

Self-Sufficiency and Responsibility Initiative

The SELF-SUFFICIENCY aspect of the plan is an effort to provide the critical services needed to help homeless persons move from the streets to financial independence:

- SHELTER FOR MEN

The City will build a new downtown shelter designed to draw "hard-to-reach" homeless people who live "on the streets" into services. An operator will be selected through an RFP process. The shelter will be housed with a day resource center and a health clinic. The shelter will have 100 beds for men and is expected to be completed in July of 2003.

- DAY RESOURCE CENTER

This component of the new facility will provide centralized intake and assessment, referral, and direct access to services that people need in order to transition out of homelessness (job training and placement, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, case management, adult education, life-skills training, child care) and services to meet people's basic needs (showers, laundry, telephone, mail). The anticipated date of completion is July of 2003. In 2000, the day resource center served 3,500 unduplicated clients.

- HEALTH CARE CLINIC

The clinic provides acute and preventive health care for people in homeless situations. The clinic is currently housed inside the Salvation Army. The new facility will house a larger health clinic with more services. The anticipated date of completion is July of 2003.

- EXPANDED SHELTER FOR HOMELESS WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The new SafePlace site opened in December of 2000. The number of shelter beds for women and children increased from 80 at the old site to 100 at the new site.

- The new Austin Shelter for Women and Children became operational in November 2001. It provides emergency shelter to single adult women and to women and their dependent children. In response to an RFP that was issued, the Salvation Army was selected to be the operator of the shelter. Some of the services that are offered at the shelter include case management, job training, and GED and ESL classes.

- TRANSITIONAL HOUSING FOR HOMELESS WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The new SafePlace site opened in December of 2000, adding 14 units of transitional housing to their existing 83 beds of transitional housing.

The City had hoped to add 54 beds of transitional housing at the former SafePlace site, but Travis County commissioners did not accept the proposal.

- PERMANENT AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Initiative recommended 20 units of Single Room Occupancy (SRO) housing for homeless single adults. SRO housing is affordable rental housing with shared kitchen facilities and/or shared bath facilities. The City published a request for proposals in 2000, but no organization responded to the request. Recently, Assistant City Manager Betty Dunkerley met with local service providers to discuss publishing another request for proposals to create SRO housing.

- SERVICES TO HELP PERSONS BECOME SELF-SUFFICIENT

In addition to services to be provided through the proposed Resource Center, the Plan recommends expanded substance abuse detoxification and treatment to be purchased from service providers in the community. In the fall of 1999, approximately \$368,000 was allocated to the Downtown Austin Community Court for substance abuse treatment for people experiencing homelessness.

The second aspect of the Plan is RESPONSIBILITY. If homeless individuals repeatedly commit public nuisance and criminal offenses, they will be held responsible for their actions. Proposed services to address public safety and quality of life in Austin/Travis County are:

- COMMUNITY COURT

The Community Court is a model that has been used successfully in New York to address problems with repeat Class C Misdemeanor offenders. The goal of the Community Court system is two-fold: to address the root causes of criminal behavior in order to prevent their repeat occurrence, and to provide the community with assurances that offenders will make restitution for their crime. Under this model, the Court has greater authority to refer repeat offenders to assessment and treatment, as an alternative to jail. The Court also requires offenders to make public restitution through community service. Throughout this process, the Court closely supervises offenders to ensure compliance with their sentence, and to evaluate the success of their treatment program.

- UPGRADE OF CLASS C MISDEMEANOR OFFENSES

The Plan proposed that Austin/Travis County investigate legislation that might have allowed Courts to upgrade repeat Class C misdemeanor offenders to a Class B status. The Texas Legislature authorized legislation that allows Courts to upgrade repeat Class C misdemeanor offenses to a Class B status on the fourth conviction within a 24-month period. This new law allows judges to treat habitual offenders more severely and increase the length of their jail sentences, creating greater opportunity to intervene with the individuals and draw them into needed services.

- IMPROVEMENTS TO DAY LABOR PROGRAM

Concurrent with expanded homeless services in the downtown area, the City addressed concerns about existing programs serving this population. The Day Labor program had been an important resource for homeless and low-income persons seeking employment but also a frequent source of citizen complaints. These complaints primarily focused on the "spill over" of day laborers along Second Street. To address these issues, the City formed a workgroup to develop recommendations for improving the Day Labor program and to identify possible alternative sites. The Day Labor program was moved to a site near 51st Street and Interstate Highway 35 in August of 1999 and operational guidelines were implemented. The search for a second Day Labor site is ongoing.

- CHANGES TO DOWNTOWN ZONING / ECONOMIC INCENTIVES

A committee was formed to evaluate possible zoning changes to ensure the compatibility of land uses adjacent to the proposed ARCH. In addition, the committee considered the need for economic incentives in order to ensure the continued growth and development of property near the proposed shelter and resource center. The committee completed its report in 1999.

- OVERSIGHT COUNCIL/COORDINATING COUNCIL

An Oversight Council and a Coordinating Council were formed to develop and oversee the operations of proposed new homeless programs, particularly those in the downtown area. The purpose of these Councils is to ensure ongoing community input and oversight into services in order to mitigate any negative impact on surrounding neighborhoods. The two Councils are comprised of representatives from neighborhood associations, downtown businesses, churches, homeless service providers, homeless/formerly homeless people, and members of the faith community.