



# Strategic Plan, 2006-2010

## Executive Summary

Dear Community Member,

The idea that homelessness is something that can be ended began a few years ago, based on a framework that if we can prevent homelessness in the first place, and shorten the experience of it when it does occur, we can ultimately end homelessness as we know it. The federal government has embraced the goal of ending chronic homelessness in ten years in the United States. Chronic homelessness refers to being on the street or in a shelter for a year or longer, or repeatedly over the course of a few years.

Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and over 200 other cities and counties have adopted or begun work on a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness in their communities. In suburban Cook County, homeless advocates have also begun the process of laying out a strategy to end homelessness.

The main planning body for homeless efforts in the area changed its name in mid-2004 from the “Task Force on Homelessness” to the Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County. When the Task Force created its strategic plan for 2003-2005, the group explored the idea of what it would take to end homelessness in our county. In the three years that followed, the Task Force achieved several of its goals identified in that strategic plan, including incorporating as a nonprofit organization, hiring a full-time executive director and staff, and changing its name to reflect its new purpose.

On November 1, 2005, the Alliance convened a strategic planning workshop to set out its goals for the coming five years and identify strategies we believe can ultimately end homelessness in our suburban communities.

### Highlights

*Ending homelessness takes a community-wide effort.* A main theme of the strategic planning workshop was how to engage additional stakeholders in the effort. Not only do we need public sector involvement and nonprofit services, but we also need businesses, faith-based communities and others at the table—“people of goodwill” who can take up the cause and expand our efforts community-wide.

*Ending homelessness is going to take systems work and advocacy.* Homelessness is an economic problem and a housing problem, but it is also touches on a variety of other systems, such as employment supports, education, mental health, substance abuse, corrections, and so forth. Workshop participants identified particular systems of care and resources that will be necessary to impact homelessness. Building the political will to end homelessness will be a crucial component.

*Supportive housing—affordable housing with services built-in—is a proven strategy to break the cycle of homelessness.* Specifically, research has shown permanent supportive housing to be particularly effective for people who experience chronic homelessness. The Alliance has identified the need for more permanent supportive housing for two groups in particular—chronically homeless individuals, and families impacted by disability. Additional housing of this type can be created through new projects, as funding allows, and through conversion of some transitional programs to permanent housing.

*Good planning begins with good data.* Cook County has conducted annual homeless counts for fourteen years, and the Alliance is now working on a homeless management information system to improve our data collection efforts. Good data can show program effectiveness. It can also demonstrate system gaps and help garner support for the most effective prevention and interventions.

*Current homeless programs are accountable for results.* After ten years of helping people out of homelessness, suburban Cook County’s homeless programs are committed to using their collective expertise and resources to maximum benefit. We need to hold each other accountable for preventing and ending homelessness, promoting residential stability, maximizing self-sufficiency, and increasing skills and income.

### **What’s Next**

In keeping with the theme, “It takes a community-wide effort,” the Alliance is committed to engaging the stakeholders to create a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness for our county. The strategies outlined in this document will provide a starting point for this plan. *The way to bring this strategic plan for the Alliance to the next level is to engage the community in an effort to adopt a ten-year plan.* We encourage community members to review these strategies and join with us in creating a ten-year plan.

### **About the Alliance**

The Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County coordinates the Cook County Continuum of Care (IL-511) which encompasses homeless assistance efforts throughout all of Cook County, outside of the cities of Chicago and Evanston.

The Alliance brings together a range of services and housing options for homeless people. It convenes a variety of stakeholders to set priorities, collect data, rank project applications, and measure outcomes. It coordinates the annual application to HUD for homeless assistance grants and brings approximately \$5 million per year to support over 40 homeless programs in the region.

To learn more about the effort to end homelessness in our county, contact the Alliance at 708/345-4035, or write to [Jennifer@suburbancook.org](mailto:Jennifer@suburbancook.org).

Sincerely,

*Jennifer Hill*

**Jennifer Hill**  
Executive Director

*Kenneth Schmitt*

**Kenneth Schmitt**  
Chair, Board of Directors

*Susan Shimon*

**Susan Shimon**  
Chair, Continuum of Care Development Committee

#### **Strategic Plan Focus Areas**

- **Engaging Stakeholders:** A Plan to End Homelessness needs to be a Community Plan, with leadership and buy-in from a variety of constituency groups, including the public sector, elected officials, faith-based communities, nonprofit groups, business leaders, and others. The Alliance to End Homelessness is committed to engaging the stakeholders who need to be involved in creating and implementing a community plan to end homelessness.
- **Chronic Homelessness:** Many people who lose their housing may only be faced with homelessness once or twice, or for a short period of time, while others find themselves in the “revolving door” of homelessness. Research shows that supportive housing—affordable housing with services built in—is highly effective in breaking this cycle of chronic homelessness.
- **Family Homelessness:** A family faced with homelessness will experience a challenge very different from that of an individual homeless person. A child’s schooling may be disrupted; children and parents may face separation; the emergency shelter options are more limited. While many homeless families in suburban Cook County are served in transitional housing, we struggle to help families afford housing and find employment over the long term.
- **Systems Prevention:** Ending homelessness will require preventing it in the first place. Other public systems (corrections, mental health, etc.) need better housing options to offer to people leaving an institutional setting so that they do not become homeless upon release. In addition, mainstream resources (food stamps and other benefits) need to reach all poor people, not just poor people with addresses.
- **Outcome Evaluation:** Suburban Cook County’s homeless providers have worked together for ten years to help people out of homelessness. To make best use of our collective resources, we need to hold each other accountable for preventing and ending homelessness, promoting residential stability, maximizing self-sufficiency, and increasing skills and income.
- **Advocacy:** Ending homelessness requires the creative use of public and private resources, cutting-edge housing and services strategies, and greater system accountability. Building the political will to end homelessness is crucial to making a community plan successful in ending homelessness.

## Appendix: Members, Board of Directors for the Alliance, 2005-2006

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**Jennifer C. Hill (Staff Liaison)<sup>1</sup>**

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*Executive Director, South Suburban PADS*

**Sandy Williams**

*Development Coordinator,  
Journeys from PADS to HOPE*

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<sup>1</sup> Non-voting member