



**COMMUNITY HOMELESS  
OUTREACH CENTER**  
of Lancaster County

*A Cost-effective*

*Solution to a Pressing*

*Community Need*

*Tax-deductible monetary  
contributions can be sent to:*

Community Homeless  
Outreach Center  
c/o Tabor Community Services  
P.O. Box 1676  
Lancaster, PA 17608-1676

*Community Homeless  
Outreach Center Location:*  
210 S. Prince St., Lancaster

## BACKGROUND

*The chronically  
homeless make  
up 10 percent  
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resources.*

For many years, Lancaster County has had a well-established but strained network of emergency and transitional shelters for the homeless. Currently, there are three emergency overnight shelters, all in Lancaster City, and 17 transitional shelters, located in both the city and the county. The emergency shelters provide 133 beds for people who might otherwise be forced to live “on the street,” while transitional shelters offer 531 beds for people who are moving toward permanent housing.

Despite this shelter network, a significant number of people on any given day are living on the street for reasons that may include shelters being filled to capacity, behavioral issues, substance abuse, mental illness or an aversion to the shelter environment.

Although exact numbers are difficult to ascertain, the Winter Shelter Program, in which Lancaster houses of worship provide emergency overnight shelter, served 168 homeless individuals during the four months the program was in operation in 2006-2007.

A large portion of this street population consists of the chronically homeless who suffer long periods of homelessness and often cycle through many programs and services. Transitionally homeless people, on the other hand, typically have suffered a personal or financial setback and are in the homeless system for only a brief period, until they are able to get back on their feet. National statistics show that the chronically homeless make up 10 percent of the total homeless population, yet they consume 50 percent of the resources available to the homeless. Local evidence suggests that these numbers are generally applicable to Lancaster County as well.

## THE NEED

Although Lancaster County’s homeless shelters provide invaluable services to the homeless population and the community as a whole, there remains a pressing need to address those who are chronically homeless. These individuals use a disproportionate share of resources, yet they are difficult to reach with services that will help them improve their situations.

To address this issue, the Interagency Council for the Homeless (ICH) in 2006 appointed a task group to identify how to best meet the needs of the chronically homeless. The group found that Lancaster is fortunate in that its street population has not reached the point where a significant number of people are living in tent cities and literally sleeping on sidewalks. However, the task group also noted that the key to preventing the street population from growing — and to using scarce homelessness resources more effectively — is to reach out to these individuals and start them on a path to a more stable future.

## THE SOLUTION

The ICH Task Group recommended the creation of a daytime drop-in center as the first step toward engaging the street homeless. From this recommendation, the Community Homeless Outreach Center was born.

The Center provides a single point of entry for the chronically homeless to start along a path toward permanent housing and stable lives. Its mission is to meet the basic needs of the chronically homeless in a safe, supportive, minimally intrusive environment, while also identifying opportunities to connect members of this population with appropriate services and agencies in Lancaster County. It will accomplish its mission by helping individuals access services, such as health care, veterans services and mental health programs, as a means to move from homelessness to self sufficiency. It also offers showers, bathrooms, laundry facilities, so the homeless can take care of basic hygienic needs.

While the primary mission of the Center is to help the homeless, it offers other community benefits as well. Individuals seeking a place to simply get off the street during the day can use the Center rather than the public library, restaurants, shops, lobbies and other public spaces. It also will serve as a central referral location during the Winter Shelter Program; it will build an effective, broad-based volunteer base; partner with local institutions of higher learning as a site for internships and practicum experiences; and offer groups outside of Lancaster City an opportunity to participate in a meaningful way in addressing the county's homelessness problem.

## THE PARTNERSHIP

To effectively use available resources and avoid the more costly path of creating a new non-profit organization, the Community Homeless Outreach Center is organized and operated by existing entities. The Interagency Council for the Homeless has designed the Center's structure and established goals and operating principles; Water Street Rescue Mission provides the location and facilities maintenance; and Tabor Community Services provides the 501(c)3 designation and operational support.

The operation of the center is guided by an independent Steering Committee, which is responsible for strategic planning, establishing an annual budget, raising money, setting policy, hiring the Center's director, and organizing volunteers. Initially, the Center is being staffed by the director, volunteers from the community, and, as needed, representatives from service agencies.

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## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since the need for the Center was identified, much has been accomplished to bring it to fruition, including:

*The Center is a true community partnership that makes efficient use of existing resources.*

- A 17-member Steering Committee has been established, consisting of representatives from business, government, non-profit service providers, academia, and the faith community.
- A cooperative agreement has been established between the Steering Committee, Tabor Community Services and the Water Street Rescue Mission.
- A first-year annual operating budget of \$104,000 has been established, and more than \$40,000 in funding and commitments has been raised.
- The director position has been advertised and candidates have been interviewed, with a hiring decision expected by the end of October 2007.
- The Center location at 210 S. Prince Street is being renovated and furniture is being purchased.
- Operating rules have been adopted.
- An opening date has been set for November 15, 2007.

## LONG-TERM GOALS

As the Center becomes an established point-of-entry for homeless services in Lancaster County, it will continue to grow as necessary to fulfill its mission. A second paid staff position is anticipated as usage and funding allows. Also, it is anticipated that the Center will play a key role in establishing a more-complete picture of the homelessness problem in Lancaster County, through the gathering of demographic information from its clients and entering this information into a county-wide homelessness tracking system. The confidentiality of individual clients will always be protected.

Since the goal of the Center is to help the chronically homeless achieve greater stability in their lives, the ideal outcome will be for individual users to cycle through the Center on their way to permanent housing. So although the volume of usage may increase in the short-term as the chronically homeless population becomes comfortable with the Center, over the long term the volume should stabilize, barring economic and social factors that could increase the overall homeless population. At all times, the Steering Committee will continue to look for opportunities — through partnerships and innovative new initiatives — to strengthen the effectiveness of the Center and reduce homelessness in Lancaster County.

*A collaborative program of the Interagency Council for the Homeless,  
Tabor Community Services and Water Street Rescue Mission*