
Montgomery County

Zero: 2016

Update on Veterans Homelessness

Presented by

Montgomery County Continuum of Care

September 2016

Montgomery County Zero: 2016 – Update on Veterans Homelessness

Fiscal Year 2017 Plan - September 2016

I. Background

Montgomery County achieved functional zero for Veterans experiencing homelessness as of the end of December 2015. The County’s effort has been recognized by both the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and the Zero: 2016 campaign. Zero: 2016 is a national effort of 71 communities across the Country who have committed to ending Veterans homelessness by December 2015 and chronic homelessness by December 2017. Led by Community Solutions, Zero: 2016 supports participating communities in optimizing local resources, tracking progress against monthly housing goals, and accelerating the spread of proven strategies.

Montgomery County’s Zero: 2016 Initiative builds upon the successful 100,000 Homes Campaign. Montgomery County’s Zero: 2016 Plan for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 was developed with a primary focus on the rapid exit of Veterans from homelessness to permanent, sustainable housing. The following plan was the result of collaborative discussions between Department Health and Human Services (DHHS) and key stakeholders including family and single adult shelter providers, Veterans groups, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) providers and others. This group reviewed the current homeless Continuum of Care (CoC) to determine what resources – federal, state and local – and strategies were needed to address Veterans homelessness. These strategies required the redeployment of existing resources and the addition of new resources to reduce the length of stay in homelessness for Veterans. The focus on ending Veteran homelessness in 2015 was an extension of a system-wide embrace of the Housing First Model and on-going prioritization of Veterans for housing.

II. Status on Goals

The work on Veterans homelessness in the County in 2016 continues to be based on the use of the “By-Name-List” which compiles information on all persons experiencing homelessness and have been identified as Veterans in the County. The Veterans List is updated multiple times each week to record new persons who have been identified, any change in status for persons already on the list, and all planned or achieved housing placements.

As of September 1, 2016, 20 formerly homeless Veterans have been housed from the List during the course of the current year as shown on the chart below:

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)			Rapid Re-housing		Self-Resolving	2016 TOTAL TO DATE
Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH)	Mont County Coalition for the Homeless (Operation Homecoming)	Other PSH	SSVF	Bethesda Cares Veteran Rapid Rehousing Prog. (VRRP)	Self-Resolving	
2	7	1	1	5	4	20

Average Time for Placement

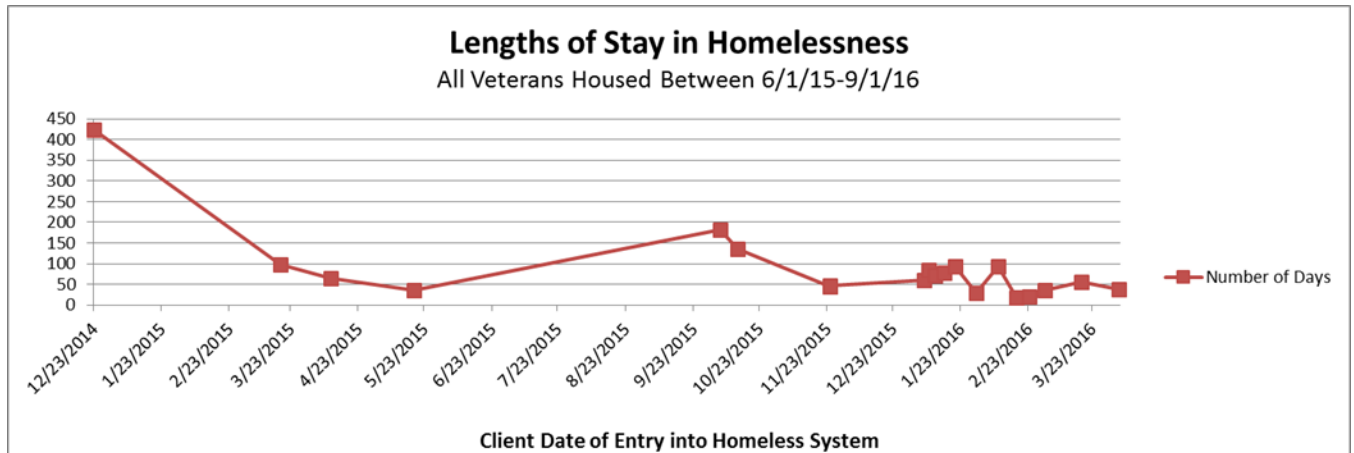


Table 1. Length of Stay Homelessness

As shown in Table 1, the average length from date of identification to date of housing for the Veterans housed so far in 2016 has been 86 days and the median is 66 days. Additionally, 17 of the 20 have been housed in 100 days or less. Since the Zero: 2016 effort began last year, the average length of stay has consistently decreased as the individuals who had been homeless for years are housed.

Tracking New Veterans, Placement Rate and Number Currently on the By-Name-List

There are currently seven Veterans (five individuals and two families) remaining on the By-Name List who have not yet been housed as of September 1.

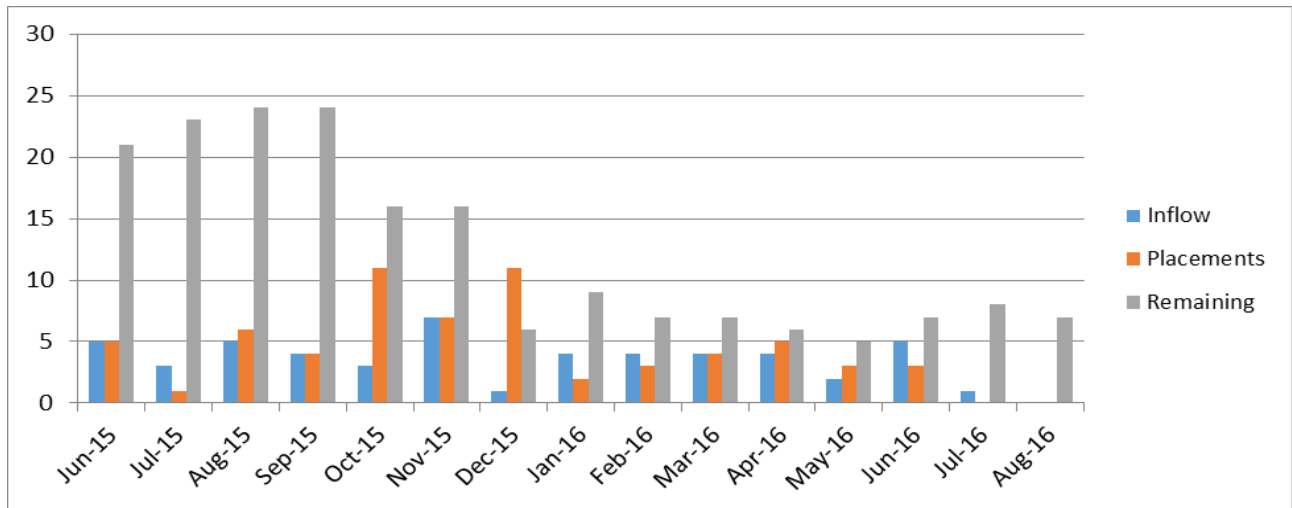


Table 2. New Veterans, Placement Rate, and the Number Remaining to be Housed from June 2015 through August 2016

Table 2 shows that as of September 1, a total of 24 Veterans have been added to the By-Name List during 2016. Based on the trend of recent years, the number of Veterans becoming newly homeless in Montgomery County during 2016 was estimated to be 40-45, so the current inflow number is on target for this point in the year.

Montgomery County is currently operating slightly over the ‘functional zero’ level target of no more than six Veterans awaiting housing placement, with seven Veterans currently on the By-Name-List. The number of monthly housing placements fell over the summer months as some key resources were slow in coming on line. This has since been resolved and the number of Veterans remaining on the By-Name-List should drop back to 6 or below in September and October.

III. New Housing Resources

As part of Montgomery County’s FY17 Budget, an appropriation in the amount of \$150,000 was approved to provide permanent supportive housing to homeless Veterans in the County. The County’s FY17 Budget has funded the expansion of the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless (MCCH) Operation Homecoming program providing housing and supportive services for a minimum of four Veterans. This expansion is in the final stages of the contracting process, and the housing placements are expected to be available before the end of September.

This expansion of the existing Veterans program is intended to supplement existing Federal resources that already been committed to Veterans homelessness in the County. Existing resources include the Federal Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program (VASH) vouchers. An expansion of this program will include 12 additional VASH vouchers for use in the County. There was a delay in getting these vouchers connected with the Veterans identified for VASH placements, but this has been resolved. Currently, there are seven veterans on the on the By-Name-List awaiting a housing placement of which four are being processed for VASH.

IV. Challenges to Sustaining Functional Zero

The Zero:2016 team continues to manage the By-Name-List on a daily basis and meets bi-weekly with all providers to review all open cases, make housing referrals, and discuss any program issues. In order to maintain the functional zero level, average number of permanent housing units needs to meet or exceed the number of Veterans becoming newly homelessness on a monthly basis. There are several on-going challenges that will impact sustainability.

1. There are a small number of clients who have consistently rejected offers of housing, despite intensive outreach efforts. The experience of the past 18 months of the Zero:2016 campaign has shown that on-going and persistent engagement can result in an eventual permanent housing placement, although this can take years. The emphasis will need to remain on having VA, County staff, and providers all working collaboratively to create trusting relationships with the hardest-to-engage Veteran clients. When a previously disengaged Veteran expresses an interest in housing, the County will make every effort to house this individual as quickly as possible.

2. The limited availability of affordable housing in the County for persons on a fixed income will continue to impact Veterans who are in the time-limited rapid-rehousing programs. For those formerly homeless Veterans who do not need long-term supportive services but cannot transition to paying market rents at the end of the rental subsidy, there is a gap in available housing options. The rapid-rehousing providers (Bethesda Cares for the County-funded program, and the SSVF providers for the VA-funded program) are working on a case-by-case basis to identify alternative housing options, but this will remain a challenge in the current environment.
3. The staff working on the permanent supportive housing programs (MCCH for the County-funded program, and the VA for the VASH tenants) have identified Veterans whose service needs exceed what is possible in the current program configurations. These situations have created issues with the stability of the client's housing. Program staff are exploring how to increase the intensity of service by offering expanded services in-house or brokering services with other providers. This remains a struggle as resources are limited.

V. Conclusion

Montgomery County's successful strategies to achieve functional zero for Veterans experiencing homelessness included identifying specific targets for both the number of placements needed as well as types of housing required, development of a comprehensive By-Name-List of all Veterans experiencing homelessness, and prioritization of veterans for available housing. Close collaboration with the Veterans Administration helped shorten the length of time for eligibility determination. Additionally, local commitment of funding to create additional housing options was critical to our success. The CoC thrives to achieve the vision of making homelessness a rare, brief, and non-recurring event for Veterans in Montgomery County.

Last Update: 9/15/2016