheltered		Unsheltered*	Total
	Emergency	Transitional		
Number of households with Dependent Children	17	14	257	288
Total Number of Persons in these Households (adults and children)	61	42	787	890
Number of Households without Dependent Children	30	42	204	276
Total Number of Persons in these Households	31	43	234	308
Total Persons	92	85	1021	1198

Homeless Population	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total
Chronically Homeless	65	159	224
Severely Mentally Ill	47	38	85
Chronic Substance Abuse	40	58	98
Veterans	1	6	7
Persons with HIV/AIDS	0	0	0
Victims of Domestic Violence	14	23	37
Unaccompanied Youth (Under 18)	0	1	1

"Unsheltered" refers to individuals referred for but not receiving services due to a number of reasons. Some are ineligible for services, some simply choose not to come to the shelter and some have been discharged from the shelter for noncompliance. And some remain unsheltered due to shelters in the county facilities being at maximum capacity.

The Southern Maryland Tri-County Community Action Committee reports a 50% increase in the number of clients who are seeking help due to foreclosures in St. Mary's, Charles, and Calvert Counties. SMC Dept. of Economic and Community Development reports that St. Mary's Foreclosure Index falls within the high category. These previous home owners may also fit the population of homeless who need immediate help but not prolonged services.

According to the St. Mary's County Department of Social Services the homeless population is typically found in the Lexington Park area, followed by the Leonardtown area. Originally, these were the two most populous communities of St. Mary's County therefore, service providers responded to the needs of the vulnerable populations by establishing sites in these locales to ensure that services were readily available. Of further benefit is that once individuals are given supports for success the resources they need in the form of jobs, transportation, housing, grocery stores, etc. are within close proximity.

SHELTERS PROVIDING EMERGENCY SERVICES IN 2008

Agency	Individuals Served
Three Oaks Center	1119
Angle Watch	160
Leah's House	51
	1330

St. Mary's County Demographic Information

The 2008 U.S. Census Bureau reported St. Mary's County's population reached 101,578, an increase of 1,316 people in one year (1.3 percent). This is the second fastest growth rate in the state. It is now projected that St. Mary's population will reach 105,400 by 2010. All of this represents unprecedented growth for a small county that, until recently, had a predominantly agriculturally based economy. Unfortunately, affordable housing stock has not kept pace with this population expansion. Instead, many of the new housing developments are within a price range more affordable to those newly relocated to the county, who tend to be in the higher-paid engineering and technology fields associated with the local Navy base activities. As a result of both demand exceeding supply in the affordable housing market, and the expanding higher-end housing market pushing up overall market values, rents have risen significantly in the past several years. Presently an individual can expect to pay about $1,068 per month for a two-bedroom unit, plus utilities. Reported by the St. Mary's County Department of Housing and Community Development, St. Mary's County's per capita income is 14% above the state's average.

Not since the Navy established the Naval Air Test Center in the 1940's has St. Mary's County experienced such unprecedented growth. This growth is mainly attributable to the merging of important military operations from outside of Maryland within the naval facility here at Patuxent River. While this is great for the economy of St. Mary's County and the surrounding region, the actual resulting impact on the availability of affordable housing and the working poor has not been favorable.

The St. Mary's County population can expect to continue to grow in the southern region of the county as the Patuxent River Navy Base in Lexington Park continues to expand. At the same time, new upper income housing developments are being built in Leonardtown, and in the northern areas of St. Mary's County. This offers more challenging housing situations as families with low and moderate incomes are finding it harder to find safe and affordable housing. They are now being squeezed out of the available housing market as costs escalate.

As the local economy expands, the number of jobs in the service and retailing sector has increased. However, many of these jobs pay minimum wage or only slightly higher, limiting wage earner's housing options. The absence of large industries like a steel mill, Westinghouse, etc, contributes to the problem of low wages for those not formally educated. The problem of limited affordable housing options is exacerbated by limited public transportation to all areas of the county.

According to the local Housing Authority, vacancy rates are currently at 7.3% in the county. Even when individuals and families acquire Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, they still have difficulty finding affordable rentals. Through the efforts of the local Housing Authority 112 new low-income housing units recently became available in the county. The positive impact of this was somewhat offset, however, by the loss of two mobile home parks in 2008. In addition, a third mobile home park is preparing to close. All of them were purchased by private ventures and are slated for development into commercial retail space. Together, these parks account for a total loss of 78 affordable housing units, giving the county a small net gain of only 34 units.

POVERTY IN ST. MARY'S COUNTY

St. Mary's County has a significant number of families that live on subsistence income. The chart below provided by the St. Mary's County Department of Social Services, demonstrates the increasing number of individuals that are functioning at or below the poverty level and who are increasingly coming to the local DSS for services. The poverty level in the county has increased over the past three years and is expected to continue to increase this year. Unemployment rates have shown a marked increase, particularly over the past year and a half. St. Mary's DSS has also shown a sharp increase in the number of customers receiving Temporary Cash Assistance and Food Stamps. There is also an increase in disabled individuals who are receiving Supplemental Security Income or Temporary Disability Assistance Program payments.

	FY 09 (FYTD) Average	FY 08 Average	FY 07 Average	FY 06 Average
Poverty Rate	Unavailable	8.2	7.7	7.5
Unemployment Rate	5.4 (Preliminary Jan 09)	3.7 (Annual)	3.1 (Annual)	3.3 (Annual)
TCA Customers (Total Paid Cases)	458	330	280	261
Food Stamp Customers	7,684	6,425	5,759	5,598
SSI Recipients	1,262	1,240	1,193	1,151
TDAP Recipients	170	124	156	165

In 2005, the St. Mary's County Chamber of Commerce formed a Workforce Housing Task Force to research the county's affordable housing needs and provide recommendations. The Task Force produced a report focusing on housing that is affordable to families earning 45% to 110% of median household income (an annual salary range of $34,065 to $83,270). The Task Force proposed four major objectives to address the current affordable housing situation:

1. Preserve the traditional, older neighborhoods of St. Mary's County to maintain the current stock of workforce housing.

2. Create incentives for developers as a means to encourage the construction of workforce housing to result in a rich diversity of housing types and sizes ensuring home ownership opportunities within a broad range of income levels.

3. Increase community awareness of the workforce housing issue and promote existing State and Federal housing assistance programs such as House Keys 4 Employees and More House for Less available to working families in St. Mary's County.
4. Establish an ongoing source of funding to sustain workforce housing initiatives.

Each objective is accompanied by a number of specific recommended measures to be undertaken in order to increase affordable housing options in St. Mary's County.

EMERGENCY AND TRANSITIONAL SERVICES

There are three primary providers of shelter for residents of St. Mary's County: Angel's Watch Shelter (est.1989), Three Oaks Center (est.1996) and Leah's House (est. 2005). The Department of Social Services (DSS) also plays a significant role in housing the homeless in that they provide limited funding for overnight motel stays until shelter space is secured. There are also a number of churches, non-profits and organizations who assist the homeless, both physically and financially. It is important to acknowledge there is no designated State or County agency charged with funding homeless shelters. Funding for these programs come from a variety of contracts, grants and public and private institutions.

Shelter Providers

Angel's Watch Shelter
Angel's Watch Shelter is owned and operated by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington DC and serves St. Mary's, Charles and Calvert residents, only. They are located central to all three counties, with each county seat being approximately 20 minutes in either direction. Angel's Watch offers emergency and transitional shelter services for women and women with children. They are the only shelter in Maryland and the DC Metropolitan area that allows women with male children up to 17 years of age to be sheltered together, so the family may remain intact. There are 41 beds available and 10 additional cots available during hypothermia season which runs from November 1 through March 31. The beds at Angel's Watch are not dedicated to any one county or any one classification of resident, meaning that residents are admitted on a first-come, first-served basis. Domestic violence and inclement weather clients are always offered a cot, even if the shelter's general bed space is full. In 2007, 40% of the beds at Angel's Watch were filled by St. Mary's County residents, meaning on any given night approximately 16 beds were occupied by women and children from St. Mary's. In FY08 Angel's Watch reported it provided 3,824 bed nights to 160 women and children from St. Mary's. This represents all categories of clients: emergency, transitional, domestic violence and hypothermia.

Residents admitted to Angel's Watch are on an Emergency Shelter status for 30 days (except for hypothermia which is a night by night basis). Thirty days is part of a national standard by which emergency funding is granted and a benchmark for residents to demonstrate their readiness to take more control over their lives and move-through the continuum of care to transitional, and ultimately, permanent housing. After 30 days, the resident may apply to enter the Transitional Program at Angel's Watch which allows them to stay up to 24 additional months (another standard). The Transitional Program is a national model, funded, in part, by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and is designed to provide the supportive services necessary for shelter residents to achieve the confidence and steps needed to become self-sufficient.
In FY 08, Angel's Watch reported a total of 30 women passed through the Transitional Program at Angel's Watch with 35 children. During that period, 19 women exited the program.   Of the 19 exiting residents, 53% entered permanent housing and 26% secured housing with a family member or friend. Twenty-one percent (21%) entered institutional care (hospital, jail and/or another transitional program). Further, of the 19 residents who exited during the reporting period, 95% had an income upon exit – either through employment or entitlement benefits. This is a 28% increase over their status when they entered Angel's Watch. Residents may remain in the shelter during both the emergency and transitional phases of assistance. Supportive services continue for a specified period of time while residents move into permanent housing.

Three Oaks Center
Three Oaks Center offers emergency, transitional and permanent supportive housing to homeless men, women, and women with children from St. Mary's County. Three Oaks is conveniently located in Lexington Park, near DSS, jobs, services and other key providers for vulnerable populations. Their mission is to help individuals and families meet their basic needs for shelter, stabilization, assessment, and referral to appropriate resources so that they may return to living productive and self-sufficient lives in the

community. Three Oaks' staff work one-on-one with each individual to ensure he or she is getting the support required to help him or her reach specific achievements. Three Oaks also partners with many local non-profit agencies that provide clients with a full range of counseling and self-improvement resources.

Prior to its establishment in January 1996, there was no shelter or dedicated transitional support program for homeless men in St. Mary's County. During the first three years, Three Oaks Center provided support to men, only. Today, they have the capacity to serve individuals and families in their emergency and transitional programs, both in the on-site facility and at off-site apartments and homes in the area. Including all these programs, Three Oaks has 94 beds available for emergency and transitional housing and 51 permanent supportive housing beds. Recently, Three Oaks began an emergency crisis component to their work with homeless women that provide immediate assistance with basic needs and counseling.

For 2008, Three Oaks Center reported it provided 70,250 bed nights to homeless individuals in St. Mary's County, including 348 men, 341 women and 430 children. Of the 70,250 bed nights provided, 8,200 were in Emergency Shelter, 33,945 were in the Transitional Program, and 28,105 were in the Permanent Supportive Housing Program. Further, Three Oaks Center provided outreach and referral to a total of 537 individuals and child advocacy to 90 children and 38 families.

The Three Oaks Child Advocacy Program (CAP) works with families in Emergency and Transitional Housing Programs. Before the families obtained housing through the Three Oaks Center, they experienced extended periods of homelessness. Homelessness is often caused by mental health and/or addiction problems of the parent, break-up of the family, or simply by poverty. Children of such families experience periods of stress and instability that impair their normal development and leave them with feelings of insecurity in the best case and serious emotional problems in the worst. This leads to family discord, school problems, and behavior problems in the community. The Child Advocacy Program works to assess the strengths and needs of the family and creates a course of action together with the family. It also provides home-based family counseling with counseling being provided at the client's residence.

CAP has provided food, clothing, medical needs, summer camps, after school activities, special occasion celebrations such as Christmas parties, Easter Egg Hunt, Mother's and Father's Day celebrations, incentives, and tutoring for the children. It also provides parenting skills training for parents.

The shelter and transitional housing system at Three Oaks Center is organized to minimize the length of time people remain homeless, and the number of times they become homeless. Coordination of resources aimed at reducing the duration of each spell of homelessness and preventing recurrences is critical for reducing homelessness. "Rapid Re-Housing" is the most current national model for approaching services to homeless populations and is promoted at Three Oaks whenever possible. The Rapid Re-Housing approach addresses immediate barriers to housing so that homeless people can move into permanent housing as quickly as possible. The Three Oaks Rapid Re-Housing program addresses service needs through home-based case management,

which helps stabilize the family, ensure that they will have sufficient income to sustain their housing, and prevent a recurrence of homelessness.

Three Oaks housing search services include the following elements:
- Skilled housing search staff with knowledge of local housing markets and relationships with landlords.
- Assurances to landlords that their housing services will assist with landlord/tenant problems.
- Access to subsidies, such as vouchers, for households with extremely low incomes.
- Coordination with service providers to ensure that a homeless person's service needs are met once he or she is in permanent housing.
- Regular follow-up work to prevent a housing crisis.
- Services to address credit problems.

Leah's House, Inc.
Leah's House offers emergency shelter beds and transitional housing in an on-site structured program. Prior to its inception there was not a physical shelter in St. Mary's County for homeless women and children. Women and their families were provided a motel room in the county or sent to a tri-county shelter located in Charles County (Angel's Watch). Incorporated in 2005, Leah's House has 14 beds (two additional beds/cots may be added during hypothermia season) and is located in Valley Lee, Maryland. It is located 12.5 miles from the St Mary's County Hospital and only 10.7 miles from the DSS in Lexington Park. In addition, the Leah's House location is central to both Leonardtown and Lexington Park. Clients are connected by van to major bus lines which are less than 2 miles away. Recently a Leah's House client attending the Jobs Connection Program in Lexington Park was reported to have had perfect attendance – something according to DSS no client has previously achieved. With the use of a state bond bill awarded in 2008 the Leah's House shelter has plans to expand bringing jobs, childcare and educational resources on-site for homeless and other low income families.

Leah's House clients are primarily homeless persons in St. Mary's County which include survivors of domestic violence. On occasion, the shelter will take clients from other geographical locations around the country. Leah's House also works in partnership with the Tahirih Justice Center offering services to international victims. Utilizing their partnerships with existing service providers, they link and refer residents to appropriate programs for education, training, counseling, day care, job readiness, job search, legal aid including court accompaniment, and clothing assistance.

Leah's House reported in 2008, a total of 51 individuals passed through it's doors and 3,335 bed nights were provided. Thirty six percent of clients were adult women and/or adult women with children. Upon exiting during the 2008 period, thirty three percent had acquired permanent housing, forty six percent had secured housing with a family member or friend; thirty three percent were survivors of abuse: forty eight percent had received job/training with work skills, sixty two percent had acquired some sort of long-term income through employment, agency subsidies, child support or SSD, forty three percent had established personal savings to help facilitate their moves into permanent supportive housing. Twenty four percent had acquired employment; twenty nine percent

were disabled and fourteen percent were fifty years and older. The agency also received over 270 referrals for services during that time period.

During their time at Leah's House, clients: 1)are assigned a case manager to guide them through the transition process and design an action plan;2) develop money management skills including establishing savings accounts to help them transition to permanent housing; 3) receive follow-up with their Case Manager for a full year; 4)are provided household furnishings for their new homes (when available);5) have access to county services and agencies through the provision of transportation; 6) may receive rent subsidies on permanent supportive housing (when funds are available); 7)receive the assistance of staff and volunteers fluent in Russian, Italian and Spanish to serve other underserved populations; 8) are offered credit counseling;9) have staff and volunteers skilled in housing search, with knowledge of local housing markets and established relationships with landlords; and 10)receive access to subsidies, such as vouchers for low income housing, through partnership with local agencies.

Overview of Leah's House. Residents are required to actively pursue goals for housing, employment, treatment, education, etc. Empowering these families begins the moment they make contact with Leah's House. An assessment of current needs and resources is made available. Over the next few weeks and months, residents develop a plan of action and are connected with the other service providers to help them make the transition into individuals who have greater control over their lives. In the emergency program, residents are able to stay for up to 30 days. Once in the transitional program, where more additional services are provided by Leah's House staff, a resident may stay up to 24 months. The Transitional Program is a national model, similar to that funded, in part, by the Department of Housing and Urban Development at the Angels Watch shelter and is designed to provide the supportive services necessary for shelter residents to achieve the confidence and steps needed to become self-sufficient.

- **Addressing Rural Community Needs thru Collaborations (ARCNC)** - In collaboration with other agencies via a Memorandum of Understanding LH provides greater access to services.

- **Domestic Violence Shelter/Program Seminars** - Strives to enhance community's awareness and sensitivity to the need to have a new response to the issues of domestic violence and homelessness.

- **Healthy is Best Program** - In this program women are referred for physicals, mammograms. Women also receive onsite aerobic instruction and hospital transportation or accompaniment.

- **Shelter Life Living Program** (Group) - This project is committed to helping residents adjusts to shelter life; achieve self-confidence, self-reliance, and adjust to being in a strange environment with the many restrictions that are necessary for group living.

- **Leah's House Children Program (LHCP)** - The St. Mary's College of Maryland students developed a children's program called the Leah's House Children's

Program (LHCP) and are on site once a week working directly with children in the shelter.

- **Wheels to Independence (WI)** - Working with area repair shops this project gives clients an opportunity for even greater success in achieving and maintaining their independence by providing donated cars to clients.

- **Innovative youth services addressing the needs of both homeless and community youth** - This program has been operating in the community since 2001 offering positive alternatives to at risk youth. Youth at the shelter are integrated into this group which addresses behavior issues and offers conflict mediation/resolution, teen dating violence prevention, responding to and coping with peer pressure, and addressing teen victimization.

St. Mary's County Department of Social Services
The St. Mary's County Department of Social Services reported it sheltered 265 individuals for a total of 8,680 bed nights in 2008. This figure represents a duplicated count since these individuals were referred to local shelters. DSS provides shelter services to residents in St. Mary's County in the form of paying for emergency bed nights at local participating hotels and/or at Three Oaks Center and Leah's House. Angel's Watch Shelter does not receive direct emergency lodging funding from DSS. Emergency and Transitional Housing funding is passed through DSS to Angel's Watch through an annual grant to cover emergency bed nights.

In St. Mary's County, DSS is the primary conduit through which homeless women and their children enter shelter services. Although the referral process may differ slightly from shelter to shelter, DSS is the primary agency, along with a few referrals coming from specific other agencies, such as Walden Sierra and the Sheriff's Department. This mechanism is in place to ensure that individuals receive access to all of the services available to them so that they have the best opportunity for developing a plan to become self-sufficient. Since DSS is the agency tasked with seeing to the general welfare of the public, they are often the first point of contact for the homeless entering the system of care and link customers to internal services and those provided by other agencies.

Homeless men in St. Mary's County do not necessarily go through DSS for referral to a shelter. Three Oaks is the only county agency sheltering men in St. Mary's and they allow men to self-refer to their facility. Three Oaks takes the responsibility for ensuring their male residents have access to appropriate resource and referral.

The St. Mary's County Department of Social Services is accredited by the Council on Accreditation (COA). The COA partners with public and private human service organizations to improve service delivery outcomes by developing, applying, and promoting accreditation standards.

ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS
St. Mary's County Homeless Prevention Board

I. St. Mary's County has a Homeless Prevention Board comprised of agencies and organizations that provide services to the homeless population. The St. Mary's County Homeless Prevention Board recognizes that while homelessness may not be able to be alleviated; they will strive to advocate for people in St. Mary's County who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the following ways:

I. Educate the community regarding services available in the community.

II. Focus on prevention of homelessness in our youth.

III. Work toward the development and enhancement of partnerships in the community.

IV. Provide leadership to prevent and reduce homelessness when possible.

V. Identify and address the core issues and needs resulting in homelessness.

Agency Membership

Pathways	Walden-Sierra
Catholic Charities	Community Development Corporation
Three Oaks	Kennedy Institute
Leah's House	Housing Authority
Angel's Watch	Department of Human Services
Psychotherapeutic Services of	The Arc
Southern Maryland	
Department of Social Services	

St. Mary's County Human Services Council
The St. Mary's County Human Services Council was established in 2008. The purpose of the Council is to "advise and make recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners to ensure the coordination of comprehensive and quality services to the citizens of the County." The Council identified four priority issues to be addressed: Housing (at all levels); Employment; Transportation and Behavioral Health. Additionally the Council recently wrote a chapter on Human Services Needs to be included in the County's Comprehensive Plan. The following agencies are represented:

St. Mary's County Health Department	Department of Social Services
Housing Authority	Department of Aging
Department of Juvenile Services	St. Mary's Hospital
Law Enforcement	Judicial System
Business Representative	Four Non-Profit Organizations
Faith Based Representative	Mental Health
Four Representatives form a Consumer or family member of a consumer of human services	

** St. Mary's Human Services Council has identified "housing" not homelessness as

one of their issues of focus. Of course, housing options that are affordable for all levels of income is important as it is one of many issues that contribute to homelessness.

Southern Maryland Regional Homeless Prevention Board

The Regional Homeless Prevention Board oversees the Tri-County Continuum of Care (CoC) which is the primary decision making plan regarding homeless services for St. Mary's, Calvert and Charles Counties. Membership is comprised of five members for each county's local homelessness prevention board. The Continuum of Care provides strategic planning and oversight for programs and services for homeless individuals. The local Prevention Board focuses on programs and services specifically in St. Mary's county. Representative from the local boards of Calvert, Charles and St. Mary's meet to discuss homelessness on a regional level.

NEW FUNDING FOR ST. MARY'S COUNTY IN FY10
Implement New Prevention Services

According to the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) will provide financial assistance/services to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless and help those who are experiencing homelessness to be quickly re-housed and stabilized. The funds under this program are intended to target individuals and families who would be homeless without this assistance. Only local government certified lead agencies for Continuum of Care and non-profit organizations that have been approved by their local jurisdictions as applicants are eligible for funding under the HPRP.

* Maryland will receive $22.4 million, including $5.6 that will be distributed by DHCD.

The funds will provide for a variety of assistance like: short-term and medium-term rental assistances and housing relocation and stabilization services, including such activities as mediation, credit counseling, security or utility deposits, utility payments, moving cost assistance and case management.

The Three Oaks Center submitted an application for HPRP funds in the amount of $171,026. This is a two-year grant. The HPRP program at Three Oaks Center will involve homelessness prevention, diversion and rapid re-housing, along with the data collection and administration that accompanies these efforts. Since HPRP funding is intended to serve at risk populations with minimal level of services required to achieve sustainability, Three Oaks has already spoken with a new collaborative partner to outreach to this population. In collaboration with the Community Mediation Center of St. Mary's, Three Oaks intends to outreach through the court system with landlords and tenants to prevent evictions. In-house case managers will work with clients as well to secure housing and stabilize the individuals and families placed.

Often, low income families find it difficult to save for the start-up expenses associated with a new residence. Rapid re-housing funding will give temporary assistance to this

population while case managers work to help achieve sustainability. Domestic violence can and does occur at all income levels. Often the victim feels unable to leave current living situations for economic reasons. HPRP funding can help to establish the safe environment needed for victims to live independently from their abusers. Historically, a large percentage of the homeless population has a mental illness diagnosis, although with proper treatment they can be self-sustaining. HPRP funding may assist this population, as well.

Three Oaks' plan for an efficient and effective outreach program includes coordination with the District Court in St. Mary's County, since the first step in the eviction process is for the landlord to file a claim with that court. An HPRP representative would be stationed at the court to interview potential evictees to see if they are eligible for the program. The tenant and landlord will then have an opportunity to meet with a mediator at the courthouse to seek a resolution that would avoid eviction. Three Oaks would also receive referrals from the Department of Social Services and Tri-County Community Action. Three Oaks Center will provide case management services which include assessment, creation and adherence to a goal plan, budgeting, locating and procuring housing, and linkage to needed service provider agencies for employment, education, health, mental health, and/or legal aid.

ST. MARY'S RENTAL ALLOWANCE PROGRAM
Expand Transitional Housing Services

The Housing Authority of St. Mary's also applied for a two year grant through HPRP funds in the amount of $37,888.00 to support their existing Rental Allowance Program (RAP). RAP is designed to assist very low-income persons who have critical housing needs. RAP may grant <u>twelve months</u> rental assistance to those without or in danger of losing their housing. The amount of the grant depends on the size of the family.

<u>**WHO IS ELIGIBLE**</u>

1. Applicants must be residents of St. Mary's County.

2. Applicants must be income eligible.
   Yearly income must fall below the guidelines:

1 Person	2 Persons	3 Persons	4 Persons	5 Persons	6 Persons	7 Persons
$18,000	$20,550	$23,150	$25,700	$27,750	$29,800	$31,850

3. Applicants must have a critical housing need. They must be homeless or in danger of becoming homeless.

4. Applicants must prove they will be able to take over rental payments <u>in full</u> following twelve months of RAP assistance.

HOW RAP WORKS

A check is mailed directly to the landlord the first of each month. The recipient is responsible for the balance of rent due the landlord. The amount of rental assistance depends on the size of the family.

1-2 Persons	3-4 Persons	5+Persons
$270.00	$330.00	$500.00

This assistance is for twelve months only. Families must be prepared to pay the full rent after receiving assistance for twelve months.

Fair Market Rent	Affordable Rent
FMR - One Bedroom $820	One Bedroom Affordability Level $1,120
FMR - Two Bedroom $1,068	Two Bedroom Affordability Level $1,280
FMR - Three Bedroom $1,403	Three Bedroom Affordability Level $1,440-$1,600

Housing subsidies based on fair market rents do not cover the cost of what St. Mary's Housing Authority considers to be affordable housing. This causes a lack of truly affordable housing. The populations who find themselves homeless usually have an income below 15 percent of area median income. Housing Authority of St. Mary's calculates affordability at 30% of income level. Low income levels (80% of median) for 1, 2, 3 and 4 persons are $44,800; $51,200; $57,600; and $64,000 respectively. Affordable monthly rents at these levels would be $1,120; $1,280; $1,440; and $1,600. These "affordable" levels are well above the Fair Market Rents assigned to St. Mary's County.

NEW WALDEN SIERRA SITE
Expand Mental Health/Substance Abuse Services in Lexington Park

Walden is opening a new site in Lexington Park at 21770 FDR Boulevard. This new site will provide the space required for Walden to meet the demand for outpatient addiction services, crisis and counseling services, and community services supportive of recovery and healing. The FDR Boulevard facility will open November 2, 2009 with Walden's existing Lexington Park site on Route 235 closing at the end of October. While this is not considered new funding, the move to Lexington Park will provide more services in an area of the county with the largest need.

FAITH-BASED HOMELESS INITIATIVE
Expand Emergency Shelter Services

Several churches throughout the county joined forces to address homelessness on a local level. Their taskforce includes representation from provider agencies, as well. They are working to successfully replicate a Safe Nights Program currently underway in both Calvert and Charles Counties. The St. Mary's County program is WARM Nights (Wrapping Arms 'Round Many).

Ideally, WARM Nights in St. Mary's would operate during the coldest months (November through March). Churches throughout the county would volunteer to serve as a host site to provide shelter, dinner and breakfast to homeless men, women and children referred by Three Oaks when it's at maximum capacity. The churches would rotate an inventory of cots and blankets between host sites.

Currently the task force is meeting monthly to determine operating procedures. They are discussing details like length of commitment for host sites, provision of meals, monitoring and safety issues, recruiting additional host sites, rules for participants, financial support and more. The target date to launch WARM Nights in St. Mary's is winter, 2009.

Church/Agency Representation

Church of the Ascension
Cornerstone Presbyterian Church
First Missionary Baptist Church
First Saints Community Church
Lexington Park United Methodist Church
Mt. Zion United Methodist Church
New Beginnings Worship Center
Patuxent Presbyterian Church

Department of Human Services
Department of Social Services
Housing Authority of St. Mary's County
Leah's House
Three Oak Center
SAYSF Bible Church
St. George's Episcopal Church

SUMMARY

The current state of homelessness throughout our nation, and specifically, within St. Mary's County is the culmination of various complex social, financial and political factors, many which began decades ago. With the growth of technology driven jobs in the county, lack of a properly trained workforce, reduction of federal and state support dollars, inflation and a national healthcare crisis, it is a daunting challenge to meet the needs of the chronically homeless, as well as, the general population who require affordable housing options.

Local resources are addressing emergency shelter needs, however, more resources are needed for prevention and transitional and permanent housing. Local shelters report St. Mary's County currently has 149 emergency beds with 94 at Three Oaks, 41 at Angel's Watch and 14 at Leah's House. The St. Mary's County Department of Social Services reports not needing to place women and children in hotels for the past 1 1/2 years to meet emergency needs. While there is a hypothermia plan that exists with DSS, there has not been a need to implement it and the hypothermia beds in the existing shelters have met the need. St. Mary's County, like the rest of the nation, is working with limited resources thus making it especially important to identify existing needs and ways to address those gaps in services. Local agencies working directly with the homeless population concur more emphasis is needed on prevention measures and transitional and permanent housing in order to make an impact in reducing homelessness.

Homelessness cuts across all demographics and solutions to this problem requires commitment from all key community stakeholders which includes government, public agencies, the business sector, private citizens and the faith community. Land use patterns have an effect on poverty. Short and long term trends must be examined carefully as the placement of schools, homes, businesses, etc… impact poverty. Three Oaks reports a large percentage of their clients present with mental health and/or substance abuse problems. That is not the case with Angels' Watch and Leah's House, who indicate poverty and domestic abuse are often seen with their residents. In an effort to inform government officials and public agencies and educate the community at large, it is critical to understand that while these factors contribute to homelessness, there are a growing number of people who are becoming homeless due to the current economy. These are people who are skilled but due to loss of employment are finding themselves in a situation they never imagined they would be in. Homelessness due to illness or lack of income is a tragedy that can happen to anyone. The faces of homelessness are diverse and the contributing factors are varied. It is important to devise a comprehensive system of support services pertaining to all categories of homelessness and address the needs of the low income, veterans, people with substance abuse problems, those with mental and/or physical disabilities and those recently displaced due to the current economic climate.

While difficult, it is not impossible, to eliminate or significantly diminish the tragedy of homelessness in St. Mary's County. It begins with adoption of a central plan to provide affordable housing for all levels of income and prevent homelessness for the low income, with particular attention given to special populations (veterans, persons with physical and mental disabilities, etc…) and in the event that homelessness does occur,

the strategic plan must call for enhanced emergency responses and move to quickly stabilize people into permanent housing along with the appropriate level of support services needed. As with most areas, more resources (funds and case management) and affordable housing are cited as major needs. Plans to secure future funding, the sharing of resources and information, the planning and collaboration of new programs and services, should ideally, be based upon the data and guidance provided by the County's strategic plan.

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS
ST. MARY'S COUNTY, MARYLAND
FY 2010 – 2013

Goal 1: Establish preventive strategies to reduce and/or eliminate occurrences of homelessness.

Performance Target(s)	Organization Responsible	Target Date
A. Establish a single point of entry to access services for both males and females.	Dept. of Social Services	Oct. 1, 2009
B. Promote prevention resources to assist citizens at risk of becoming homeless;	Walden Sierra Tri-County Community Action	FY2010
• Walden-Sierra is expanding hotline services to include information on homelessness prevention.		
• Increase awareness of services provided by Southern Maryland Tri-County Community Action Committee.		
C. Implement Housing Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) initiatives.	Three Oaks Community Mediation Center of St. Mary's	FY2010
D. Provide increased case mgmt and life skill coaching for at-risk population before shelter services are needed.	Dept. of Social Services	Ongoing
E. Increase funding to preserve existing housing through assistance with rent and utilities.	Dept. of Social Services, Tri-County Community Action, Housing Authority and Providers	Ongoing
F. Promote suggestions to increase affordable housing made by the Human Services Council and rep in the County's Comprehensive Plan.	Housing Authority Dept. of Land Use and Growth Management	Ongoing

Goal 2: Improve efficiency of emergency services

Performance Target(s)	Organization Responsible	Target Date
A. Provide increased case management and life skills coaching during shelter stay.	Shelter Providers	Ongoing
B. Initiate WARM Nights Program.	Faith Community	Nov. 2009
C. Increase WARM Night locations.	Faith Community	FY2011– 2013

Goal 3: Increase opportunities for transitional and permanent housing.

Performance Target(s)	Organization Responsible	Target Date
A. Reduce length of shelter stay and expedite move to transitional and permanent housing	Shelter Providers	FY2010
B. Provide increased case management beyond shelter stay. Identify additional funds to increase case management beyond shelter stay.	Shelter Providers Dept. of Human Services	Ongoing
C. Identify additional funding sources for increasing affordable housing options.	Housing Authority Dept of Human Services	Ongoing
D. Explore alternative or non-traditional housing sites.	Housing Authority Dept. of Land Use and Growth Management Dept. of Human Service	Ongoing

Goal 4: Enhance System Coordination.

Performance Target(s)	Organization Responsible	Target Date
A. Participate in the implementation of the newly established State HMIS system.	Service Providers Dept. of Human Services	Jan. 2010
B. Host a local conference focusing on prevention for service providers, organization, partners and clients.	Dept. of Human Services	Jan. 2010
C. Notify all related agencies once the strategic plan is adopted by the County Commissioners.	Dept. of Human Services	FY2010
D. Participate in continuum of care plan on local and regional level.	Shelter Providers	Ongoing
E. Strengthen collaboration of the homeless system by coordinating funding strategies.	Dept. of Human Services	FY2010
F. Monitor the progress of the homelessness plan by evaluating the efficiency of the plan and making recommendations, as needed.	Local Homeless Prevention Board Dept. of Human Services Human Service Council	FY2010
G. Expand mental health and substance abuse services in the Lexington Park area.	Walden Sierra Pathways, Inc. NAMI SoMD(National Alliance on Mental Illness of Southern Maryland)	Nov. 2009