



Lee County Homeless Coalition, Inc.

Annual Report

July 1, 2014- June 30, 2015



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The Lee County Homeless Coalition, Inc. was incorporated on December 4, 2008 as a private, not-for-profit Florida corporation under the provisions of Chapter 617 of the Florida Statutes. The function of the Coalition was established pursuant to Florida Statute 420.623 to plan, network, coordinate, and monitor the delivery of services to the homeless. The Coalition had been operating under the umbrella of the Department of Human Services since October 2004. On September 1, 2009 the Lee County Homeless Coalition officially separated from the Department of Human Services as an independent agency. The mission of the Coalition is to *advocate, educate, and promote awareness of issues and obstacles facing homeless individuals in Lee County through community collaboration, planning and implementing solutions.*

The coalition has 44 paid members including not-for-profit agencies, businesses, faith-based organizations, advocates, and people who are currently or have been homeless. The general Coalition meets monthly as well does the three task forces which focus on community awareness and education, prevention, and demographics. The coalition participates in many community meetings which have shared goals of ending homelessness. We are active in the Continuum of Care governance meetings, Triage governing meetings, Community Blue Print and Zero: 2016 to name a few.

The Coalition is involved in a variety of activities and media events designed to raise public awareness on homeless issues. Some projects and events included:

Continuum of Care Governance and Ranking Committee

The passage of the HEARTH Act in 2009 changed how programs and funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) work to help the homeless. One of the new requirements in the HEARTH Act is the formation of a Governing Board for each local Continuum of Care (CoC). This board must be made up of a cross section of nonprofit providers, governmental agencies, advocates, and other organizations that in some way help the homeless in Lee County. The Homeless Coalition is a part of this Governing Board.

The Board has the ability to assign itself tasks, but in general, responsibilities include adopting a process for future Board members, approving policies and procedures for the Lee County CoC, working on goals, objectives, and performance measurements for the CoC, and providing semi-annual reports to the general membership of the CoC. Our CoC is expected to address homelessness through a coordinated community-based process of identifying the needs and building a system of housing and services that addresses those needs. Ranking of projects need to be done by a committee that understands the CoC but is not in competition for any of the funding therefore, the Homeless Coalition Board of Directors act as the ranking committee for our CoC projects.

Awareness Campaign, August and on-going

The Coalition's mission is to advocate, educate, and promote awareness so one of our objectives is an Awareness Campaign. More people need to have an appreciation for the depth of the issue before they can decide how they might be able to help our cause. Our three public service announcements (PSA) which were released last year continued to air on local television through October of 2014. The PSAs are also posted on our website. The PSAs will continue to air on local television networks whenever funding is available.

The second part of this year's Awareness Campaign was the Home Plate Campaign.

On the threshold of World Homeless Day on October 10, the Lee County Homeless Coalition launched its "Home Plate" general awareness initiative to expose the plight of people who are homeless. The public was invited to participate by picking up a complimentary Home Plate Kit to host a meal as a catalyst for an awareness and discussion event in their homes with a handful of invited guests. The kit consists of a Coalition branded tote bag containing 10 branded meal plates and an activity sheet to help get the discussion going. Additionally, a brief video that brings to light poignant information and little known facts concerning homelessness was provided.

These Storied Streets, November 13, 2014

The Coalition partnered with Community Cooperative, Alliance of the Arts and the National Association of Social Workers to show a documentary film titled These Storied Streets. The viewing included a Q&A session afterward. Storied Streets explores homelessness across America by telling the stories of those who live it every day. The film profiles the homeless and the formerly homeless and their struggle to survive. Their stories are real, raw and compelling. The film provides a window into their struggles, question stereotypes and changes the way you feel about homelessness.

Homeless Challenge, November 15-23, 2014

The Lee County Board of County Commissioners officially proclaimed the week of November 15-23 as "National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week", a time designated to educate the public and bring awareness to the needs of the homeless. Each year, the Coalition hosts a homeless challenge in mid-November to correspond with National Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week. The Lee County Homeless Coalition sponsored several events during November to engage the community. The challenge ended with "Night on the Streets" in which the community was encouraged to spend a night outside to discuss, think and learn about homelessness. This year's "Night on the Streets" event took place on November 22.

Those participating in a "Night on the Streets" joined together for a meal and attempted to live homeless, foregoing sleeping in their own beds and facing similar situations that affect the homeless until 10 a.m. on Sunday, November 23. Participants also visited homeless provider agencies, and used Lee Tran for transportation. The day's agenda included discussions with law enforcement, ER staff, and some of our partner agencies.

The goal was to have participants come away with a better understanding of the scope of the problem, and of how the system currently deals with the hardships of homelessness. The activity was designed to educate and promote awareness.

For those unable to attend a "Night on the Streets", there were many other activities to take the homeless challenge and participate during National Homeless Awareness Week and beyond. Recommendations included: Collecting or donating non-perishable food or clothing, Volunteering professional services to provide aid to the homeless, Asking your employer or school to host or sponsor a fundraising event, Donating funds to a non-profit shelter, food pantry or "FPL's Care to Share" program, and Participating in our Home Plate Awareness Campaign.

The Lee County Homeless Coalition 2015 Client Identification Grant

The Coalition works with individuals and agencies to identify potential gaps within our local continuum of homeless care. One of those gaps involves assisting persons who are homeless obtain birth certificates, driver's licenses, and/or state ID's. The Florida statutes now provide an exemption for homeless individuals to obtain state Identification cards. However, there can still be a need for incidental costs to obtain supporting documentation or services fees to obtain the state Identification. Without proper identification an individual is not able to obtain employment or receive financial assistance and may be subject to arrest. By providing funding to assist with obtaining birth certificates, driver's licenses, and/or state IDs, we hope to enable the individual to become self-sufficient. This is the third year the Coalition has provided funding to our member agencies for this purpose. All Soul's Episcopal Church and Community Cooperative, Inc. received \$1,000 each to assist clients with identification. The Coalition was pleased to be able to offer this grant to our members and assist those who needed help.

10th Annual Dinner and Silent Auction, November 1, 2014

The Lee County Homeless Coalition raised more than \$21,000 during the organization's masquerade-themed tenth annual dinner and silent auction held at the Colonial Country Club in Fort Myers. The event was sponsored by the Aubuchon Family Fund. In addition there were 2 Gold Sponsors, 7 Silver Sponsors and 9 Bronze Sponsors. Approximately 200 guests attended and bid on 93 donated auction items. The funds raised help the Lee County Homeless Coalition and its partners to continue their mission to end homelessness in Lee County. In addition, a portion of the proceeds from the dinner were donated to Project Dentists Care which is administered by The Salvation Army.

Hosted by master of ceremonies David Plazas, News-Press Digital Engagement Editor, the event featured special guest speaker Commissioner Brian Hamman. Music was performed by Motown Magic.

This year's Dean Blitz Annual Memorial Award for outstanding community service was presented to Kaitlin Major. Kaitlin is a dedicated social worker at Community Cooperative. She is compassionate and works hard to create sustainable change for those experiencing homelessness in the community. We are grateful to have her on our team!

The Coalition appreciates the community coming together and supporting our efforts to end homelessness in Lee County. Many thanks to all of you for your support and contributions!



Nov. 1, 2014 Masquerade-themed tenth annual dinner and silent auction, at the Colonial Country



Kaitlin Major, Dean Blitz Award Winner



2014 Dinner and Auction

18th Annual Candlelight Vigil, December 21, 2014

The community came together on the steps of the Old Courthouse to memorialize 23 homeless individuals who died during the year while living on the streets or in a homeless shelter in Lee County with the lighting of candles. The Candlelight Vigil included opening remarks by Janet Bartos, Executive Director, and William Rodriguez, Coalition Board Chair. The opening prayer was presented by Major Timothy Gilliam from The Salvation Army. Taps was performed by Harvey Charter, Commander, Victor Paul Tuchman Post 400 Jewish War Veterans. Local performing artist Dallas Bel debuted her original song, "A Face Without A Home", which she wrote specifically for the Candlelight Vigil. She was joined by the AHT4U Girls Choir who sing in support of Touch a Hero's Heart. This event brings attention to the tragedy of homelessness and educates communities that the lack of affordable housing, shelter, living wages, and accessible health care is a problem that must be addressed.



Candlelight Vigil

Zero: 2016

Lee County has been selected, along with 68 other U.S. communities, to participate in Zero: 2016, a national campaign to end veteran and chronic homelessness in the next two years. The Campaign is being spearheaded by Community Solutions, a national non-profit that will work intensively with Lee County to meet the federal goals set by President Obama to end veteran homelessness by December 2015 and chronic homelessness by December 2016. The initiative is a rigorous follow-on to the group's successful 100,000 Homes Campaign, which announced in June 2014 that it had helped communities house 105,000 chronically homeless Americans in under four years. The decision to apply was made jointly by our Housing Authority, Veterans Affairs, Lee County Department of Human Services, and the Lee County Homeless Coalition.

Cold Weather Outreach

The Coalition partnered with Community Cooperative and other agencies in the Cold Weather Street Outreach. It was activated when temperatures drop below 40 degrees and scheduled Monday through Friday from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. between the months of October to March. During this time volunteers distributed coffee, hot chocolate, blankets, jackets and winter caps to the homeless in the Fort Myers, Fort Myers Beach and Cape Coral areas. There were six locations in Fort Myers, one on Fort Myers Beach and two in Cape Coral. The outreach was activated three times in February and 136 people were assisted.

Safe Shelter Report

In late 2013, the Lee County Homeless Coalition (LCHC) Board of Directors authorized the formation of the "Safe Shelter Initiative Committee" (SSIC) to assess and make recommendations to address the gap in emergency shelter beds for the homeless population of Lee County and present these findings to the Board. They formed a committee of community members with various backgrounds and expertise to help guide their work. They reviewed Point In Time (PIT) numbers along with the housing inventory chart. The committee viewed shelter models and toured shelter facilities. They consulted with a nationally known expert, Dr. Robert Marbut. The final report was submitted in January 2015. During their research into the need and viability of developing an emergency safe shelter for our community, the SSIC discovered that there is a substantial shortage of emergency unconditional shelters in Lee County – a 400+ bed shortfall every night. SSIC identified 2 viable solutions to reduce the housing shortfall in Lee County. They are to expand the capacity of the Bob Janes Triage Center and support Volunteers of America or another non-profit that would bring a permanent supportive housing project to our community.

Census Blitz (Point in Time Count), January 30, 2015

Once per year the Coalition, with the help of many volunteers, conducts a Point in Time (PIT) census to count the homeless and provide data to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The PIT count is also used to gather information that allows local service providers to target services to meet the specific needs of the homeless in our communities.

The PIT count, which asked people where they slept the night of January 30, 2015, included both sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals and families. The PIT count was able to document 638 homeless persons, of which 178 were considered to be chronically homeless. HUD defines chronic homelessness as “an unaccompanied adult homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either continuously been homeless for a year or more or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.” Among the 638 persons surveyed, 56 percent reported having a disabling condition. Also among the 638 were 40 families with 55 children. Veterans made up for 10 percent of those surveyed. Data obtained through the Lee County Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and PIT count found that during the course of the year, there are an estimated 2,816 homeless individuals within Lee County.

Housing and service programs for the homeless are provided in part through Continuum of Care funds from HUD. On January 26, 2015, The 2014 Continuum of Care funding announcements were made. Lee County submitted funding requests to sustain 11 programs in the County, which are operated by the Lee County Department of Human Services, SalusCare, CASL/ Renaissance Manor, and The Salvation Army. The total awarded amount was \$2,061,821.

The Lee County Homeless Coalition would like to extend a special thank-you to the volunteers that assisted with this year's homeless census.

Homeless Service Day and Veterans Stand Down, January 31, 2015

Stand Down is a military term describing soldiers taking care of other soldiers in a safe, secure place. The goal of this event is to provide services which may assist in breaking the cycle of homelessness and encourage hope, vision, and health. Once again, this year's event was held at the City of Palms Park in Fort Myers. We served 535 people at the Stand Down. Sixty two were Veterans. We also had 475 volunteers participating in the event. There were over 40 agencies and community groups providing services. A Health and Comfort grant was received from Disabled Veterans National Foundation. It consisted of 23 pallets of goods to benefit Veterans. Local providers assisted with services such as clothing, mental health referrals, substance abuse referrals, immunizations and health screenings, employment, housing services, Veterans benefits, Social Security, spiritual counseling, haircuts, and transportation. Participants received back packs, resource books, hygiene kits, bus passes, tarps, blankets, flash lights, food bags, and army surplus items. Hot meals were also provided. Participants were offered flu, pneumonia, and tetanus shots. Disc-jockey, Domingo Valladres, provided entertainment. All participants were asked to complete a survey for the Annual Census Blitz. The success of this event was due to the wonderful collaboration of agencies and volunteers who came together to help the community.



Homeless Service Day and Veterans Stand Down, January 2015

Summer Blessing Bags

On June 2 the Community Awareness & Education Task Force assembled over 70 hygiene bags that included specific items for summer weather elements such as sunscreen, insect repellent, rain ponchos and chap stick. Donations were provided by Lee County Electric Cooperative, Next Level Church, and private donors. Each bag also contained a bus pass and resource guide. Outreach workers distributed the bags to those living on the streets of Lee County.

Advocacy and Education

The Lee County Homeless Coalition was able to participate in 81 activities that promoted awareness and education of homeless needs in our area. We continued with our Awareness Campaign which included Public Service Announcements that aired on local television and radio stations.

The Lee County Pocket Guide to Emergency Assistance (Green Book) was updated several times and printed twice this year. The booklet is provided to those who are in need of services. In order to save cost on printing, the Coalition designed a "Homeless Survival Guide" which is a one page document that lists many of the agencies that provide service to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It is a smaller version of the Green Book. It is placed on the website and is available to be copied.

The Coalition provides referral information and helps those in need make connections that could help them avoid homelessness. This year the Coalition was able to assist 454 individuals by referring them to services.

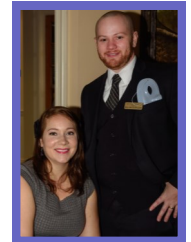
Over 950 bus passes were provided to the community. First, during the Homeless Service Day and Stand Down, and afterwards to our member agencies to assist their clients needing transportation for employment or obtaining social services.

The Coalition advocated for homeless needs during the 2015 Legislative Session. We participated at the Lee County Legislative Delegation Meeting. Being on the agenda allowed us to share our priorities that work toward ending homelessness and request increase support for our Continuum of Care. We kept abreast of the issues and sent out action alerts when necessary. We participated in weekly conference calls with Adams St. Advocates, a governmental and business development consulting firm that represents the Florida Coalition for the Homelessness. They assist us in establishing our priorities and advocating for them. Phone calls and letters were sent to our Legislatures in support of homeless funding and services. Our efforts paid off and the Legislatures restored \$2 million in the Coalition Staffing grant for the 28 Continuums of Care. The Challenge Grant was not only approved at \$3.8 million for the 28 Continuums of Care but is now recurring. This means there will be challenge grant funding every year! Challenge Grant funding is used by the local Lead Agency Continuums of Care to meet emergency needs of the homeless and at risk individuals and families. Challenge Grants provide for innovative local solutions to end homelessness and bridge the gap by ensuring that emergency shelter, meals, food, clothing, and other critical local needs are addressed to serve the most vulnerable population in each Continuum of Care throughout the State. This is a competitive grant and our CoC does need to apply for the funding.

The Lee County Homeless Coalition is funded in part through contracts from Lee County Department of Human Services and the State of Florida Department of Children and Families. The Coalition also receives private donations as well as those received through fundraising and membership dues. Over 500 volunteers assisted the Coalition this year. If you are interested in our financial reports, we are required to submit to an audit each year. The audit can be found on our website.



WE LOVE OUR
VOLUNTEERS



To learn more about the
Lee County Homeless Coalition,
please visit our website at
www.leehomeless.org.



LEE COUNTY HOMELESS COALITION

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Veterans Stand Down

Donation Information



Homeless Service Day

☐

Please accept this general donation
to be used where needed.

☐

\$35

☐

\$75

☐

\$125

☐

\$250

☐

\$500

☐

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My donation is in memory of:

_____ (name),

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Payment Enclosed Please Charge my _____ VISA _____ MasterCard

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How did you hear about us? _____

Donate online through PayPal at: **www.leehomeless.org**

LCHC is funded by Florida Dept. of Children & Families, Lee County Dept. of Human Services and your thoughtful and generous contributions.



Donations are tax-deductible. LCHC is a 501c3 non-profit organization.

239.322.6600

Many thanks for your support and kindness!