

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness owes its success to all of its members, who have devoted their time and energy to improving our world by accepting the challenge of ending homelessness in Mercer County. Thank you for making a difference.

The Alliance would like to extend a special thank you to Dennis Micai, Alliance chairman and director of the Mercer County Board of Social Services. We would also like to thank all members of the Alliance steering committee, who have made the Alliance and the development of the ten-year plan possible. We extend our sincere thanks to the following people:

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## MERCER ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS

### CONTENTS

02	.....	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
04	.....	CALL TO ACTION
05	.....	HISTORY OF THE ALLIANCE
06	.....	THE HOMELESS OF MERCER COUNTY
10	.....	THE COSTS OF HOMELESSNESS
13	.....	PLAN OVERVIEW
15	.....	HOUSING AND ENDING THE CONCENTRATION OF POVERTY
17	.....	SAFETY NET
18	.....	INCOME
21	.....	DISCHARGE PLANNING
21	.....	PUBLIC AWARENESS
24	.....	MERCER ALLIANCE SUPPORTERS

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness (**The Alliance**) is a collaboration of government agencies, non-profit organizations, elected officials, corporations, congregations, community groups, and individuals who have banded together to create comprehensive strategies to end homelessness in our community within ten years.

Our mission is to ensure that every resident of Mercer County has access to permanent, affordable, and safe housing. Our first objective is to prevent homelessness, and then ultimately to end it. The Alliance aims to make every Mercer resident aware of the societal and economic impact that poverty and homelessness have on our community and asks that each of us becomes involved in resolving the issues that create it.

***On any given day in Mercer County, over 900 people experience homelessness and almost 50% of them are children.***

According to the study conducted by the Homeless Resource Advisory Committee (HRAC) of the Mercer County Human Services Advisory Council, over the course of a year, more than 3,000 men, women, and children receive services in the homeless system. In fact, Trenton has the second highest rate of family homelessness in the nation.

Equally disturbing is a 2003 report

***Trenton has the second highest rate of family homelessness in the nation.***

by the National Low Income Housing Coalition that cites New Jersey as one of the least affordable states in the country for the last four years. The report goes on to note that no one earning minimum wage can afford housing in Mercer County without working almost 22 hours a day, seven days a week to rent a two-bedroom apartment.

For a healthy community, simply providing shelter for the homeless is not enough. Many more families are on the edge - a paycheck or a family crisis away from homelessness. Those living doubled up, in unhealthy conditions, and/or paying 50-75% of income for rent are at constant risk. Most research shows that a family of four needs twice the federal poverty level, or \$36,000, to be economically self-sufficient. Yet 42% of New Jersey households earn less than \$30,000 (2003 Consolidated Plan of New Jersey Department of Community Affairs).

For the past two decades, government and private agencies have dedicated a massive amount of time, energy, and monetary resources to alleviate the problem. While agencies manage homelessness by providing food, clothing, and shelter to homeless families and singles, and by eventually moving them into stable housing, they have not been able to prevent homelessness or remedy the systemic issues which

are the root cause. In fact, the incidence of homelessness and the number of people affected by it continues to

***Most research shows that a family of four needs twice the federal poverty level or \$36,000 to be economically self-sufficient. Yet 42% of New Jersey households earn less than \$30,000.***

escalate relentlessly.

Housing in Mercer County is extraordinarily expensive. The National Low Income Housing Coalition's 2003 "Out of Reach Report" states the average rent is \$973 a month for a two-bedroom apartment. Housing in the \$500-\$700 range tends to be severely substandard, in dangerous neighborhoods, with problems of infestation, leaking roofs, lead paint, and asbestos.

Housing in Mercer County is expensive, because it is so scarce. Since the early 1990's, affordable housing stock in Trenton has decreased by more than 6% a year. While some new affordable housing has been built in Mercer County, it is primarily for those earning more than \$40,000. Those earning less than \$30,000 represent 42% of households and have few, if any, decent housing options. They often resort to living with others, enduring dangerous or unsafe housing

conditions, or spending more than 70% of their disposable income on housing costs. Most risk imminent homelessness.

In April 2003, over 100 community leaders came together with a mission and passionate commitment to end homelessness in Mercer County. In the following six months, the Alliance developed a ten-year plan that delineates our step-by-step approach. This plan was created with the input and expertise of a wide range of participating agencies and has been endorsed by Alliance members.

The causes of homelessness must be addressed both systemically and tactically. We must transition from managing homelessness to developing and implementing strategies that will end it. Changes need to be made across the entire community, focusing not just on services to the homeless, but on the factors that contribute to the problem. Working together we will prevent and end homelessness in a strategic way.



**You can close your eyes to homelessness in Mercer County or you can open your heart.**



Over the years, thousands of families have been placed in single motel rooms on Rte. 1 or Rte. 130.

## CALL TO ACTION

### Mercer County can end homelessness

With engaged community stakeholders, government partners, service providers, and, indeed, all citizens, we are taking action to ensure that every person in Mercer County has access to safe, decent, affordable housing and support services.

### Mercer County must end homelessness

The challenges are many. Mercer County is one of the wealthiest counties in one of the wealthiest states in the nation, yet Trenton has the second highest rate of family homelessness in America, according to the 2002 "Report of the US Conference of Mayors." The city has lost 6% of its housing while the county as a whole has less than a 1% vacancy rate.

It is especially difficult for low-income, working people in the county to locate and secure housing. Here, as all over the country, people are discharged from institutions and prisons into homelessness. Children are living in motels and shelters with their families. We will no longer tolerate these conditions.

### Mercer County will end homelessness

How will we end homelessness? Steps on three fronts must be taken: "closing the front door," "opening the back door," and "building the foundation." Closing the front door means preventing families from becoming homeless by building supports across the community. We must open the back door by quickly moving families out of homelessness and into appropriate

housing. Finally, building a foundation means developing support systems for low-income and homeless people allowing them to earn a decent wage for their labor, access treatment options for any addictions and/or health problems, and obtain truly decent housing that is affordable and can be maintained within their incomes.

Our objective is to prevent homelessness, and ultimately end it.

## HISTORY OF THE ALLIANCE

In the summer of 2002, area representatives attended a national conference sponsored by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, and featuring the HUD Interagency Council on the Homeless. The movement to end homelessness began in the late 1990's, when social service agencies realized that despite their best efforts and billions of dollars yearly, and even with a booming economy and an historically low rate of unemployment, homelessness was increasing. Working in conjunction with the federal government, the agencies made a commitment to address and combat the root causes of the problem, and developed strategies that have begun to have a positive impact.

In fact, over fifty jurisdictions nationwide have developed concrete plans to end homelessness, but there was no plan for any jurisdiction in New Jersey. Our area representatives resolved to develop a program in our area.

On April 16, 2003, the United Way of Greater Mercer County, the John Watson Institute of Public Policy at

Thomas Edison State College, the New Jersey Alliance for the Homeless, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, and HomeFront organized a gathering of more than 100 people. Represented were all sectors of the community - corporations and businesses, state, county, and local government, congregations, and non-profit organizations - and the Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness was created.

Recognizing the need to address both systemic and tactical issues, five working, action committees were formed to focus on:

- Availability of safe and affordable housing and ending the concentrations of poverty in communities.
- Establishing a seamless safety net.
- Developing and implementing income strategies.
- Implementing discharge planning.
- Raising public awareness of the issues.

Since then each committee has met on a monthly basis, reporting back to a steering committee that disseminates the results to the other committees. Specific strategies have been developed with clearly defined action steps. All participants, now numbering 167, were re-convened October 1, 2003, to ratify the draft plan and to implement these steps. The document that resulted from this meeting outlines a ten-year plan with specific and measurable goals. It should be noted that the plan is a living document, which will be updated and revised as necessary during a full meeting of the Alliance each year.

# THE HOMELESS OF MERCER COUNTY

*To fully understand the problem and the steps needed to remedy it, we must recognize that there are three types of homeless people - transitional, episodic, and chronic.*

## THE TRANSITIONAL HOMELESS

These are people who spend a relatively short time in the homeless system. They become homeless or are at risk of losing their housing, receive the assistance they need, and then exit the system, returning infrequently, if at all.

*The majority of Mercer County's homeless population falls into this category and is comprised primarily of families with children.*

Generally, they have experienced a housing crisis, but do not have significant life issues; in fact, most are working full-time jobs. The root cause of homelessness among this group is the gap between their income and the cost of housing in Mercer County. Because this is the largest homeless population, we must take a

closer look at who they are and why they become homeless. As previously mentioned in a recent study by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Trenton has one of the highest rates of family homelessness in the nation. In addition to those who are actually homeless, another large number of families are living in overcrowded or substandard housing.

It is alarming that children comprise almost 50% of Mercer's homeless population. Some children live with their parents in motels or shelters, on the streets, in cars, or abandoned buildings. Many more live with friends of other family members. Approximately 20% of homeless children do not attend school regularly. They often are transported in the "homeless kids" buses and face ridicule by their peers.

Over the last decade, poverty increased 17.1% in Mercer County. The face of homelessness has become one of young mothers, low-wage workers, and children. Our homeless are in elementary school or in diapers.



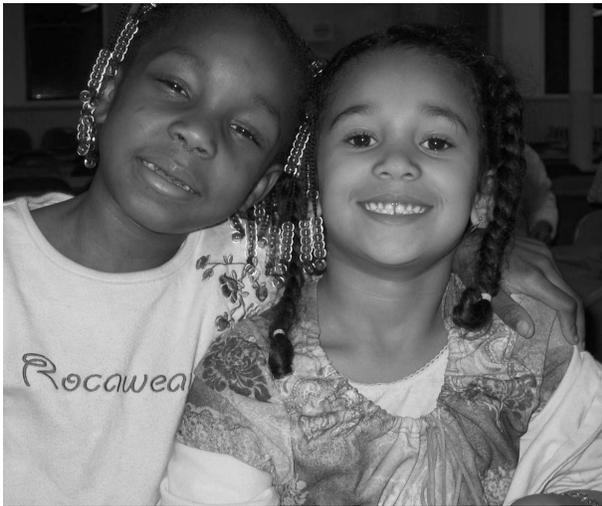
Young girl jumps rope in parking lot of a Rte. 1 motel in Lawrenceville.

“The dream of growing up and taking care of your family is not attainable to many working people in this country. I can’t see how any fair-minded civic leader can turn his back on this issue.

We have to change the face of homelessness and let people know we’re dealing with children.”

-Dennis Micai

Chairman, The Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness  
Executive Director, Mercer County Board of Social Service



**Transitional Housing Residents**

***HomeFront has found that the average age of a homeless person in Mercer County is seven years.***

The victims of this crisis are the working poor. Full-time workers earning \$8/hour net \$1160 per month. If they spend \$973 of their income on an average two-bedroom apartment, they are left with only \$187 a month for other basic costs, such as utilities, food, transportation, and childcare. Despite working long hours at such jobs as janitors, home health and nursing aides, sales clerks, childcare workers, restaurant employees, gardeners, and school bus drivers, they are unable to make ends meet. The result is often homelessness.

For transitional families and singles already homeless, the need is to move them into permanent housing as quickly as possible, while linking them with appropriate support services. This is called "housing first."

Whenever possible, families and singles at risk must be kept in their homes. Homeless prevention and housing first are key to housing stability for this population.

For certain subpopulations, such as families fleeing domestic violence, those who are HIV positive, youth aging out of foster care, and the seriously mentally ill, transitional housing is the necessary alternative until the head of household becomes stable. After that, the family can be placed in permanent housing, with appropriate support services.

## **THE EPISODIC HOMELESS**

At least 20% of Mercer County's homeless population is characterized as episodic homeless. This population uses the shelter system repeatedly, and on a regular basis. They include those who move from overcrowded, living conditions with family members to motels and shelters, or sleep in their cars or abandoned buildings. They also cycle from hospitals and prisons. They are primarily single males or young women with children who have never been able to establish their own homes. They tend to be younger than the chronic homeless and are often involved with substance abuse. Emergency prevention capacity and good discharge planning are essential in order to reduce the enormous costs incurred when this group interacts with other systems, particularly shelters, prisons, and hospitals.

A flexible strategy is necessary in order to address their housing

needs, as well as their problems with substance abuse or chronic depression. Many will need training in independent living skills, extended case management, and connection to support services. Since no one can focus on becoming, and remaining, independent if consumed by a sense of hopelessness or addiction, effective treatment for these problems is crucial.

## **THE CHRONIC HOMELESS**

Nationally, the chronic homeless represent 10% of the homeless population, but utilize 50% of the resources. They are overwhelmingly single and primarily male, with a very high incidence of substance abuse. Many are veterans.

Most of the chronic homeless are unable to work because of a debilitating physical or mental disability. Even with income from public benefits, they require long-term subsidies for housing and social services to remain adequately housed. They need permanent, supportive housing with appropriate easily available services, including sufficient addiction treatment

*This group is most visible to the public and has created the stereotype of the homeless.*



**The Chronically Homeless**

# THE COSTS OF HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is extremely expensive for the community. Government entities spend approximately \$75 per night, or \$2281 a month, to place one family in an area low-budget motel or homeless shelter. The Mercer County Board of Social Services alone spends more than \$8-\$12 million per year for emergency services. In addition to the direct cost of providing shelter, a wide range of indirect expenses is incurred. Our tax dollars could be much better spent enriching the community if a safety net was in place to prevent the extraordinary costs of emergency shelter.

Homelessness costs employers millions of dollars annually. Employees without stable housing often have high rates of absenteeism and poor work performance. The physical and psychological stress - daily struggle for survival- created by homelessness makes it difficult for them to focus on their work. It also precludes them from obtaining work-related training or education to upgrade their skills.

Homelessness vastly increases the cost of health care. The physical and emotional effects of homelessness have a very real impact, especially on children. For example:

- 47% of homeless children have problems with depression, anxiety, or withdrawal from their surroundings, as opposed to 18% of children with homes.
- Homeless children are four times more likely to suffer from asthma.
- Costs for emergency room treatment

for asthma compared to regular preventive care and medication are staggering.

- Nearly 70% of homeless infants and toddlers suffer from chronic illnesses.
- Homeless children are twice as likely to experience hunger.

Homelessness also takes a severe toll on the health of adults. Because of inadequate primary health care, undiagnosed medical conditions frequently reach acute levels before they are treated.

- Without a primary care physician, adults utilize more expensive hospital emergency room care.
- 59% of homeless families visit hospital emergency rooms at least once a year.
- Homeless people spend, on average, four days longer as inpatients than non-homeless people. The average cost of this increase is \$2,414 per hospitalization.

The cost of incarceration (a bed in a New Jersey state prison averages \$28,000 per year) is strongly linked to homelessness; that is, people who are, or have been homeless, are more likely to spend time in prison.

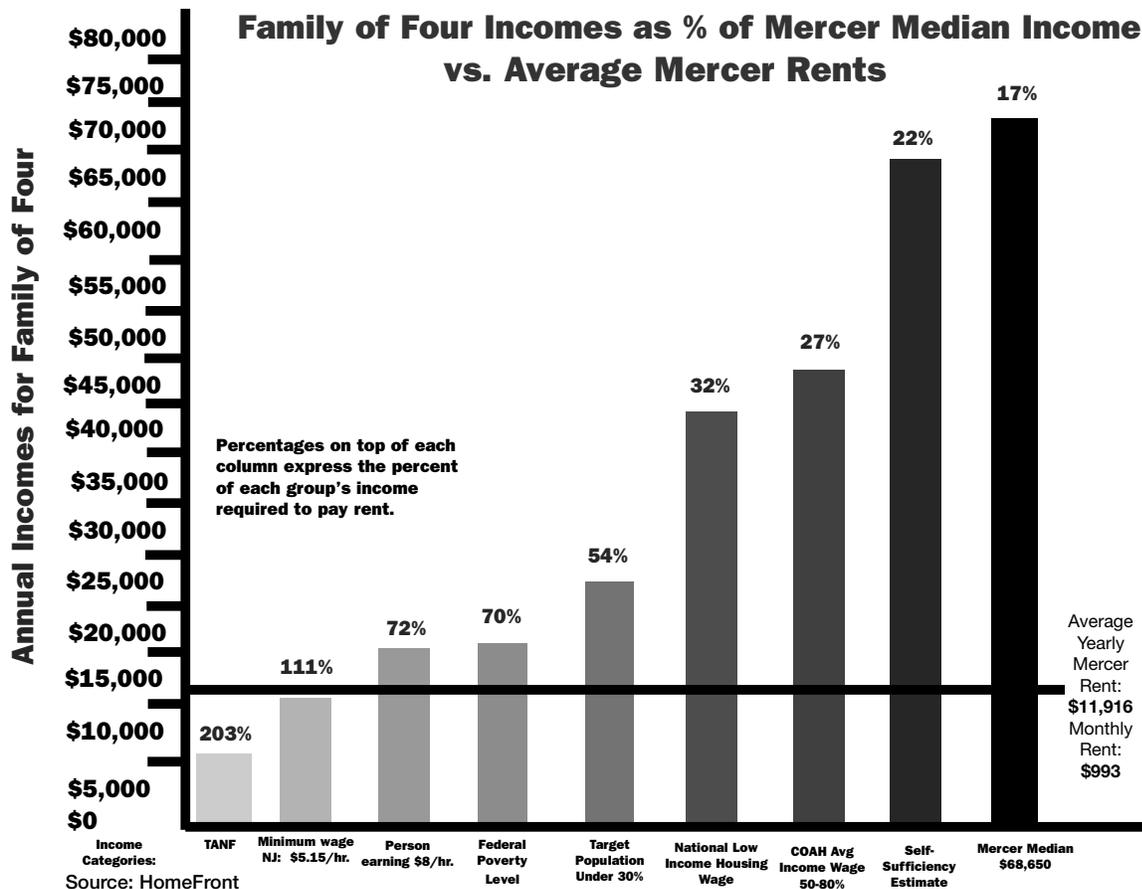
Children who experience homelessness, and the stresses associated with it, often manifest inappropriate anger and aggression later in life. This is especially true of school-age, homeless children who are twice as likely to demonstrate delinquent behaviors as non-homeless children.

While the above are mostly measurable costs, some cannot be calculated. Homeless children often demonstrate academic problems, because they tend to change schools regularly. These disruptions and lack of oversight by teachers cause many homeless children to remain two grade levels behind their peers; thus, their potential for academic success and future productivity is greatly diminished.

Homelessness is both the primary cause and the end result of a wide range of broader social issues. People become homeless due to lack of available affordable housing, unemployment, low wages, high rents, drug abuse, mental and physical disabilities, illness, and criminal activity, yet the trauma of homelessness leads to higher rates of the same ills.

**While ending homelessness will not eliminate poverty, crime, or substance abuse, we do know that no individual or family can resolve personal issues without a stable place to live.**

We also know that ending homelessness now will prevent future generations from experiencing its debilitating and degrading effects, namely emotional and physical problems and diminished potential.





Data Entry Keyer:

**\$24,520 Annually**



EMT/Healthcare Support Worker:

**\$34,000 Annually**



Landscaper:

**\$23,805 Annually**



Custodian:

**\$29,920 Annually**

**A WAGE EARNER MUST MAKE  
\$38,000 TO AFFORD  
HOUSING IN MERCER COUNTY.**

# PLAN OVERVIEW

The Alliance's plan to end homelessness is unique among its national counterparts in that it is a living document, which will be modified and expanded each year in order to address new needs and goals.

The current plan consists of our ultimate goal, three long-term goals, and five short-term goals with defined action steps. These are listed below:

**A. Ultimate Goal:**

To build and strengthen our community by ensuring that within ten years every resident of Mercer County has permanent, affordable, and safe housing and the ability to maintain it.

**B. Long-Term Goals:**

1. Prevent homelessness or "*closing the front door*" by providing a financial safety net to protect those who have housing but are in danger of losing it. Equally necessary is ensuring that government institutions do not discharge people into homelessness.
2. Housing First or "*opening the back door*" by coordinating provider systems so that people who become homeless move into safe, affordable, and permanent housing as soon as possible.
3. "*Building a foundation*" by actively working with other groups to promote truly affordable housing, a decent wage, and/or increasing income and work supports, and ensuring case management, treatment options and access to necessary government and private services.

**C. Short-term goals and actions:** The goals are divided into five focus areas or committees.

1. Making safe and affordable housing available and ending the concentrations of poverty in communities.
2. Establishing a seamless safety net.
3. Developing and implementing income strategies.
4. Implementing discharge planning.
5. Raising public awareness of the issues.

Each committee will be responsible for the implementation and oversight of its respective goals, which will be determined at the start of each new year. Details of each committee's goals, the steps they will take to achieve them, and the persons responsible for oversight, are as follows.

“What if you had nowhere to go after work tonight? No place to fix dinner; no place to call home? What if your children had nowhere to do their homework? No safe place to stay? No decent place to sleep? Without a place to live, the rest of our daily routines would quickly disintegrate.

Try maintaining a neat appearance for work when your clothes are stashed in a plastic bag instead of a closet. Try to buy food, clothes or medicine when half your paycheck is eaten up by rent.”

-Diane Sterner

Executive Director of the Housing and Development Community Network  
The Trenton Times (June 7, 2003)

# HOUSING AND ENDING THE CONCENTRATION OF POVERTY

## 1. GOAL:

Address barriers that are preventing people from accessing current available housing.

- Hold workshops for landlords about the laws against discrimination. Task Lead: Phil Freeman, partnering with Division of Civil Rights
- Hold workshops for tenants detailing their rights and responsibilities. Partner with Legal Services and determine other agencies that could provide an effective workshop series. Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marino, Legal Services, Mercer Ombudsman
- Create education program for Mercer nonprofit provider agencies regarding the state pilot project for Section 8 homeownership in Mercer County. Task Lead: Arnold Cohen, Milt Sharp, Isles
- Collaborate to prevent homelessness by foreclosure and predatory lending. Prepare educational materials and seek legal volunteers to offer bankruptcy clinics. Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marino, New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, Legal Services

## 2. GOAL:

Make ending homelessness a priority when housing plans are being developed by local, county, or state governments.

- Open communications with existing public housing authorities, work

to create a specific eligibility priority for the homeless, propose alternative plans for housing as appropriate and at annual hearings. Task Lead: Rhonda Coe, Alliance members

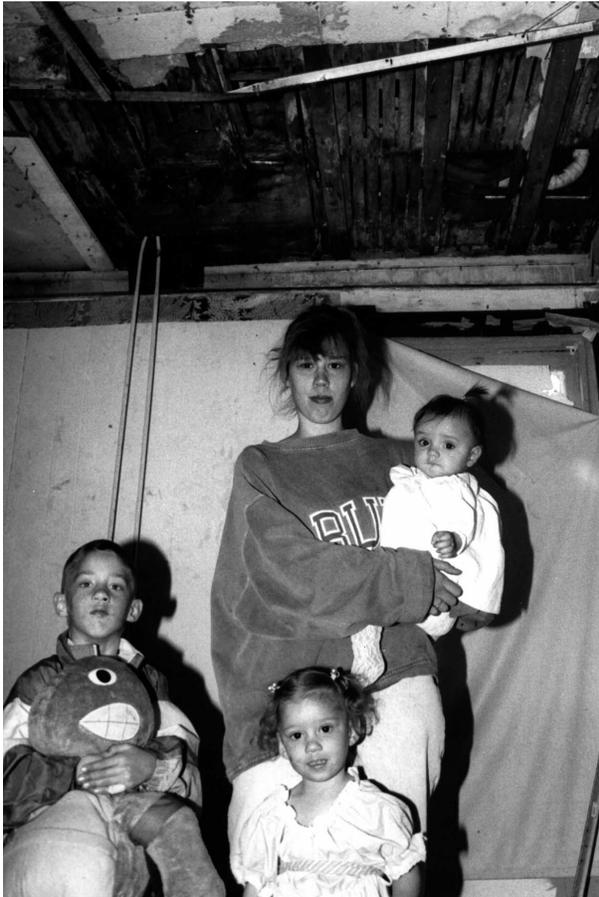
- Expand communications with the Mercer County Housing Office, seek specific priorities in HOME and Community Development Grant Block funds for housing or services to the homeless, seek to develop joint plans with Mercer County and the Trenton/Mercer Continuum of Care, work to reinstitute the county security deposit fund to prevent homelessness. Task Lead: Rhonda Coe, Mary Ellen Marino, Connie Mercer
- Work with the Department of Community Affairs and Hamilton Public Housing Authority to streamline the Section 8 program in areas such as provision of security deposits, speeding up inspections and check processing, seeking exceptions to fair market rent caps in high-rent areas, and using annualized incomes for establishing tenant contributions where there is history of job instability. Task Lead: Arnold Cohen, Mary Ellen Marino

## 3. GOAL:

Coordinate advocacy on state and federal legislation.

- Collaborate with coalition partners to support the state funded rental assistance bill. Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marino, Arnold Cohen, Alliance leaders, AntiPoverty Network, Regional Equity Coalition, New Jersey Catholic Conference, Lutheran Office of Government Ministries

- Research and provide action alerts to Alliance participants on proposed COAH rules and other current rules and regulations regarding housing and homeless related issues. Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marino, Arnold Cohen
- Prepare and disseminate action alerts for Alliance participants on key legislative issues relating to its mission. Take public positions on key issues as determined by steering committee. Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marino, Arnold Cohen
- Create database of people and information that can be utilized by the Alliance advocacy network. Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marino, Denise Higgins and Victoria Cabanlet



Family living in deteriorated housing in Trenton.

- Disseminate information regarding issues pertaining to the Alliance and its mission. Encourage Alliance members to respond to the issues by taking measures on a state, federal, or local level. Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marino, Arnold Cohen

#### 4. GOAL:

Set a reasonable goal for the minimum number of housing units needed to end homelessness in Mercer County.

- Review existing data on number of units that meet current criteria for decent, safe rental housing. Task Lead: Cleophis Roper, Rhonda Coe, Arnold Cohen, Mathematica Policy Research
- Examine census data and other reliable sources on the existing need for housing units in Mercer. The need will be determined by the percentages of: uninhabitable or deteriorated units, overcrowding, owners versus renters, and those who spend more than 50% of income on housing. Mathematica Policy Research and the Homeless Resources Advisory Council (HRAC) will make a count of the homeless. Task Lead: Cleophis Roper, Rhonda Coe, Arnold Cohen, Mathematica Policy Research
- Determine the shortfall of housing units, factoring in job growth and workforce needs. Task Lead: Housing Committee of The Alliance
- Examine the data on jobs and local needs, determine the need in each Mercer County municipality, meet with municipal leaders to make them aware of the needs in their community. Task Lead: Housing Committee of Alliance

**5. GOAL:**

Collaborate with others to end the concentration of poverty.

- Determine areas where concentrations of poverty exist. Task Lead: Housing Committee of the Alliance
- Coordinate activities with Regional Equity Coalition to create more balanced communities. Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marino, Bruce Davidson
- Involve mayors and local community volunteers in each Mercer municipality. Task Lead: Denise Higgins, Mary Tanner, Joe O'Neill

Task Lead: Larry Hatton, Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)

- Follow up to ensure that eligible organizations and agencies apply for funds and, when requested, connect them with appropriate technical assistance. Task Lead: Larry Hatton, CSH, Joyce Campbell
- Advocate for increases in funding or against any cuts that effect the goal of ending homelessness. Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marino, Dennis Micai, Alliance members

## **SAFETY NET**

**1. GOAL:**

Maximize funding to Trenton/Mercer Continuum of Care, other resources.

- Continue close collaboration with Trenton/Mercer Continuum of Care where City of Trenton and Mercer County applied jointly for HUD Continuum of Care funding. Support inclusion of Hamilton Township in next year's application. Task Lead: Cleophis Roper, Marie Gladney, Alliance members
- Continue to support regular meetings and broad involvement of all stakeholders in the Trenton/Mercer Continuum of Care application process. Task Lead: Cleophis Roper, Joyce Campbell
- Maximize funding opportunities for organizations and agencies in Mercer County. Monitor the availability of federal and other funding sources and inform agencies and organizations eligible for these funds

**2. GOAL:**

Educate providers and clients about existing services in Mercer County.

- Inventory existing housing and mainstream support services in Mercer County for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Task Lead: Joyce Campbell, Larry Hatton
- Create website of support services that can be accessed by organizations, agencies, and clients. Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marino, Alliance staff, Tom Sullivan
- Implement joint training of providers about use of the website and all support services currently available to clients. Task Lead: Dennis Micai, Joyce Campbell
- Update and publicize "First Call for Help Directory." Task Lead: Craig Lafferty, United Way of Greater Mercer County
- Update and publicize "Finding and Acquiring Permanent Housing" booklet. Task Lead: HomeFront staff

- Create common intake form for all service providers in Mercer County. Task Lead: Marie Gladney, Joyce Campbell, CEAS, website staff

### 3. GOAL:

- Make case management, financial assistance in maintaining and securing permanent housing, and supportive services available to all persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Seek additional county funding for prevention and supportive services. Task Lead: Connie Mercer, Mary Ellen Marino
- Advocate for additional funding from federal and state sources. Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marino, Alliance members
- Involve consumers/clients in designing effective and user-friendly case management and supportive services. Task Lead: Joyce Campbell, Safety Net Committee

## INCOME

### 1. GOAL:

- Work closely with the Mercer County Workforce Investment Board to help consolidate and publicize One Stop and all other workforce development efforts sponsored by the WIB.
- Monitor the One Stop Centers for accessibility, hours, suitable location, and outreach to needy communities. Ensure that they are well-publicized and have the tools and skilled staff necessary to help clients advance in their careers. Task Lead: Income Subcommittee

### 2. GOAL:

Work to have welfare grants to clients based on 40% of the Standard of Need (the state developed standard for cost of living in New Jersey.)

- Enlist support and advocacy from coalitions, including County Welfare Directors' Association, Anti-Poverty Network, Princeton Justice Project, Think First, New Jersey Alliance for the Homeless and labor organizations, such as Service Employees International Union and Mercer Central Labor Council. Task Lead: Dennis Micai, Mary Ellen Marino
- Advocate for, and achieve, the above goal by the end of state budget period. Task Lead: Dennis Micai, members of the Alliance

### 3. GOAL:

Increase the minimum wage as a step towards a living wage.

- Enlist legislative and advocacy partners to raise state level, in incremental steps, to \$9.75 an hour as recently proposed by the Mercer County Board of Chosen Freeholders. For example, by raising it \$.58 a year for 8 years or \$.92 a year for five years. This wage would be required for private sector employers employing 50 or more employees. Task Lead: Bruce Davidson, Mary Ellen Marino, Alliance members
- Work with corporate sponsors to expand HomeFront's car donation program. Create a vehicle repair program expanding on the "Road to Success" program available at Mercer County Board of Social Services. Task Lead: Bruce

Davidson, Connie Mercer, Dennis Micai

- Work with state and local Legal Services, private attorneys and credit counseling agencies to establish a referral system for legal assistance to restore suspended drivers' licenses, based on experience of Legal Services of Northern Virginia. See also National Employment Law Project at [www.nelp.org](http://www.nelp.org). Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marino, Mary Tanner, Dennis Micai
- Work with coalition partners, New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, New Jersey Immigration Policy Network, New Jersey Catholic Conference, and others to support drivers' licenses for immigrants. Task Lead: Marlene Lao Collins, Bruce Davidson, Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

#### 4. GOAL:

Remove barriers to employment caused by lack of drivers' licenses and auto insurance.

- Advocate for expansion of Senate Bill, No. 867 (sponsored by Senator Shirley K. Turner) "concerning restricted use of licenses" which would permit driving to and from work, school, or job, to also include those seeking a job or in job training. Task Lead: Coalition partners include the NJ Institute for Social Justice, AntiPoverty Network, SEIU. Task Lead: Bruce Davidson, Mary Tanner, Mary Ellen Marino
- Work with Mercer Vicinage to implement a program that would consolidate traffic and parking fines throughout the county, and develop a realistic repayment program based on the driver's



Can you imagine working two jobs and still not being able to afford housing? She can.



Young boy enjoying a happy moment with a high school student who is tutoring him.

income to prevent license suspensions. Task Lead: Judith Irizarry, Mercer Ombudsman, Municipal Court Administrator

- Work with the Governor's office to promote the new "Dollar a Day" insurance program and inform eligible drivers. Task Lead: Mary Tanner, Mary Ellen Marino, Dennis Micai
- 5. **GOAL:**  
Support New Jersey unemployment insurance improvements.
- Work with labor, safety net, and other Alliance partners to promote awareness of unemployment increases and seek to make them permanent in FY 2006. Task Lead: Bruce Davidson, Alliance members
- 6. **GOAL:**  
Support increase in the amount of New Jersey Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and better utilization of federal and state EITC programs.
- Work with Alliance partners to align New Jersey with federal

EITC income level and promote annual cost of living increase. Task Lead: Income Committee

- Improve on the current EITC utilization by those eligible. Task Lead: Income Committee
- 7. **GOAL:**  
Seek continuation and expansion of work supports for low-wage workers, including subsidized childcare, family healthcare, and transportation assistance.
- Advocate for funding increases and educate clients to obtain all existing benefits. Task Lead: Income Committee
- 8. **GOAL:**  
Ensure that low-wage workers and the homeless are aware of free educational opportunities which would enable them to obtain jobs paying a living wage.
- Advocate for adult literacy programs, tuition benefits and educate clients to obtain all existing benefits. Task Lead: Income Committee

# DISCHARGE PLANNING

## 1. GOAL:

Create an integrated discharge system to ensure that all clients released from public and private facilities are released with a risk and needs based discharge plan and a place to live.

- Enlist the involvement of key players such as juvenile justice, probation, parole, Divisions of Youth and Family Services and Mental Health, Department of Corrections, hospitals, county probation and jail, substance abuse/treatment programs through Department of Health. Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marino, John Monahan
- Review and study the current discharge processes for all facilities. Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marion, John Monahan
- Create an integrated discharge system by obtaining memoranda of understanding among agencies about the discharge process. Task Lead: Mary Ellen Marino, John Monahan

## 2. GOAL:

Amend the rule that currently excludes people convicted of intent to distribute drugs from receiving key services.

- Gain support of legislators to include graduated sanctions and/or credit for participating in approved programs. Task Lead: (collaboration with New Jersey Division of Mental Health, Human Services Advisory Committee) John Monahan

# PUBLIC AWARENESS

## 1. GOAL:

Create a successful campaign strategy to convince people that ending homelessness is critical to the economic health of business, taxpayers and the community.

- Research public awareness campaigns in other states/counties/municipalities that have developed plans to end homelessness. Task Lead: Public Awareness Committee
- Begin development of a public awareness campaign by the Alliance. Task Lead: Tom Sullivan, Public Awareness Subcommittee
- Secure community/corporate partners to help the Alliance implement the campaign. Partners will provide resources and time. Resources: media, newspapers, special events, creative programs, website, clearinghouse. Task Lead: Tom Sullivan, Alliance members
- Document Alliance accomplishments using measures of effectiveness. Task Lead: Tom Sullivan, Alliance members

## 2. GOAL:

Create a credible foundation for Alliance's efforts to end homelessness.

- "Brand" the Mercer Alliance. Create a logo, official name, and materials. Task Lead: Tom Sullivan, Princeton Partners, Alliance members



**LOGO DESIGN**

- Have Alliance plan professionally produced for distribution and hold a professionally produced press conference to release plan to the public. Task Lead: Dennis Micai, HomeFront
- Continue to be sure that the Mercer Alliance plan remains in concert with New Jersey State Policy Academy and other plans nationwide by maintaining good relations with HUD Interagency Council on Homelessness, and continue to coordinate with Trenton/Mercer Continuum of Care, the Anti-Poverty Network, the Regional Equity Coalition, the New Jersey Alliance for the Homeless, and the National Alliance to End Homelessness. Task Lead: Pam McCrory, Dennis Micai, Mary Ellen Marino

**3. GOAL:**

Create support for The Alliance plan.

- Seek endorsement from key elected officials at the local, county, and state levels. Task Lead: Connie Mercer, Dennis Micai, Alliance members
- Seek endorsements from business associations such as the Mercer County Chamber of Commerce, Princeton Area Chamber of Commerce, and Mercer Trenton African American Chamber of Commerce, New Jersey Business and Industry Association. Task Lead: Tom Sullivan, Connie Mercer, Dennis Micai, Alliance members

- Seek endorsements from grass roots, faith-based organizations, community groups, and organizations with similar goals. Task Lead: Connie Mercer, Dennis Micai, Tom Sullivan, and Alliance members
- Seek endorsements from chief executive officers of area companies. Task Lead: Craig Lafferty

**MERCER ALLIANCE  
TO END HOMELESSNESS**

FACTS

**There is a Crisis in Mercer County**

On any given day there are 900 homeless people in Mercer County.

Mercer County has one of the highest rates of family homelessness in the nation.

Over 3,000 men, women and children receive services from the homeless system.

Children comprise of almost 50% of Mercer's homeless population.

The average age of a homeless person in Mercer County is 7.

The vacancy rate of 1% in Mercer County is officially defined as a crisis.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition cites New Jersey as one of the least affordable states in the country for the past 4 years.

To afford a one bedroom apartment on minimum wage in Mercer County, you would have to work 22 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Over the past decade, poverty increased 17.1% in Mercer County.

40% of Mercer County households earn less than \$30,000 per year.

Mercer County spends approximately \$75/night, or \$2,251 a month to place one family in an area low-budget motel or homeless shelter.

Homeless people spend an average of four days longer as in-patients than people with homes, at an average cost of \$7,414 per hospitalization.

A: 1880 Princeton Ave. Lawrenceville, NJ 08848
P: 609-989-3417
F: 609-989-9423

**FACT SHEET**

- Create and maintain a central database of information relating to homelessness in Mercer County in order to measure progress and results. Task Lead: Craig Lafferty, Mary Ellen Marino, with assistance from Mathematica Policy Research, Human Resources Advisory Council, Trenton/Mercer Continuum of Care, New Jersey Department of Human Services and Community Affairs.
- Conduct a yearly census of homeless people in Mercer County. Task Lead: Alliance members and Mathematica Policy Research

“In cities that have planned and acted on their plans to end homelessness, incentives are being reversed so that we are preventing homelessness before it happens, private-public partnerships are developing and growing, and proof that this is working is inspiring new commitment.”

-Nan Roman

National Alliance to End Homelessness

# Mercer Alliance Supporters

- After School Partnership
- Anchor House
- Caliper
- Capital Health Systems: Fuld & Mercer
- Catholic Charities
- The Child Care Coalition
- Child Care Connection of Mercer County
- City of Trenton
- Community Action Service Center
- Corporation for Supportive Housing
- Corzine, US Senator Jon
- Crisis Ministry
- District 6 Parole Office, Mercer County
- Doorway to Hope
- Greater Mercer Transportation Association
- Greater Princeton Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Trenton Behavioral Health
- Greenstein, Assemblywoman Linda
- Gusciora, Assemblyman Reed
- Hamilton Township Housing Authority
- Henry J. Austin Health Care
- Hill Wallack
- HIV Consortium, Mercer County
- Hoffman, Dan, Housing Consultant
- Holt, US Congressman Rush
- HomeFront
- Homeless Prevention Program, NJDCA
- Housing & Community Development Network
- Housing Initiatives of Princeton
- Holt, US Congressman Rush
- Hughes, Brian, Mercer County Executive
- Interfaith Hospitality Network, Mercer County
- Inverso, Senator Peter & Chief of Staff, Steve Cook
- Isles, Inc.
- John Watson Institute for Public Policy
- Junior League of West Windsor
- Lawrence Interfaith Housing
- Lawrence Township
- Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministries
- Mercer County Board of Social Services
- Mercer County Community College
- Mercer County Courts
- Mercer County Division of Mental Health
- Mercer County, Housing Department
- Mercer County Hispanic Association
- Mercer County, Human Services Department
- Mercer County Probation
- Mercer County, Public Safety Department
- Mercer Landlords' Association
- Mercer Street Friends
- Mercer Trenton African American Chamber of Commerce
- New Jersey Alliance for the Homeless
- New Jersey Dept. of Community Affairs
- New Jersey Dept. of Corrections
- New Jersey Dept. of Health and Senior Services
- New Jersey Dept. of Labor
- New Jersey Dept. of Treasury
- New Jersey Div. on Civil Rights
- New Jersey Div. of Mental Health Services
- New Jersey Div. of Youth and Family Services
- New Jersey Housing & Mortgage Finance Agency
- New Jersey Institute for Social Justice
- O'Neill, Joseph P., Princeton Borough Mayor
- Palmer, Douglas, Trenton Mayor
- Pennington Presbyterian Church
- Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Windsor
- Princeton Area Community Foundation
- Princeton Clergy Association
- Princeton Justice Project, Princeton University
- Princeton Partners
- Princeton Regional Human Services Dept.
- Rescue Mission
- Rider University
- Robert Wood Johnson at Hamilton
- The Salvation Army, Trenton
- SERV Centers of New Jersey
- Smith, US Congressman Christopher
- State Employment & Training Commission
- S.T.E.P.S., Trenton/Mercer
- Thomas Edison State College
- Trenton Academy Preschool
- Trenton Board of Education
- Trenton Housing Authority
- Trinity Episcopal Church, Princeton
- Turner, Senator Shirley K.
- Union Industrial Home for Children
- Unitarian Universalist Church, Washington Crossing
- United Parcel Service
- United Progress, Inc.
- United Way of Greater Mercer County
- Watson-Coleman, Assemblywoman Bonnie & Chief of Staff, Jen Godoski
- Womanspace



**MERCER ALLIANCE  
TO END HOMELESSNESS**

**We can. We must. We will.**

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