



Van Buren County

The Plan to End Homelessness
2006 - 2016

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We envision a future

where everyone in Van Buren County

is able to access safe, decent, and affordable housing.

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Van Buren County Advisory Board

Deb Nieboer	Continuum of Care Chair
Jeff Elliott	Community Collaborative Chair
Marc Del Mariani	Department of Human Services Director
John Clement	Community Mental Health Director

Behind every effective Advisory Board there are a number of support individuals bringing fresh perspectives to committee meetings while representing their agency, organization, or municipality. There have also been a number of contributors willing to answer difficult questions at a moment's notice and always giving more than was asked. On behalf of those who will benefit the most, grateful acknowledgement is given to:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH), and numerous other agencies and organizations have begun an unprecedented bipartisan movement (backed by new federal investment) to end homelessness in this country before the year 2016.

Van Buren County joined this movement with a commitment to develop a 10-year plan to end homelessness that will specifically address local issues with local responses. Members of the Housing Continuum of Care Committee and the Human Services Collaborative Council are dedicated to the belief that homelessness is unnecessary, that everyone needs a home and, that through Housing First standards achieved with effective efficient methods, it is possible to *envision a future where everyone in Van Buren County is able to access safe, decent, affordable housing.*



As a primarily rural and agricultural county, the homeless situation and corresponding action plan will differ from plans designed for more populated and metropolitan areas. At first glance, the number of homeless families or individuals in the county would not seem to warrant a high profile, broad-based systematic change; however, individuals and organizations committed to ending homelessness have taken a firm stand that any number of homeless is unacceptable in Van Buren County.

In 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that 12.2% of the Van Buren County population was living at or below poverty level. With only two major population centers, South Haven and Paw Paw, (each located at opposite edges of the county) transportation and access to employment opportunities, educational facilities, health and human service agencies is a costly and difficult endeavor. Among other reasons, the

affordable housing market has suffered due to skyrocketing housing prices in South Haven and other waterfront areas.

Van Buren County's ***mission*** is to address these local issues by striking at their very root with a prevention-based plan that will stop homelessness before it occurs, will incorporate the Housing First standard, will provide more affordable housing options, will further streamline the service delivery system, and will support policies and efforts to improve economic and educational achievement.

The following goals provide an overview of Van Buren County's strategy to achieve the mission and fulfill the vision. While regional issues will be addressed and attended to, committee members often specified "Van Buren County" in the goal statement to ensure a sharp local focus. The final chapter of this plan provides a detailed guide for each goal with objectives and specific action steps designed to move the process forward to eventual success.

Goal Statements

- **Prevent homelessness in Van Buren County.**
- **Provide an adequate supply of safe and affordable housing in all Van Buren County communities.**
- **Optimize coordinated service delivery systems in Van Buren County.**
- **Develop and implement service program responses to meet the needs of a diverse and changing population in Van Buren County.**
- **Reduce poverty and improve the educational and skills capacity of the current and future workforce of Van Buren County.**
- **Improve methods and capacity to collect, assess, and utilize data.**
- **Explore and pursue increased and diverse funding resources for the purpose of improved service provision.**
- **Encourage political leadership on every level to support and promote this 10-year plan to end homelessness in Van Buren County, and ultimately the State of Michigan.**

OVERVIEW OF VAN BUREN COUNTY

More than 1,000 farms add color to the picturesque rural landscape of Van Buren County. Located in the southwest corner of Michigan, Van Buren is a major contributor to the state's important agricultural economy. The county's relatively moderate climate contributes to an abundance of orchards and vineyards – Van Buren ranks first in the production of all berries in the state and is sixth in the country! Van Buren is also ranked second in the state for harvested vegetables and seventh in the state for pre-cut Christmas trees. Related to the agricultural output of the county, food processing is the primary manufacturing activity.¹

Tourists are drawn to the many miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, the numerous inland lakes and rivers, and a world-class wine industry. For recreational and leisurely pursuits there are beautiful beaches and marinas, hiking and cross-country trails, parks for camping, and an abundance of festivals – most of which celebrate the many varieties and rich flavors of home-grown agricultural products.



HISTORIC BEGINNINGS

Settlers from the east coast began making their homes in the southwest Michigan area in the early 1800s. Many of the settlers were from New York and shared a Dutch ancestry with the now well-known Van Buren family who came to America in 1631 from the Netherlands. The territory was approved as a local self-governed county in 1837 and named in honor of Martin Van Buren who became the eighth president of the United States in the same year.

A typical Van Buren County home in those early years would be described as follows:

...built of logs notched at the corners to hold them in place; the crevices were chinked with split basswood and daubed with clay to make the cabin warm and comfortable; the roof was made of oak shakes which were held in place by

¹ MEDC <http://www.michigan.org/medc/miinfo/places/VanBurenCounty/>

weight poles; the floor was of split basswood puncheons several inches in thickness, smoothed slightly on the upper side with an adze or axe. There were three small windows below and one in the gable; the chimney was made of sticks and mud and thickly plastered inside; the fireplace was spacious and wide, admitting of huge logs, in front of which the cooking was done.²

To remember and celebrate the early development of the county, the Van Buren County Historical Society operates a museum that includes three floors of historical items highlighting memorabilia common to turn-of-the century society. The museum building was built in 1884 to serve as the county poorhouse and is now on the state historic register.



Van Buren County Museum-Former Poorhouse

On tours given by the museum curator, visitors can learn how the county offered this house as either short- or long-term shelter for those who had no home and nowhere else to go. All occupants were required to work and contribute to the household – many of the residents chose to work on the attached farm. This was the county's first known assistance program for the homeless.

Population Patterns

Van Buren County currently has just over 76,000 residents living in eighteen townships, four cities, and seven villages. The Village of Paw Paw serves as the county seat and South Haven is the largest city with a population just over 5,000.³ (See map this following section)

The county population increased more than 50% from 1960 to 2000, but has only increased 15% in the last twenty years (66,814 in 1980 to 76,263 in 2000). The greatest increases in population were in the townships on the east side of the county near Paw Paw, Mattawan, and Kalamazoo. Almena Township, one of the townships on the east side, grew from 1,288 in 1960 to 4,226 in 2000 – a 228% increase! For the same period

² http://www.swmidirectory.org/History_of_Van_Buren_County.html

³ U.S. Census Bureau (2000)

of time, Hartford was the only city in Van Buren to record a population increase with a growth rate of 7%; of the seven villages, Mattawan had the greatest increase with a 62% rate of growth.⁴

In contrast to the substantial increases for some, other municipalities had decreases in population. The Village of Breedsville and the cities of Gobles, Bangor and South Haven all recorded a population loss. The City of South Haven experienced the greatest loss with a decrease of over 18 percent.

The population and housing density is predictably more concentrated in the cities and villages; Paw Paw, Hartford, Decatur, Bangor, and South Haven have the greatest density of both population and housing units per square mile of land area. The Village of Paw Paw has the greatest population density with 2,167 per square mile and the greatest housing density with 1,191 housing units per square mile. The least concentrated area is Hamilton Township with only 52 people and 21 housing units per square mile.⁵

In addition to the previously mentioned municipal distribution of the general population, there were also approximately 712 individuals in Van Buren County residing in alternative housing such as nursing homes, correctional, juvenile, and “other” institutions in 2000.

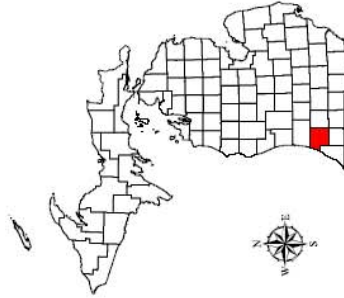
The population distribution by category of race was 87.9% White, 7.4% Hispanic, 5.3% Black or African American, 0.9% Native American, and 0.3% Asian. The population was distributed equally between males and females in the county and the overall median age is 36.6 years. By the 2010 Census, it is estimated that the median age will increase to over 37 years and the Hispanic population will comprise approximately 9% of the total population.

This information and knowledge of many different aspects of the county’s demography provides planners with an understanding of present and future needs.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau (2000)

⁵ Ibid

Van Buren County, Michigan



Van Buren County's Municipalities

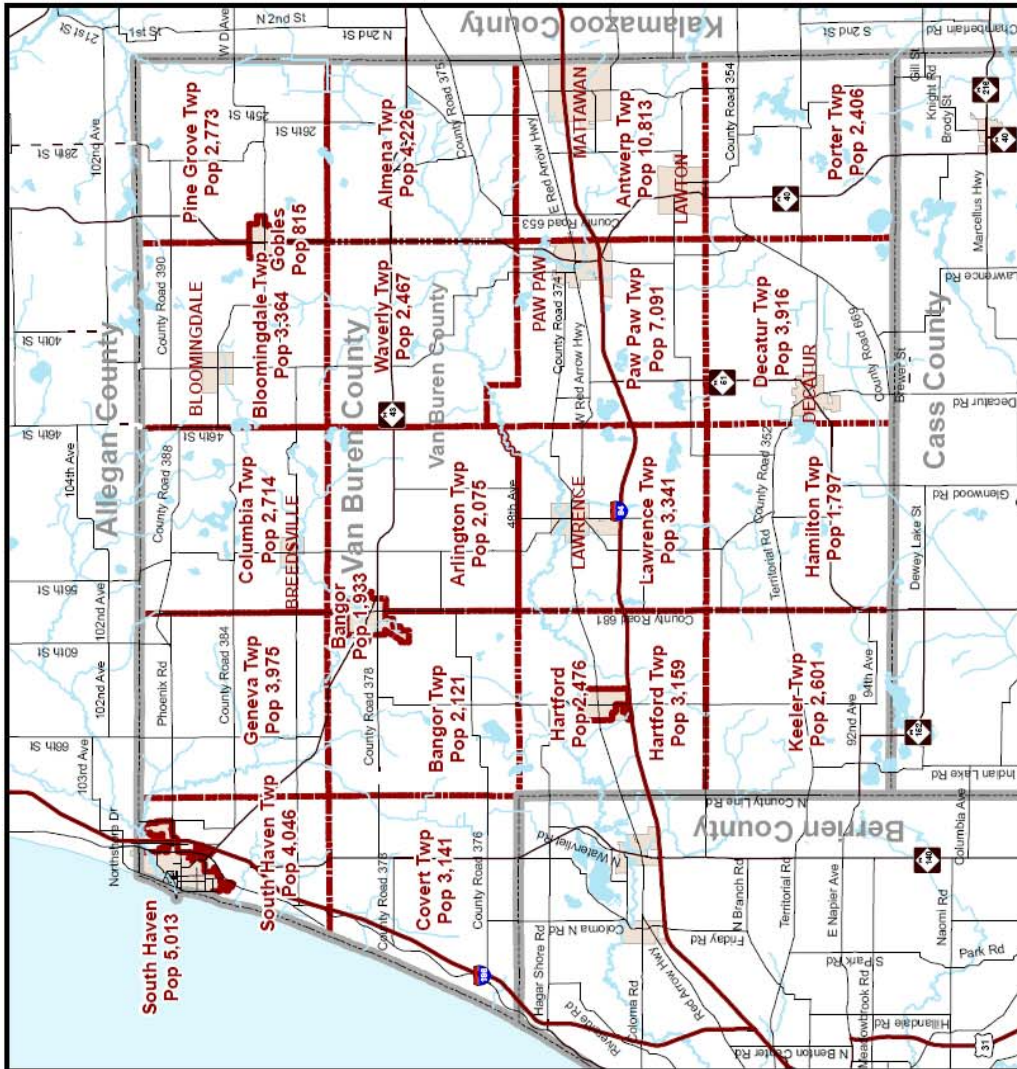
Bloomingdale Township
 Columbia Township
 Covert Township
 Decatur Township
 Geneva Township
 Hamilton Township
 Hartford Township
 Keeler Township
 Lawrence Township
 Paw Paw Township
 Pine Grove Township
 Porter Township
 South Haven Charter Township
 Waverly Township

*Serves as the county seat



County
Minor Civil Division
Population 2000 Census

Map Prepared September 2006 by:
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0 1.25 2.5 5 Miles

Base Map Source: MI Center for Geographic Information, Framework (VGA)
 Data Source: 2000 US Census

Language

There are some segments of the population in Van Buren that speak a language other than English at home (8.9% of the total population) and some that speak only Spanish (7% of the total population).⁶ This may indicate a need for future assessment of communication capabilities and possible improvements to communication methods.

Education and Economy

The percentage of residents with a high school diploma in Van Buren County is similar to that of the nation as a whole; however, only 14.3% have a Bachelor's degree or higher compared with 21.8% in the State of Michigan and 24.4% in the United States. This is an important statistic to consider; the correlation between educational attainment and poverty will be clearly demonstrated in this plan.

The only institute of higher learning in Van Buren County is a branch campus of Lake Michigan College (LMC) in South Haven. LMC is a two-year community college based in Berrien County. The four-year colleges and universities serving Van Buren County are Western Michigan University and Kalamazoo College in Kalamazoo County, and Andrews University in Berrien County.

Van Buren County has eleven public school districts with 17,652 students enrolled in grades K-12. In six of the eleven districts, over half of the students are identified as "economically disadvantaged". Covert Public Schools has the highest percentage of economically disadvantaged students at 89%, and Mattawan Consolidated Schools has the lowest rate with 13%.⁷

LABOR AND INCOME

The ten largest private employers in the county are located either in the Mattawan/Paw Paw area on the east side of the county or in the South Haven/Covert area on the west side. These employers are primarily agricultural-related but there are also plastic or metal equipment manufacturers and utility or retail related businesses.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau (2000)

⁷ From "School Matters" www.schoolmatters.com (2005)

In 2001, the total estimated workforce was 37,775 with 35,525 employed – an unemployment rate of 6%.⁸ In 2004, the unemployment rate rose to 7.4% primarily due to loss of manufacturing jobs. The majority of employment overall is in manufacturing, retail trade, services, and government/government enterprises.⁹

Although the unemployment rate does not seem alarmingly high, there are other factors to consider. Wages are low (as demonstrated by poverty levels) and the opportunity for job advancement is slim because there are not many other jobs available. In the annual “Client Needs Assessment” conducted by the Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency, over 50% of the respondents cited “not enough jobs in the county” as the biggest barrier to employment. Also cited, as second and third most common barriers to employment, were transportation and lack of job skills (respectively).¹⁰

The median household and per capita income of county residents is low compared with all residents in the State of Michigan. Antwerp Township (on the east side of county near Kalamazoo) has the highest median income in Van Buren (\$57,014) and Covert Township (on the west side of county) has the lowest median income (\$22,829).

1999	Van Buren County	Michigan
Median Household Income	\$39,365	\$44,667
Per Capita Income	\$17,878	\$22,168
Persons Below Poverty Level in 1999	11.1%	10.5%
Persons Below Poverty Level in 2003 (Estimated)	12.2%	11.4% ¹¹

The following Van Buren County municipalities are designated “Low and Moderate Income” communities. This designation is determined by the percent of residents reporting an income of 80% or less of the median income of the county. Low equals 50% or less of the median income; Moderate equals 80% or less. *(The number following the municipality is the percentage of residents meeting the criteria for either low or moderate income.)*

⁸ Michigan Employment Service Agency, (2001)

⁹ <http://www.michigan.org/medc/miinfo/places/VanBurenCounty/?section=economy>

¹⁰ SMCAA “Community Needs Survey” (2006)

¹¹ http://www.michigan.gov/documents/1994_to_present_100717_7.xls

Low and Moderate Income Communities in Van Buren County

Arlington Township 54.8%	Columbia Township 53.2%	Gobles City 68.5%
Bangor City 60.7%	Covert Township 64.0%	Hartford City 58.1%
Bangor Township 52.4%	Decatur Township 54.5%	Hartford Township 51.3%
Bloomington Village 53.2%	Decatur Village 61.0%	Lawrence Village 59.2%
Breedsville Village 61.5%	Geneva Township 51.8%	Mattawan Village 68.7%

Compared with the neighboring counties of Cass and Berrien, it is clear that Van Buren County has a much greater number of low/moderate income communities in the southwest Michigan region.¹²

Low and Moderate Income Communities in Berrien and Cass County**Berrien County**

Benton Charter Township 60.5%
Galien Village 51.1%

Cass County

Cassopolis Village 54.3%
Dowagiac City 56.0%
Vandalia Village 55.1%

Housing

There are 33,975 total housing units (56 units per square mile countywide) and an average household size of 2.66 in the county. Of the total housing units, 27,982 are occupied and the countywide median house value is \$94,200. Using a standard formula of median income multiplied by 2.5, the affordable housing price in Van Buren County would be \$98,412 or less. Understanding that the statistics are based on median house value and median income, it can be concluded that approximately half of the occupied housing units are near, or are more than, the affordable housing value.

As seen in the following table, “Home Ownership and Housing Values in Van Buren County,” of the total households in 2000, 20% were renters and 46% of those renters could not afford a two-bedroom rental unit.¹³

¹² A “low-income community” is defined as any population census tract with a poverty rate of at least 20%, or with median family income of up to 80% of the area, or statewide, median.

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau (2000)

Home Ownership and Housing Values in Van Buren County (2000)	
Total Occupied Housing Units in Van Buren County	27,982
Homeowners	
Rate of Ownership (80% of total occupied households)	22,253
Median House Value	\$94,200
Affordable Housing Price (Median Income of \$39,365 x 2.5)	\$98,412 or less
Monthly costs for house with mortgage	\$845
Renters	
Renter Households (20% of total households)	5,729
Median Monthly Rent	\$451
Work hours per week to afford two-bedroom rental (Minimum wage of \$5.15)	91
Estimated percent of renters unable to afford a two-bedroom rental	46%

Transportation

There are many reasons to be concerned about human service transportation. Lack of transportation affects an individual's independence and opportunity. Human service transportation is not just about improving individual lives; it is about improving all facets of the economy, culture, and society that rely on transportation systems to work effectively at the community level. When transportation does not work, the healthcare system, the economy, and the civic culture also cannot work at the highest level possible. Reliable transportation is both a prerequisite for a healthy economy and often the first step toward independence and opportunity for people with low incomes, older adults, and people with disabilities.¹⁴ (See map at the end of this section)

Lack of transportation has been acknowledged as one of the primary barriers to economic and physical health in a number of studies. In 2006, social service recipients in Van Buren County cited lack of transportation as the second highest barrier to employment.¹⁵ ("Not enough jobs" was number one)

The cost of daycare (an average of 11% of income for two-parent families and 37% of income for single-parent families)¹⁶ coupled with the cost of transportation to and from daycare creates an especially difficult barrier for parents working at minimum wage. For those dependent upon public transportation, the outlying locations of many licensed

¹⁴ Grant Proposal for the Center for Regional Excellence Award (Awarded 2006)

¹⁵ SMCAA "Community Needs Assessment" (2006)

¹⁶ NACCRRRA "2006 Child Care in the State of Michigan" (February 2006)

daycare providers creates a spatial disconnect. For those who do not need to rely on public transportation, the situation is also daunting. When the price of fuel doubled in just over one year's time, the trips to and from daycare became an even greater barrier to finding and maintaining employment.

"Childcare is neither inexpensive nor prevalent"

Question 6

Why do we have homelessness here?¹⁷

Transportation is also one of the greatest concerns expressed by the senior population and by those living below poverty levels. Access to transportation affects a person's ability to eat, to get medical treatment, to work, and to socialize. In general, the limitations of a transportation system will impose special burdens not only on the aging population but also on social service and health-care institutions that often have to use grant funding to provide transportation for their clients.¹⁸

Public Transportation – Van Buren Public Transit (VBPT) provides limited demand-response and advance reservation service to the residents of Van Buren County. The transit service facility is located in the City of Bangor and operates fourteen vehicles. Dial-A-Ride, operated by VBPT, provides curb to curb service within the Paw Paw and South Haven areas - Monday through Friday only. Countywide service is offered on a 24-hour call-ahead/reservation basis for travel within the boundaries of Van Buren County. Priority transportation services are offered to contracted agencies for their clients.



Highways – Two major interstates, I-94 and I-196, serve as major transportation routes for the county. Interstate 196 follows the Lake Michigan coastline for north and south bound traffic and Interstate 94 crosses the county south of Hartford and Paw Paw moving traffic east and west. State-owned highways such as M-40, M-43, M-51, and M-140 also serve as transportation routes through the county.

¹⁷ SWMPC Survey (2006)

¹⁸ Van Buren Transit Study (2005)

Other transportation - Although not likely to be used for day-to-day travel, the following transportation methods are available throughout the county.

- The City of Bangor recently renovated a downtown train depot to serve as a stop for Amtrak's Pere Marquette line connecting Grand Rapids and Chicago.
- There are several airports in surrounding cities such as Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Lansing, South Bend, and Chicago
- Some of the cities and villages in the county have sidewalks that can be used to access some employment and service areas. Although many other municipalities in the county have plans to develop non-motorized trails for transportation purposes in the future, there are currently none available to connect residential areas with employment or service areas.

Van Buren County, Michigan

Location of Selected Human Service Providers with Distribution of Population Per Square Mile

Human Service Providers

Decatur

- * Telamon Migrant Head Start
- * Decatur Family Shelter

Hartford

- * Department of Human Services (DHS)
- * District Public Health Department-Hartford Clinic

Lawrence

- * Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency

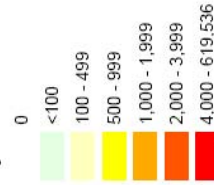
Paw Paw

- * Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan
- * District Public Health Department-Paw Paw Clinic
- * United Way
- * Telamon Corporation
- * Michigan Works Service Center

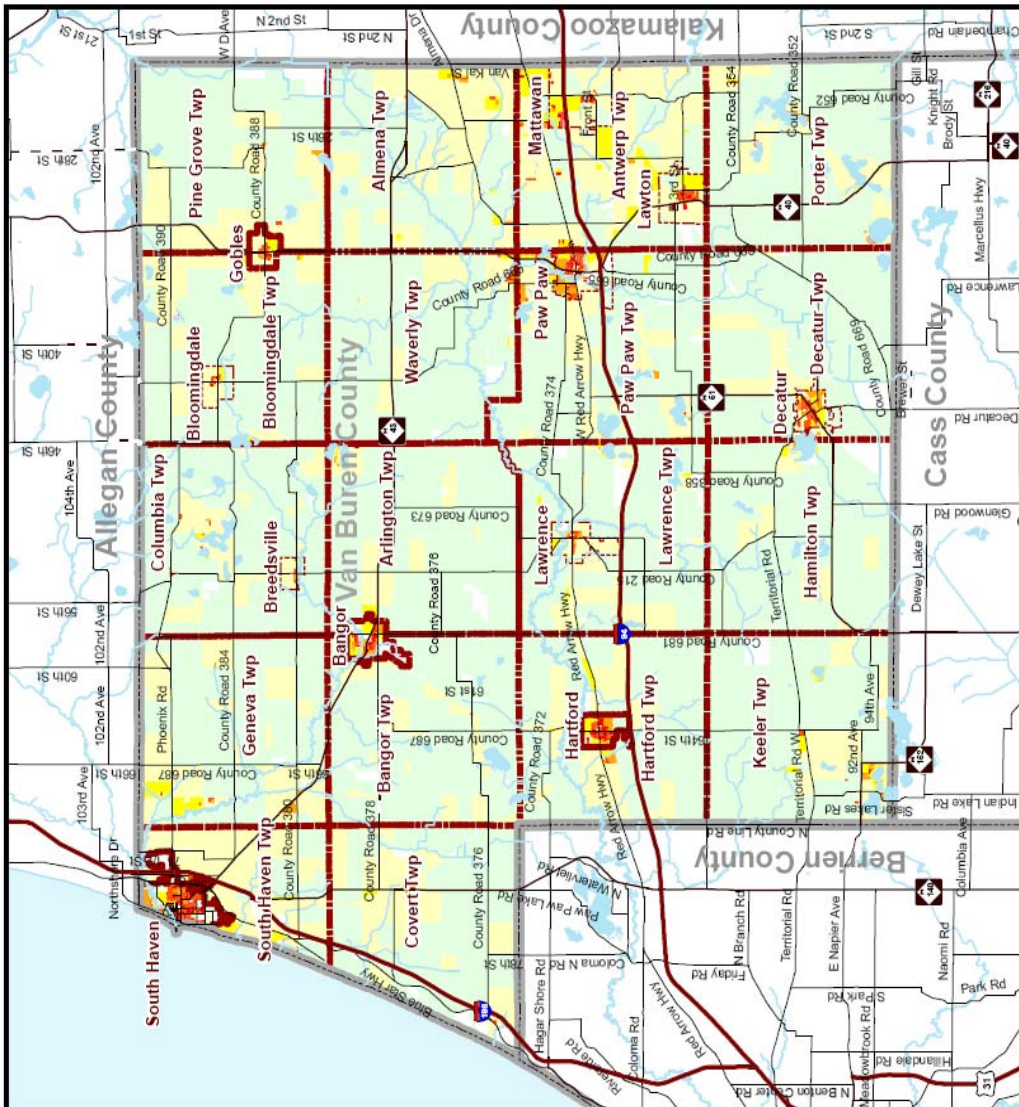
South Haven

- * Michigan Works Service Center

Population Per Square Mile By Census Block



Minor Civil Division



0 1.25 2.5 5 Miles



Base Map Source: MI Center for Geographic Information Framework (V5a)
Data Source: 2000 US Census



Map Prepared September 2006 by:
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HOMELESSNESS IN VAN BUREN COUNTY

Overview

Understanding the geography and socio-economic demography will lend some perspective to the following homeless statistics of the county. It is clear that poverty is a pervasive issue, related to unemployment, but not exclusively so. Even with high poverty levels and few opportunities for employment, half (50%) of the reported homeless in 2003 were employed and over one-third (34%) of the reported homeless in 2004 were employed.¹⁹ In 2005, the point in time count (1/25/2005) did not record the number of employed, only those who were unemployed. An extrapolation of the reported unemployed (63%) could lead to the conclusion that just over one-third (37%) *were* employed. Seasonal or part-time jobs, as well as low wages for many full-time jobs, contribute to the number of homeless who are employed. Other factors specifically addressed in this plan include the lack of affordable housing options, overwhelming special circumstances, and poor financial management skills.

It is noted that although the employment percentages are emphasized, the flip side of those percentages reflect the number of homeless who are *un*employed (50% in 2003, 66% in 2004, and 63% in 2005) thus indicating the need for a long-term strategic plan to increase job opportunities, labor force capabilities, and overall economic development in the county.

The number of children living in poverty has become a special concern on the local level. In 2003, 178 individuals were reported homeless, of those 111 were children. Of the 140 individuals reported homeless in 2004, 49 were adults and 91 were children. And, in 2005 there were 74 adults and 81 children for a total of 155 homeless.

The preceding statistics highlight the central themes and related questions addressed in this plan as summarized below.

- Affordable housing and prevention programs – for the last three reporting years (2003-2005) between one-third and one-half of the homeless were employed. (What measures could prevent those with jobs from becoming homeless?)

¹⁹ *Housing Continuum of Care Count of Homeless/Unsheltered Residents (May 2004)*

- Employment and education – for the last three years between one-half and two-thirds of the homeless were *not* employed. (What measures can be taken to improve education and, ultimately, employment opportunities?)
- Housing First through shelters/emergency care/vouchers – there are no shelters for single men and not enough shelters for any group including domestic violence victims. (What is the most feasible response to meet the immediate need for emergency and transitional housing vouchers?)
- Youth Oriented Solutions – Families with children comprised the majority of homeless situations from 2003-2005. (Are the families with children able to secure permanent affordable housing? Are the health and safety needs of children being met? Is there an adequate response to provide educational continuity?)

At first glance, the homeless count in Van Buren County seems low when compared to other municipalities and counties in Michigan. Among the reasons for this is the unknown number of precariously housed (i.e. doubled-up, overcrowded, substandard) individuals and families. This appears to be a significantly under-reported population because often they do not meet certain definitions of homelessness and therefore have limited (if any) access to assistance. The low homeless counts may also be affected by the fact that there are *very few shelter beds*.²¹ For those who need housing assistance and for those who try to provide assistance, the low numbers have the potential to create complications. Access to certain funding and service programs, based on a need that is quantified by yearly counts, can be adversely affected.

“A majority of services are crisis-oriented with few prevention services”

*Question 2
How does this work?²⁰*

Further study is needed on the local level to determine the scope of undetected need and to develop the necessary responses. While those issues are being studied, responses to the known “at risk” subpopulations are currently under development. The characteristics of subpopulations identified as “at risk” of homelessness are identified and described below. The primary information comes from national findings; local information is also provided as available.

²⁰ SWMPC Survey (2006)

²¹ In 2003 there were only thirteen beds.

Children and Youth

What happens to children who are homeless? What is meant by the term “homeless children and youth”? The McKinney-Vento Act defines “homeless children and youth” as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The term includes children and youth who are:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason. A youth is considered homeless if they are not with a parent in this situation – also sometimes referred to as “doubled-up”
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters
- Abandoned in hospitals, or are awaiting foster care placement
- Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above²²

Being homeless is obviously a difficult situation to be in, but in lieu of other immediate housing and assistance needs, what is done for the many students who get behind or fall completely off the learning track? Approximately half of the adults seen at Emergency Shelter Services (nationally) do not have a diploma or a GED. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, in Michigan, 62% of children whose parents do not have a high school degree live in poor families.²³

In 2005, 18% of the nation’s children below the age of 18 years were living in poverty; in Michigan 17% were reported to be living in poverty; and in Van Buren County, 13%. Another indicator of this economic distress locally is the 44% of all children in Van Buren’s school districts who are eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches.

²² www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/guidance.pdf

²³ http://www.nccp.org/state_detail_demographic_poor_MI.html

It becomes evident that to stop the cycle of poverty and subsequent likelihood of homelessness, improving the response to the educational needs of children experiencing homelessness is one of the most critical steps needed to achieve the ultimate end of homelessness in this county and in our country. However, the response to homelessness for children must include housing first. A safe, adequate, and permanent home is essential to the learning capabilities and educational achievement of children. Children need the security of permanent housing to flourish in school and to maintain physical and mental health. With that, progress can be made to improve current and future job skills and labor force capabilities.

Before assistance can be given, children and youth experiencing homelessness must be identified. The McKinney-Vento Act requires all public school districts to appoint a “*Homeless Liaison*” to identify and serve homeless children. There is a liaison in place for each district in Van Buren County and one regional director serving Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. Reports from these, and other, representatives indicate that childhood homelessness is not always immediately obvious in the classroom. Some methods used to overcome this include:

- Following attendance records. (Irregular attendance is also one of the greatest predictors of an eventual school dropout.)
- Noting the frequency of school transfers. (Children experiencing homelessness often transfer schools two or more times in a school year.)
- Appearance in shelters with parents – is there adequate follow-up?
- Police records and crime reporting

Follow-up discussion: What assistance programs are available to keep homeless or precariously housed children on the educational achievement track? What is done to alleviate the stigma?

Migrant/Seasonal Farm Workers

The State of Michigan produces 38 crops ranked in the top 10 nationally with a production value of over \$2.1 billion annually. Every year thousands of migrant farm workers come to Michigan to do the hand labor involved for many of these crops. The

housing provided for the farm workers is inspected and must be licensed to ensure there are no safety violations.

Michigan Agriculture (a division of DLEG) posts job openings and housing availability on a website as part of the Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker Program. The website also lists the names of farms with licensed and approved housing, the number of housing units available, and the total capacity of those units. In 2005, Van Buren County had 107 camps with 638 licensed housing units and a capacity of 3,789.²⁴

The Telamon Corporation is a private, non-profit organization (with offices located throughout Michigan) dedicated to the economic upgrading of migrant and seasonal farm workers and their families. The program provides employment and training services and other supportive services including housing assistance to qualified individuals.

Follow-up discussion: How many farm laborers actually arrive needing housing and what can be done for workers who arrive and find no housing available?

Renters/Marginal Homeowners

In the last 10-20 years, housing values have soared in many areas across America - often far beyond the personal income growth rate. By definition, for housing to be considered affordable the total costs should not exceed 30% of annual income. The rise in housing value has created a crisis level gap between the availability of affordable housing and the demand. Homeownership has become out of reach for most people who are working for minimum wages. The loss of affordable housing has led to high rent burdens, overcrowding, and substandard housing. Housing assistance can make the difference between stable housing, precarious housing, or no housing at all. Compounding this situation, the demand for housing assistance far exceeds the supply.²⁵



²⁴ <http://www.michaglabor.org/> 2005 Licensed Migrant Labor Housing Sites by County

²⁵ Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness www.mihomeless.org

Follow-up discussion : Efforts are underway to improve the availability of affordable housing and jobs with living wages – until those goals are achieved, what program can assist renters prior to eviction (or eviction notice)? What programs can help homeowners (under certain circumstances) retain their homes?

Veterans and Single Men

In 2002, one-third of the adult homeless male population and nearly one-quarter (23%) of all homeless adults had served their country in the armed services. Many veterans are at risk due to poverty, lack of support from family and friends, and precarious living conditions in overcrowded or substandard housing. Almost all (97%) homeless veterans are male and the vast majority is single.²⁶ There are no shelters in Van Buren County for single men. The mission of the Michigan Association of County Veterans Counselors is to assist veterans and their families in obtaining any and all county, state, and federal benefits to which they are entitled. This service is best provided through a local veteran's office where the veterans programs and assistance is consolidated into an easily accessible "one-stop shopping" location. Trained and accredited county counselors develop and represent veterans' disability and other claims.²⁷

Van Buren County currently participates in the Veteran's Trust Fund but does not have a Veteran's Counselor.

Follow-up discussion: Without shelter beds for single men, what emergency housing assistance are any single men (veterans or not) able to access?

Domestic Violence Victims

In 2001, almost half of all women and children experiencing homelessness in the United States were fleeing domestic violence. Shelters provide immediate safety to battered women, and often their children. For these victims, shelters can be the first stop on the road to gaining control over their lives. The provision of safe emergency shelter is a necessary first step in meeting the needs of anyone fleeing domestic violence. In the

²⁶ <http://www.va.gov/pressrel/hmlsfss.htm> <http://www.nchv.org/background.cfm>

²⁷ http://www.michigan.gov/dmva/0,1607,7-126-2362_2376_2380-8892--,00.html

absence of cash assistance, women who experience domestic violence may be at increased risk of homelessness or be compelled to live with a former or current abuser in order to prevent homelessness.

A sizable portion of the welfare population experiences domestic violence at any given time. Thus, without significant housing support, many welfare recipients are at risk of homelessness or continued violence. For families living in poverty and experiencing abusive or violent behavior, the options are seriously limited. In states that have looked at domestic violence and welfare recipients, most report that approximately 50-60 percent of current recipients say that they have experienced violence from a current or former male partner.²⁸ Welfare programs must make every effort to assist victims of domestic violence and to recognize the tremendous barrier to employment that domestic violence presents. Long term efforts to address homelessness must include *increasing the supply of affordable housing*, ensuring adequate wages and income supports, and providing necessary supportive services.²⁹

In Van Buren County there are no transitional housing vouchers, no shelter beds, limited emergency funding such as hotel vouchers, and only two housing vouchers for domestic violence survivors – clearly inadequate to meet the needs in a county of 76,000 people.³⁰

Moving victims into a housing situation quickly, with the aid of tools to assist a household with limited income and resources, is an attractive alternative for any area



that has no immediate domestic violence shelter. Individuals in Cass, St. Joseph, and Van Buren counties only have one shelter. The Housing First model, for some domestic violence victims trying to move into violence-free living, is the only viable alternative, especially for those whose support network has vanished because of the abuse. Without the support of housing vouchers or other supportive

housing services, many survivors of domestic violence with a history of long-term victimization would not be able to live independently, if at all, in this region.

²⁸ Institute for Women's Policy Research, (1997)

²⁹ <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/domestic.PDF>

³⁰ Domestic Violence Coalition

One of the goals of this 10-year plan is to develop and implement service program responses to meet the needs of a diverse and changing population in the county. Among the groups most in need is the domestic violence population. Currently under discussion is a collaborative effort involving Cass, Van Buren, and St. Joseph Counties. With the increased emphasis placed on regional collaboration, and the logical economies associated with combined resources, this tri-county area would benefit from a partnership in many ways as they have in previous successful endeavors.

Follow-up discussion: Where do domestic violence victims (and their children) go?

Crime and Substance Abuse/Criminal Convictions

Between 2000 and 2004, Van Buren County recorded some of the most staggering statistics related to Methamphetamine in the State of Michigan. The number of cases of drug abuse treatment admissions related to Methamphetamine rose from 4 cases in FY2000 to 222 cases in FY2004 (*the statewide total in FY2004 was 1,341 cases*). This equals a “per capita admission rate” of 701.5 for Van Buren County (FY2000 – FY2004 cases combined). The statewide “per capita admission rate” average per county for the same time period was 38. The most common age group admitted for meth treatment in Van Buren County was 26-29 – the most common age group statewide was 36-44 years.³¹ The involvement of this younger age group locally is important to the development of response programs, both for treatment and for supportive services including housing, as it could mean an earlier (under age 18) start of substance abuse.

Substance abuse, poverty, crime, and homelessness are often linked statistically. In 2004, 29% of the homeless reported drug or alcohol abuse, in 2005, 17% reported substance abuse. Several crime detection and rehabilitation programs dedicated to resolving substance abuse problems have been initiated and efforts are being increased to prevent homelessness due to inadequate discharge policies.

“It costs approximately \$28,000 to incarcerate someone for a year.”

*Question 6
What does it cost?³²*

³¹ http://www.michigan.gov/documents/PIRE_Baseline_Data_Report_122741_7.4-11-05.doc

³² SWMPC Survey (2006)

The program “New Direction” is an example of a local successful collaborative effort involving law enforcement and the inter-county district public health department. The description following is from the Van Buren County and Cass County District Public Health Department website:

In the summer of 2003, we (Cass/Van Buren District Public Health Department) collaborated with the Van Buren County Sheriff’s Office to develop a treatment program for methamphetamine offenders in the Van Buren County Jail. The program has been operational since October 2003. Currently the program consists of four hours of cognitive-behavioral therapy delivered twice weekly in the jail. In addition, there are three different community based groups that serve inmates released from jail. Program participants are required to attend a minimum of one year of treatment, with six months of violation free behavior to graduate from the program. The first two participants graduated in February 2005 with an average length of treatment of sixteen months. Program participants are rigorously drug tested on site and randomly in the community. The program has grown and at any point in time there are between 60 and 70 individuals actively involved in treatment. The curriculum, “A New Direction A Cognitive-behavioral Treatment Curriculum” was developed by the Hazelden Foundation and the Minnesota Department of Corrections. The program is a cost-effective treatment approach that saves tax-payer dollars by reducing jail days, diverting prison costs and reducing recidivism.³³

The Van Buren County Jail, in Paw Paw, is an Adult Correctional Facility with capacity for 158 inmates.³⁴ In 2005, the jail received 4,372 inmates for booking with a total of 6,398 charges. The majority of bookings were for contempt of court and probation violations (620) and drunk-driving arrests (599).

The Office of Community Corrections (OCC) monitors the jail population and works to divert appropriate offenders to alternative sentences. Some of the programs administered by the OCC are Cognitive Change, Weekend Alternative Program, Tether,

³³ <http://www.vbcassdhd.org/vbc/substance-treatment.htm>

³⁴ <http://www.vanburencountysheriff.com/corrections.htm>

Work Release, New Directions (substance abuse rehabilitation – see above), and Weekday Community Service Enrollments.

Upon discharge from a corrections facility, a condition of parole is to prove adequate and permanent housing arrangements. With limitations on availability of assistance to convicted felons, the choices are few. With stable housing arrangements and simultaneous support services, the recidivism rate could be lowered. With the success of other collaborative and multi-faceted programs, pilot programs are being considered to improve the discharge policies by providing more options.

“Ex-offenders...tend to go back to the people and places they associated with before being arrested.”

*Question 4
Is there a story?³⁵*

Follow-up discussion: What *is* considered an adequate housing arrangement for parolees with no family/support system or financial means?

Health Related Issues

Among the health care providers in the county, there are two hospitals with a total of 115 beds - South Haven Community Hospital in South Haven, and Lakeview Community Hospital in Paw Paw. Hospice Care of Southwest Michigan is a private, non-profit healthcare agency committed to caring for individuals and families who are confronted with serious illness and loss. This agency offers comprehensive hospice care, emotional counseling, spiritual support and other services to the residents of Van Buren, Cass, Kalamazoo, as well as parts of Allegan, Barry, Berrien, and Calhoun counties.³⁶

In 2000, approximately 39 million Americans did not have health care insurance. Almost one third of all persons living in poverty had no health care insurance of any kind. In Van Buren County, almost 12% of the total population (all income levels) did not have health insurance; for others the amount of coverage they did have would not be enough to get through a serious illness.³⁷ Without health care, any illness or sudden disability would likely lead to loss of employment, depletion of any savings, and eventually foreclosure or eviction. When asked to name three barriers to overall success,

³⁵ *SWMPC Survey (2006)*

³⁶ *This is only a representative sample. A full list is in the Appendix*

³⁷ *Primary Health Care Profile of Michigan*

the number one reason given by 14% of the SMCAA client respondents, was medical problems.³⁸ For the following groups, what assistance is available?

- Physical disabilities
- Mental disabilities
- HIV - housing assistance programs are available (privacy issues can sometimes make identification difficult and therefore hard to inform)
- Addiction Disorders – limitations on housing availability
- Mental Illness – limitations on housing availability

Fairweather House is owned and operated by Van Buren County Community Mental Health Authority. This successful program provides CMH clients a home and the opportunity to work for a self-run for-profit business and receive wages. Residents live voluntarily in the home and pay rent as the business pays its own rent for office space. Case managers oversee the residents and the business is run by the Fairweather House Board members and CMH staff. This program is an excellent model combining services, housing, and employment.

Housing Continuum of Care

As part of the annual Van Buren County Continuum of Care Plan, the CoC identifies and categorizes local needs. The following points were identified as “Critical” or “High” for 2006. These needs were referred to and taken into consideration as the goals and objectives were developed for the Action Plan.

Needs identified as “Critical” in the 2006 Continuum of Care Plan

- Engaging key stakeholders in CoC planning
- Promoting collaboration in CoC planning
- Increasing access to transitional housing
- Expanding Financial Resources for Housing First Relocation
- Developing Supportive Housing for Non-Disabled Populations
- Assuring adequate supply of affordable permanent housing
- Linking employment and related supports for the homeless
- Implementation of a Housing First Plan

³⁸ SMCAA “Community Needs Assessment” (2006)

Needs identified as “High”

- Collecting data on homeless populations and needs
- Addressing impact of institutional discharge on local needs
- Increasing access to emergency shelter
- Developing supportive housing for disabled populations
- Increasing capacity for linking follow-up services to housing

Conclusion

Service providers have long recognized the personal and overall societal value of helping people move into safe, affordable housing and providing the means for turning emergency and transitional housing into permanent housing solutions as quickly as possible. Multiple studies have shown the resource efficiency and problem-solving effectiveness of permanent housing solutions combined with coordinated services. Homelessness can be prevented in Van Buren County – the desire is great and the homelessness situation, as currently understood, is at a point in time when permanent resolution is possible.

Housing First...



From transitional...



To permanent!

THE ACTION PLAN

The vision

A future where everyone in Van Buren County is able to access safe, decent, affordable housing.

The mission

Van Buren County's mission is to address local issues by striking at their very root with a prevention-based plan that will stop homelessness before it occurs, will incorporate the Housing First standard, will provide more affordable housing options, will further streamline the service delivery system, and will support policies and efforts to improve economic and educational achievement.

The goals

As information was collected, processed, and analyzed, eight focus areas for goal development became clear:

1. Prevention
2. Affordable Housing
3. Service System Coordination
4. Service Programs
5. Economics and Education
6. Data Collection
7. Funding Resources
8. Political Support

The plan

Van Buren County providers addressed each of the eight areas by developing this "Action Plan" with a description of specific issues, goals, objectives, and steps to end homelessness in the county in 10 years. Throughout this plan there is an acknowledgement of, and provision for, an ever-changing population and service need. The research component should never be complete; human service provision planning requires the continued quest for information through interaction with consumer/client focus groups and a detailed, evolving survey process that includes providers, municipal heads, and community members.

Because of this commitment to continued growth and development, criteria for future goal setting and goal prioritizing have been established.

Criteria for future growth and development

As opportunities arise and population needs change, the current action plan may require amendments either through the addition or deletion of particular objectives or action steps. Prior to these changes, the following questions will help maintain the integrity of the original vision and mission.

- Will this change *prevent* homelessness - chronic or otherwise?
- Will this change *streamline* the process of receiving and coordinating services?
- Will this change *improve* the service and/or assistance program?
- Will this change facilitate the implementation of strategies in the *most resource-efficient and effective* way possible?

In essence, this plan provides the foundation and overall structure to anticipate and proactively meet the needs of a changing society through innovative methods consistent with these criteria.

PREVENTION

Goal Statement: **Prevent homelessness in Van Buren County**

Recognizing that assistance before eviction is the most economically efficient way to end homelessness; Van Buren County is committed to identifying and addressing *at risk situations* to prevent homelessness *before* it occurs. Strategies designed to “close the front door” have been adapted to address specific local issues and are included in the action steps.

Issues identified locally include (but are not limited to) the following:

- There are many precariously housed people with no assistance or assistance that is too little too late. (Precariously housed are often not identified until eviction is imminent and resources are exhausted)
- The lack of safety nets (family/friend support, alternative funds, etc) and lack of legal resources creates a higher risk of eviction
- The definition of precariously housed is not always understood – any or all of the following may apply:
 - Overcrowded housing units
 - Substandard conditions – can be anything from the presence of lead paint to the lack of utilities or dangerous neighborhoods
 - Marginal income/assistance – no backup plan available if anything goes wrong
 - Bad credit
 - Felony conviction
 - Substance abuse
 - Aging out of foster care
 - Domestic violence
 - Mental or physical illness

With consideration of these issues and in keeping with the vision, the following objectives and action steps have been determined:

Objective **Prevent precariously housed situations from turning into homeless situations.**

Action Step 1 **Clarify specific causes (“risk factors”)** of homelessness in Van Buren County by expanding point-in-time survey criteria and performing the survey semiannually (*January and July*) instead of annually.

Project Leader: SMCAA and DHS will lead committee discussion

Target Date: January 2007

Benchmark of Success: Redesigned survey criteria completed

Action Step 2 **Create an internal system that will flag households (or individuals)** by using risk factor identification information, gathered from those receiving or applying for assistance, to effectively intervene and prevent *at risk* situations from turning into homeless situations. (*Close the front door*) This response system will trigger further eligibility assessment for appropriate programs.

Project Leader: CoC, HSCC will lead committee discussion and study process

Target Date: July 2008

Benchmark of Success: System implementation

Action Step 3 **Activate systematic short term responses** for imminent at-risk situations.

Project Leader: SMCAA

Target Date: July 2008

Benchmark of Success: Use of system

Action Step 4 **Implement pro-active response system** that will combine appropriate housing assistance, income/employment assistance, and other human support services needed to prevent further status decline. (*Coordinate benefits by building on current protocol of interagency collaboration to ensure needs are met in a timely and efficient manner*)

Project Leader: SMCAA with assistance from CoC partnerships

Target Date: July 2008

Benchmark of Success: Use of system

Action Step 5 **Change policies** that currently prevent people from receiving assistance prior to becoming homeless. (*Appeal to governing bodies to advocate for policy changes to allow DHS, the CAP agency, and others to provide assistance before people become homeless*)
Project Leader: HSCC
Target Date: Begin 2007 until changes occur
Benchmark of Success: Improved policies that meet needs and expedite service delivery

Objective **Prevent short-term homelessness from turning into long-term or chronic homelessness. (Prevent homeless reoccurrence)**

Action Step 1 **Develop intervention process** that is quick and seamless to get homeless individuals into permanent housing per Housing First standards.
Project Leader: SMCAA, DHS
Target Date: July 2008
Benchmark of Success: Process designed and completed

Action Step 2 **Engage long-term strategies** to prevent future homelessness or homeless reoccurrence.
Project Leader: SMCAA, DHS, and other partnerships
Target Date: January 2007
Benchmark of Success: Strategies in place and being used

Action Step 3 **Expand educational opportunities** such as money management classes, debt counseling, family-life counseling, etc.
Project Leader: SMCAA will seek partnerships
Target Date: January 2008 and ongoing
Benchmark of Success: An increase in classes and attendance each year

Action Step 4 **Market and promote** the availability of life-skills management programs.
Project Leader: SMCAA, DHS
Target Date: July 2008
Benchmark of Success: Completed materials and promotional campaign begun

Objective Prevent institutional discharge into homelessness.

Action Step 1 **Appoint subcommittee to study** other discharge planning policies proven to be successful in other communities.

Project Leader: Law enforcement, hospitals (South Haven and LakeView), CMH

Target Date: 2007

Benchmark of Success: Committee members accept responsibility and schedule meetings

Action Step 2 **Develop institutional discharge policies and programs** relevant to Van Buren County (based on committee findings) and build on strengths already in place.

Project Leader: Emergency Services Council

Target Date: Beginning immediately through 2010

Benchmark of Success: Discharge policies that improve homelessness prevention

Comments: This action step includes discharge policies for all primary public institutions (prisons, hospitals, foster care, etc).

Action Step 3 **Implement the program** when funding becomes available

Project Leader: Service organizations as relevant

Target Date: 2010 and ongoing

Benchmark of Success: Program in use

Objective Prevent youth who have aged out of foster care from becoming homeless.

Action Step 1 **Form a collaborative** between Department of Human Services (DHS) and Catholic Family Services (CFS) to ensure continuity of care.

Project Leader: DHS, CFS– the Ark

Target Date: January 2008

Benchmark of Success: Collaboration formed with DHS and CFS meeting on a regular determined basis.

Action Step 2 **Create a plan that will ensure transition from foster care to independent living.**

Project Leader: DHS and CFS

Target Date: June 2008

Benchmark of Success: Elimination of homelessness due to youth aging out of foster care.

Objective **Prevent domestic violence victims from becoming homeless.**

Action Step 1 **Initiate collaborative effort** with St. Joseph and Cass counties to maximize resources

Project Leader: Van Buren Domestic Violence Coalition

Target Date: October 2006

Benchmark of Success: Meeting date set and attended

Action Step 2 **Apply for regional grant** to provide housing support for domestic violence victims

Project Leader: Van Buren Domestic Violence Coalition

Target Date: November 2006

Benchmark of Success: Application submitted

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Goal Statement: **Provide an adequate supply of safe and affordable housing in all Van Buren County communities**

There is a serious shortage of safe and affordable housing stock in the communities of Van Buren County. In 2006, 43% of client survey respondents cited high rent as the primary indicator that there is a lack of affordable housing. Having a poor credit rating was the second most common reason stated.³⁹ As noted throughout the action plan, credit and financial counseling as a support service is an important component to the eventual attainment of adequate permanent housing. Housing affordability is an issue that applies to either renting or home ownership. Rental units however, often have an additional issue of questionable safety, maintenance, and appropriate value for the money.



Responses to survey and interview questions have identified the following issues:

- Lack of safe affordable housing stock
- Lack of funding to build/purchase safe affordable housing stock
- Inadequate number of shelter beds
- No shelters for single men
- Lack of transitional/and/or emergency housing for domestic violence victims
- Lack of subsidized Adult Foster care
- Not enough attention to substandard housing conditions
- Geographic distance between job, housing, services
- Lack of transportation

Among the most important first steps toward long term improvement is the creation of an affordable housing plan. As an example of what this plan might include, the toolkit

³⁹ SMCAA "Community Needs Assessment" (2006)

designed for the Washington D.C. area provides an excellent model for the type of affordable housing plan discussed here. This toolkit gives examples of best practice models that have worked across the nation and could be used as a guide to develop an affordable housing plan for Van Buren County. Topics relevant to a future local plan include:

- Ways to preserve existing affordable housing
- Information about programs that promote affordable housing development
- Design concepts
- Funding options
- Homeowner and rental assistance programs
- Housing education and advocacy tools
- Regulatory reform topics such as inclusionary zoning, minimum lot sizes and setbacks, affordable housing districts, infill housing development, expedited permitting, affordable dwelling unit ordinance, density bonuses, and impact fee waivers and proportional impact fees.⁴⁰

The first objective below will create the unified housing leadership role necessary to shepherd the process of developing an affordable housing plan.

Objective Identify, define, and create a unified housing leadership role at the county level.

Action Step 1 Define the role, responsibilities, relationships and resources needed to support the unified housing leadership role. Form and manage a committee of service providers and business leaders to draft the concept and proposal.

Project Leader: CoC or selected agency representative

Target Date: June 2007

Benchmark of Success: Role defined, committee formed and concept and proposal drafted

Comments: This step is a high priority

⁴⁰ <http://www.mwcog.org/uploads/pub-documents/9VpbXg20060217144716.pdf> (2006)
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

Action Step 2 **Petition request** to the county board of commissioners for the unified role and resources to support it.

Project Leader: CoC Committee created in Action Step 1

Target Date: December 2007

Benchmark of Success: Commission resolution to support the unified role.

Objective **Create an affordable housing plan to be distributed and promoted in every municipality.**

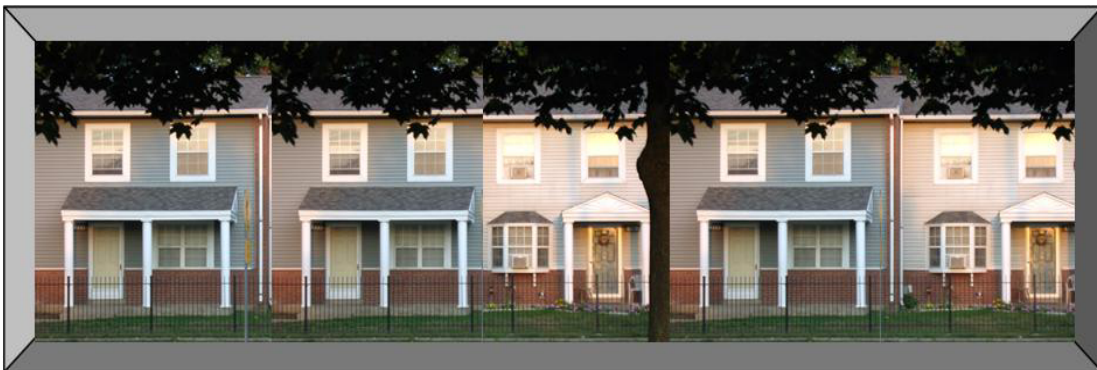
Action Step 1 **Define affordable housing** by researching and collecting materials to show types and varieties of options. (*Rehabilitation/renovation projects – downtown and other, purchase of existing vs. new construction building/development projects*)

Project Leader: SWMPC working with the County Planning Commission (CPC)

Target Date: September 2007

Benchmark of Success: Report defining affordable housing for Van Buren County

Comments: It is recommended that SWMPC continue in its role in the county, and regionally, working with the planning commission in the development of an Affordable Housing Plan.



Action Step 2 **Document examples of successes and failures** with explanations, proven benchmarks and predictors for inclusion in plan.

Project Leader: SWMPC/CPC

Target Date: July 2008

Benchmark of Success: Plan with documented benchmarks.

Action Step 3 **Customize plan** appropriately for each municipal type.
(City/township/village)

Project Leader: SWMPC/CPC and local planning/zoning boards

Target Date: September 2008 (this will begin the process with the local planning bodies - may take a year or two to fully implement)

Benchmark of Success: Customized Plan

Objective **Gain public (government) and private (business) acceptance of affordable housing plan.**

Action Step 1 **Present the plan to county and local officials** and petition for official adoption.

Project Leader: CoC/SWMPC/CPC

Target Date: Winter 2010

Benchmark of Success: Local adoption of the Plan

Action Step 2 **Present the plan to landlords and management companies** to facilitate increased access to housing for homeless, precariously-housed and those identified as “hard-to-house”.⁴¹

Project Leader: CoC/SWMPC/CPC

Target Date: Winter 2010

Benchmark of Success: Plan communicated to appropriate entities

⁴¹ Public Housing Transformation and the “hard to house” (June 2005)
www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/311178_Roof_9.pdf

Action Step 3 **Promote the development of zoning policies** by encouraging local units to adopt zoning ordinances that will encourage an increase of attractive affordable housing options

Project Leader: County Planning Commission

Target Date: July 2011

Benchmark of Success: Sample ordinance wording made available to municipalities

Action Step 4 **Promote the increase of incentives** to further encourage developers to build or rehabilitate affordable housing units

Project Leader: Unified Housing Leadership

Target Date: 2011 and ongoing

Benchmark of Success: Incentives in use and developers completing affordable units.

Objective **Facilitate municipality efforts to implement the affordable housing plan locally.**

Action Step 1 **Enable the municipalities** with training and other resources.

Project Leader: MSU Extension

Target Date: Ongoing

Benchmark of Success: Municipalities participating in training and using resources.

Action Step 2 **Monitor and report** on plan implementation progress

Project Leader: Unified Leadership Role

Target Date: Ongoing

Benchmark of Success: 100% municipality participation in plan implementation

SERVICE SYSTEM COORDINATION

Goal Statement: **Optimize Coordinated Service Delivery Systems in Van Buren County**

By seeking innovative and improved methods of service delivery coordination, Van Buren County will provide an optimum level of efficiency and economy of effort for service providers and service recipients. One of the objectives to reach the goal of an optimized service delivery system is to provide data and support assistance as needed throughout this study and into the implementation phase. Identified service coordination issues include:

“The primary problem is that clients have to go to many resources and many locations in order to access the funds [and services] needed to help.”
Question 2
*How does it work?*⁴²

- Applying for assistance can be a difficult process to negotiate
- Provider locations are often challenging geographically for those without personal transportation
- Service providers are not always aware of other agency programs
- Assistance requests are sometimes unmet because of criteria limitations and unknown solutions
- Cross-training efforts could be improved

Transportation

One of the opportunities for improved service delivery is currently underway. Van Buren County Public Transit recently received a Center for Regional Excellence award to do a feasibility study for the implementation of technology to coordinate transportation and human service needs. The following paragraph is excerpted from the award proposal and makes a clear case for this county’s spirit of cooperation.

Coincident with the environment of public transit is a changing landscape for agencies in Van Buren County that provide human services. In the human services world there is a regular need to supply transportation

⁴² *SWMPC Survey (2006)*

services. Many agencies are spending large amounts of money on transportation because public transportation is not always available. In addition, there are repeated instances of agencies that provide some of the same services already provided by Van Buren Public Transit. Coordination and the use of technology will address all of these issues. Many public transit and human service agencies are beginning to embrace coordination. Coordination that better reinforces connections between multiple transportation providers in a region and the delivery of human services appears to be particularly ripe with opportunity. Coordination and cooperation are keys to maximizing the level of service and performance in rural areas.⁴³

2-1-1 Information Service

The Van Buren County United Way seeks to widen the service area of 2-1-1 service to include Van Buren County. 2-1-1 currently serves 60% of Michigan's population with service available in Calhoun, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Kent, Macomb, Muskegon, Oakland, Ottawa and Wayne counties as well as the 15 counties across the Upper Peninsula. Michigan 2-1-1, Inc., is a nonprofit organization chartered to support statewide 2-1-1 access through local and regional development. Through Michigan 2-1-1, United Ways are working to establish a sustainable statewide 2-1-1 system via partnership with the State of Michigan.⁴⁵

"A 2-1-1 system would help with people trying to reach resources."

Question 7

What else do you know that would make a difference?⁴⁴

The local installation and establishment of the 2-1-1 system would provide a number of benefits specifically related to housing and the provision of human services as well as a wide avenue of possibilities for service coordination and efficiency. Other benefits would include (but are not limited to):

- The ability to help non-English speaking people receive assistance information

⁴³ *Grant Proposal for the Center for Regional Excellence Award (2006)*

⁴⁴ *SWMPC Survey (2006)*

⁴⁵ <http://www.211.org/status.html#Michigan> (March 2006)

- The provision of a comprehensive human service web-based database for everyone including social workers, medical providers, etc.
- The ability to receive information confidentially thus reducing stigma and fear
- The rapid identification of unmet needs so funding can be steered to provide targeted assistance where it is most needed
- An inventory of beds for the homeless – an up-to-date broad geographic inventory of shelter beds available
- The provision of housing assistance referrals

One-Stop-Shop/Single Point of Entry

A single point of entry system for one-stop service provision would streamline the process of applying for, and receiving, assistance. Among the methods being considered to achieve this objective are:

- A physical single point of entry with a SMCAA staff member on site within the DHS building. This would enable customers who are denied benefits at DHS to see representatives of other agencies for assistance at the same location.
- A more wide-reaching concept is expressed in the vision of having multiple agencies and providers represented under one physical roof – for some it might mean a full complement of staff, for others it could mean a single representative.
- A Human Services Park operated similarly to a commercial/industrial park.
- A virtual single point of entry system through use of database software.

Under consideration for inclusion in any of the above options are human service agencies, community pantries, faith-based assistance groups, and adult education providers – either volunteers or paid professionals. As committee members further study the feasibility of these options, it will become clear which concept will provide the most efficient and effective method for Van Buren County.



Human Services Building in Paw Paw

The Van Buren County Continuum of Care and Human Services Collaborative Council members, along with municipal leaders and community representatives, plan to continue the study of service system coordination options. The first two steps have already been taken: 1) there is *a commitment* to streamline the process for the benefit of providers and recipients, and 2) there is open *communication* and an *excellent working relationship* among agency administrators and organization representatives.

Objective **Improve coordination and planning through support of interagency collaborative efforts.**

- Action Step 1* **Increase cross-training efforts** to lessen the gaps between provider agencies.
 Project Leader: VB County Emergency Services Provider Committee chaired by DHS Director
 Target Date: January 2007
 Benchmark of Success: The annual scheduling of an interagency informational gathering/training Forum
- Action Step 2* **Encourage agency teaming** for the purpose of discussing precariously housed or chronically homeless families, to pool resources, and develop creative ideas to assist these families.
 Project Leader: VB County Emergency Services Provider Committee chaired by DHS Director
 Target Date: January 2007
 Benchmark of Success: Regular and well-attended meetings resulting in new team efforts

Objective **Support Van Buren Public Transit Study efforts to implement technology to streamline the coordination of transportation and human service delivery.**

- Action Step 1* **Provide information** as requested.
 Project Leader: SWMPC
 Target Date: 2007-2008
 Benchmark of Success: Documented information
- Action Step 2* **Participate in cross-training efforts** when technology implementation phase begins.
 Project Leader: SWMPC, providers
 Target Date: 2007-2009
 Benchmark of Success: Full participation

Objective **Ensure the installation and utilization of the statewide 2-1-1 service.**

Action Step 1 **Write letters of support** and approve implementation when possible.
Project Leader: Greta Williams (VB United Way)
Target Date: Annually until 2-1-1 is implemented
Benchmark of Success: Minimum of five letters of support sent upon request to legislators.
Comments: Requests for letters of support may be over successive years

Action Step 2 **Provide accurate and adequate information** to 2-1-1 coordinators when requested.
Project Leader: Greta Williams (VB United Way)
Target Date: When requested
Benchmark of Success: Request fulfilled

Objective **Create a single point of entry system to provide one-stop-service.**

Action Step 1 **Build consensus** among agencies for the need for a single location (virtual or physical) where services can be provided by multiple agencies.
Project Leader: VB DHS Director and SMCAA Director
Target Date: January 2008
Benchmark of Success: Interagency agreement

Action Step 2 **Form subcommittee to study** the feasibility of the following possible methods to achieve the single point of entry/one-stop-shop objective: (Committee to include CoC/HSCC members and non-members)

- Human Services Park – multiple agencies in individual buildings on county-owned or privately-owned land.
- Representatives of multiple agencies housed within an existing building.
- Virtual single point of entry through the use of shared data systems

Project Leader: VB DHS Director and SMCAA Director
Target Date: January 2008
Benchmark of Success: Completed study with recommendation for most effective, efficient solution.

Action Step 3 **Secure a location,** if warranted, capable of housing multiple agency representatives.

Project Leader: VB DHS Director and SMCAA Director

Target Date: January 2008

Benchmark of Success: Physical plant

Action Step 4 **Invite** agency representatives and service providers and **facilitate** their inclusion at the one-stop location.

Project Leader: VB DHS Director and SMCAA Director

Target Date: January 2010

Benchmark of Success: Occupation of plant and start of service provision

SERVICE PROGRAMS

Goal Statement: **Develop and implement service program responses to meet the needs of a diverse and changing population in Van Buren County.**

Van Buren County is aware of a changing demography and acknowledges the presence and unique needs of under-served population groups such as veterans, seniors, immigrants/migrants, minors, and those who are not homeless but are living in overcrowded and unsafe conditions. In addition to recognizing that these groups may have inadequate attention and funded programs, providers are aware that different solutions will become necessary for different groups – one size does not fit all. Van Buren County service providers seek to improve and expand existing successful programs and to develop new methods and programs as need arises.

Following are some of the recommendations suggested to address the need for evolving service programming:

- Recommend a systematic intervention process when people do become homeless
- Recommend raising the age limit of assistance eligibility. Age limit is currently 18 years but many are not ready to assume responsibility – can the age be raised to 20 years? (24?)
- Recommend expanding the range currently allowed for short-term assistance. Many programs specify 28 days but that is often inadequate. Recommendation is to expand the range up to at least 60 days.
- Recommend building on successful programs like “New Direction” (substance abuse rehabilitation) and “Fairweather House” (Community Mental Health combines work and housing to achieve maximum self-sufficiency)
- Recommend further development of indigent policies in discharge planning situations
- Recommend obtaining a Domestic Violence Shelter for Van Buren County
- Recommend considering a Veteran’s Counselor to locally administer assistance to veterans with the Veteran’s Trust Fund.

- Recommend initiatives specifically designed to streamline and improve transportation systems. Address and recognize transportation as a vital component to ultimate self-sufficiency.

Objective **Provide new service programs (pro-actively rather than re-actively) that will meet changing needs.**

Action Step 1 **Create taskforce to study** changing population groups and future needs of those who have been underrepresented previously.

Project Leader: CoC

Target Date: Begin January 2007 and turn in report by January 2008

Benchmark of Success: Committee report that details local data with recommendations for upcoming changes.

Comments: Committee should include all service providers, CFS, DV, DHS, CAR. Population groups to include (but not limited to): Veterans, seniors, single males, youth due to age range issues, convicted felons, etc.

Action Step 2 **Enhance and expand capacity for providing services to homeless youth through collaboration with homeless and youth service providers**

Project Leader: CFS

Target Date: July 2008

Benchmark of Success: Increased number of homeless youth housed and receiving services.

Objective **Ensure transportation needs are met.**

Action Step 1 **Work with Van Buren Public Transit and other transportation providers to more efficiently and effectively meet transportation needs in the county.**

Project Leader: Transit Director/CoC/HSCC/SWMPC

Target Date: Ongoing beginning January 2007

Benchmark of Success: Increased ridership, stabilized funding

Comments: This will include supporting efforts to investigate tracking systems and collaboration with service agencies to ensure coordinated usage. Invite transit director/staff to CoC and HSCC meetings.

ECONOMICS AND EDUCATION

Goal Statement **Reduce poverty and improve the educational and skills capacity of the current and future workforce of Van Buren County.**

With an acknowledgement that the primary cause of homelessness is poverty, Van Buren County recognizes that the key to long-term measures to end homelessness is a vital economy, which in turn depends on the achievement of quality education and the availability of jobs. This section includes objectives directed at improving the economic and educational attainment in the county with strategies designed to alleviate un- and under- employment, lack of transportation, lack of job skills, and high illiteracy rates.

To answer the questions regarding why there is poverty and homelessness in Van Buren County, and what should be done about it, the following comments were taken from service provider survey responses and the annual community needs assessment. (A client survey conducted by SMCAA)

- Not enough jobs with living wage – not enough jobs period!
- Rural housing costs are rising faster than rural incomes
- Need for improved transportation -service and options
- Need to improve education – academic and vocational
- Van Buren has the highest county poverty rate in southwest Michigan
- Need to address societal factors such as substance abuse and poverty
- Need to address systemic problems and provide emergency relief – short and long term

There are currently successful educational systems in place that can be built upon and expanded to reach a greater portion of the population. The Van Buren Intermediate School District (VBISD) actively supports the vocational training of its students through the Technical Center (VBTC). The VBTC has the capacity to serve over 1,300 students in 28 programs. Enrollment has averaged over 900 students during the past three years. Students receive career, academic and technical instruction while fostering positive work

habits and attitudes. In cooperation with local schools and businesses, the Tech Center provides an education for all learners so they can prepare for life-long learning and the job market of the future.⁴⁶

The VBISD also operates the Bert Goens Learning Center. The Learning Center and the ISD have adopted a long list of initiatives to better serve children who face the dual challenges of a migrant background and needing special education. The Learning Center received the 2002 Excellence in Education Award for serving at-risk students.⁴⁷ As previously mentioned, the Telamon Corporation also provides employment and training services and other supportive services including housing assistance to qualified individuals – specifically migrants and farm workers. Telamon also operates a Head Start program.

Michigan Works! was established to foster high-quality employment and training programs serving employers and workers by providing support activities and a forum for information exchange for Michigan's workforce development system. Michigan Works! has been recognized by the National Alliance of Business as the most innovative in the country. The Van Buren offices of Michigan Works! are located in Paw Paw and South Haven.

One of the innovative programs funded through Michigan Works! is the E-LearnAbility Community - the premier connection point for organizations and individuals in Michigan interested in disability issues. Through the Internet port-of-entry, users can find information about employment, online education, organizations and resources, and more – all specifically designed for those with disabilities. This model is an excellent example of meeting the needs of a specific subpopulation and may lead to future virtual partnerships between those providing education and economic opportunities and human service providers.

In addition to increasing these education and job skills training systems, it is recommended that an updated aggressive countywide economic development plan be considered. Simultaneous efforts addressing labor force skills and job availability are crucial to successfully overcoming cyclical, multi-generational poverty.

⁴⁶ <http://www.vbisd.org/techcenter/>

⁴⁷ <http://www.vbisd.org/discus/messages/3/271.html?1019244688>

As acknowledged previously, the lack of transportation can prevent the necessary connections between education and employment. In August, 2006, Van Buren County residents responded positively to the importance of this issue by passing a millage proposal to support the public transit system. Efforts are underway to expand and increase the services, including increased coordination through the use of technology.

The following objectives have been designed to address the overarching economic and educational needs, as described above, by creating a framework of solutions to build upon over time.

Objective **Develop and implement an aggressive county-wide economic development plan that will increase number and diversity of jobs.**

Action Step 1 **The County Board of Commission will charge staff or an ad-hoc committee to facilitate the development of a comprehensive economic development strategy**

Project Leader: County Board of Commissioners

Target Date: December 2007

Benchmark of Success: Committee formed and responsibility accepted

Comments: The economic development strategy will be designed to retain existing businesses and employment opportunities, expand employment opportunities by existing businesses and attract new businesses and employment opportunities.

Action Step 2 **Secure involvement** from a diverse section of countywide partners; including businesses and governmental entities, social service agencies, local and regional economic development agencies, utility providers and others who will develop the economic development strategy.

Project Leader: County Board of Commissioners

Target Date: March 2007

Benchmark of Success: Partners participating/attending meetings

Action Step 3 **Lead the facilitation** of this diverse group, enhancing its opportunity for successful development of the economic development strategy.

Project Leader: County Board of Commissioners

Target Date: Ongoing through 2007

Benchmark of Success: Regular and well attended meetings

Action Step 4 **Adopt the economic development strategy.**

Project Leader: County Board of Commissioners

Target Date: January 2008

Benchmark of Success: Signed Adoption Resolution

Action Step 5 **Encourage other local, private and public entities to adopt the plan.**

Project Leader: County Board of Commissioners

Target Date: March 2008

Benchmark of Success: 100% municipal adoption of plan

Action Step 6 **Work to implement the plan** to its fullest capacity.

Project Leader: County Board and Municipal Heads acting as partners

Target Date: Ongoing

Benchmark of Success: Completed action steps

Objective **Increase employment opportunities that supply living wages.****Action Step 1** **Petition state and local economic developers** to vigorously pursue new business and existing business expansion.

Project Leader: SWMPC (EDA Economic Development District)

Target Date: January 2007

Benchmark of Success: Letters written/meetings scheduled

Objective **Identify and reduce barriers to employment.****Action Step 1** **Establish Collaborative** with affiliated partners (see project leaders for partial list) to stay informed of current and changing barriers.

Project Leader: Michigan Works, Work Force Skills Development Board, VBISD and VBTC

Target Date: 2008

Benchmark of Success: Regular meetings

Action Step 2 ***Work with Collaborative to develop responses and provide support when possible.***

Project Leader: CoC, HSCC, Michigan Works, and other partners

Target Date: Ongoing

Benchmark of Success: Regular and well-attended meetings

Objective **Pursue and support strategies that will increase the skills capacity of workforce in Van Buren County.**

Action Step 1 **Assign committees** to study and define current (short-term) and future (long-term) strategies.

Project Leader: Workforce Development Board

Target Date: September 2007

Benchmark of Success: Business/industry and school partnerships to enhance/improve the skills of currently employed individuals

Action Step 2 **Increase capabilities** of the labor force through job skills training efforts.

Project Leader: Tri-County Education Advisory Group

Target Date: September 2007

Benchmark of Success: Employability skills training for adults in at least three geographically diverse locations in the county

Objective **Seek and support improvements in education, especially programs to improve literacy.**

Action Step 1 **Identify** current adult literacy services

Project Leader: Margie Murphy (VBISD McKinney-Vento Representative)

Target Date: January 2007

Benchmark of Success: Survey of currently available adult education services in the county completed.

Action Step 2 **Form** Literacy Advisory Group
 Project Leader: Margie Murphy (VBISD McKinney-Vento Representative)
 Target Date: January 2007
 Benchmark of Success: Strategic plan developed for expanding services to out-of-school adults.

Action Step 3 **Implement a plan** for education and training of local school homeless liaisons.
 Project Leader: Margie Murphy (VBISD McKinney-Vento Representative)
 Target Date: September, 2007
 Benchmark of Success: Training by appointed McKinney-Vento Coordinator of pupil accounting staff at local schools (LEAs).

Action Step 4 **Offer televised educational programming** to enhance the literacy level of the Hispanic population
 Project Leader: Pedro Martinez (Telamon staff)
 Target Date: January 2007
 Benchmark of Success: Variety of age-appropriate educational programming rebroadcast from Mexico via conventional TV.

Objective **Overcome barriers created by lack of transportation.**

Action Step 1 **Identify barriers**
 Project Leader: SWMPC
 Target Date: 2007
 Benchmark of Success: Report identifying barriers and recommended responses submitted to CoC

Action Step 2 **Increase transportation-related programs** and opportunities
 Project Leader: SWMPC, Van Buren County Public Transit, Van Buren County administration
 Target Date: 2008 and ongoing
 Benchmark of Success: Decrease in underserved population
 Comments: Customer satisfaction surveys and the annual SMCAA Client Needs Assessment are two possible methods to determine success.

DATA COLLECTION

Goal Statement: **Improve methods and capacity to collect, assess, and utilize data.**

Through the collection and analysis of information, an understanding of populous needs and program success or failure points will lead to the development of change and/or the pursuit of improved programs. “It is often data that leads communities to adopt new strategies or plans to end homelessness. Conversely, communities making progress can demonstrate results because they have established data systems.”⁴⁸

Among the issues being discussed are:

- Under-utilized data collection systems
- Unmet need for tracking local and regional service usage for the purpose of coordination and funding efforts
- More efficient use of services possible
- Ensure information is accurate, complete, and timely
- Lack of a central repository of countywide municipal data relevant to the issue of homelessness
- Lack of a central, countywide reporting mechanism to identify issues and target effective solutions
- Lack of consistent program performance measures and data to support them
- Insufficient local access to data and data sources for benchmarking improvements

Data collection is important for more than just the provision of statistical information to be used in yearly reports. Timely, pertinent information can expedite service coordination and delivery saving hours of time and effort and significantly reducing stress related to the management of sometimes complex cases. *A fully-utilized database could provide the means for a virtual single point of entry.*

⁴⁸ NAEH, (June 2006)

As data collection methods are improved and increased, some considerations to include are:

- The selection of specific, relevant, and data
- The coordination, control and simplification of collection efforts
- The assurance that data is accurate, complete, and timely
- The assurance that data is used to ensure services are effective in addressing the needs of people who become homeless
- The inclusion of a mapping system indicating the locations of affordable housing, transitional housing, shelters, healthcare offices, employment offices/centers, and transportation access points
- Benchmark data is established to monitor progress and program success

The interest and desire to use technology as a means of improving service delivery is high and the investigation of efficient methods leading to appropriate use is a top priority. Among concerns to be considered are ease of use, confidentiality, and initial expense. Concerns notwithstanding, within ten years Van Buren County expects to fully implement the following objectives.

Objective Improve collection, collation, and accuracy of information.

Action Step 1 **Utilize HMIS**, the Michigan Statewide Homeless Management Information System and encourage use.

Project Leader: SMCAA

Target Date: January 2007

Benchmark of Success: Increased usage

Action Step 2 **Confirm data needs based on measures of program performance and success/identify sources, and define database and maintenance/collection process**

Project Leader: SWMPC

Target Date: 2008

Benchmark of Success: Recommendations made to CoC and HSCC concerning all aspects of data systems implementation.

Objective **Use data to understand issues related to the prevention and ending of homelessness in Van Buren County and to prepare plans for successful local programs.**

Action Step 1 **Collect data** by municipality (or zip code)
Project Leader: SWMPC
Target Date: 2009
Benchmark of Success: Collection process begun

Action Step 2 **Document issues with municipality leadership**
Project Leader: SWMPC
Target Date: 2009
Benchmark of Success: Written documentation

Objective **Use database to manage plan implementation locally and monitor program progress and success**

Action Step 1 **Implement the database**
Project Leader: SWMPC will create process for implementation and distribute
Target Date: 2010
Benchmark of Success: Database in use

Action Step 2 **Train municipalities**
Project Leader: SWMPC will create process for training
Target Date: 2010
Benchmark of Success: Municipalities able to use system

Action Step 3 **Monitor local progress through unified leadership**
Project Leader: SWMPC will create process for monitoring
Target Date: 2010 and ongoing
Benchmark of Success: Regular meetings and progress reports

FUNDING RESOURCES

Goal Statement **Explore and pursue increased and diverse funding resources for the purpose of improved service provision.**

The heart of social service beats to the flow, fast or slow, of funding. Van Buren County seeks to maximize any and all funding opportunities by seeking efficiency through coordinated initiatives, by expanding efforts toward proven successful programs, and by streamlining service delivery systems.

- Need flexibility regarding disabled individuals
- Need to increase availability of tenant based vouchers
- Need to expand use of specifically targeted Housing Choice Vouchers for homeless families and youth
- Need to increase funding to build/purchase safe affordable housing stock

Objective **Improve and expand access to state and federal resources.**

Action Step1 **Identify grant criteria, eligibility, and availability.** (See MSHDA Housing Resource Fund Quickfinder)

Project Leader: CoC, HSCC

Target Date: Ongoing discussions

Benchmark of Success: Increased funds from diverse sources

Action Step 2 **Identify who will apply** for grants – (i.e. the County, CoC, Non-profit, Municipality - See MSHDA Housing Resource Fund Quickfinder)

Project Leader: CoC, HSC

Target Date: Ongoing discussions as opportunities arise

Benchmark of Success: Written list and agreements (MOU) signed

Action Step 3 **Advocate for sufficient funds** for the prevention of homelessness, in a manner that is timely enough to meet the needs of those to be served.

Project Leader: HSCC

Target Date: Immediately and ongoing

Benchmark of Success: Systematic approach established

Comments: This action step is intended to include seeking changes in funding criteria that currently create hardships in service delivery due to arbitrary and sometimes conflicting definitions of homelessness.

The dedication to prevention drives this desire to provide assistance prior to a consumer meeting the standard of “homelessness”.

Objective **Maximize funding currently available.**

Action Step 1 **Expand the use of DHS Emergency Services Funds** for homelessness prevention.

Project Leader: HSCC, DHS

Target Date: 2008

Benchmark of Success: Increased use of ESF

Action Step 2 **Increase vendor payments** for recipients of public assistance by enforcing DHS policy on mandatory vendoring, and encouraging people to volunteer.

Project Leader: SMCAA, DHS

Target Date: 2008

Benchmark of Success: Vendor payment increase

Objective **Increase Housing Continuum of Care membership and diversity/representation**

Action Step 1 **Actively seek representatives** from Banks, Housing Commissions/Authorities, Business, County/Municipal Representatives, Veterans, and CARES.

Project Leader: CoC, HSCC

Target Date: Beginning immediately and ongoing

Benchmark of Success: 25% increase in regularly attending members

Objective **Implement innovative methods to develop local funding sources to meet needs through flexible, discretionary means.**

Action Step 1 **Investigate feasibility** of an Endowment Fund

Project Leader: CoC to appoint subcommittee

Target Date: 2008

Benchmark of Success: Completed report with recommendations

Comments: An endowment fund would be overseen by a local board with established parameters for assistance that would allow flexibility in decision-making for the ultimate purpose of homelessness prevention.

POLITICAL SUPPORT

Goal Statement **Encourage political leadership on every level to support and promote this 10-year plan to end homelessness in Van Buren County.**

Community policies are essential to the success of any improvement plan

but a *successful plan* will also require the leadership of committed individuals willing to follow through with action steps that will turn goals into fact and practice. Making the difference in Van Buren County is the will of political leadership making that commitment to follow through with actions.

The issues below have been identified as contributing to gaps in service provision and create barriers to funding.

- Municipal policies with negative impact on affordable housing
- Lack of political will
- Unfair MSA reporting (Metropolitan Statistical Area)
- Lack of homeless visibility – leaders do not see or acknowledge issue
- Predatory lending practices
- Credit rating impact on employment opportunities

Other suggested actions

- Petition the county and every municipality and relevant authority to adopt the 10-year plan by official resolution
- Ensure each local area develops effective responses to homelessness
- Create Unified Housing Leadership
- Build a political agenda and community will to end homelessness for families, children, and youth.
- Address planning/zoning issues at local level that promote/obstruct development of supportive housing for homeless families.

- Develop and adopt state policies to end the discharge of institutionalized individuals directly to homeless facilities unprepared and unable to meet the supportive service needs of the individual.
- Provide effective leadership and coordination in the implementation of the plan
- Develop universal landlord/tenant lease agreement
- Encourage rental unit inspections and the passage of a rental ordinance
- Explore housing authorities for assistance (Bangor, South Haven, and Paw Paw)

Objective **Develop a countywide political leadership that will function and maintain itself over the 10-year period to lead a successful effort to end homelessness in Van Buren County.**

Action Step 1 **Increase efforts to include** local elected and appointed political leaders from all municipalities in Van Buren County as members of the Continuum of Care.

Project Leader: CoC Chair

Target Date: April 2007

Benchmark of Success: Completion and attendance at meeting in April

Comments: At least one representative from each municipality will participate directly on the CoC committee or one of its subcommittees by the end of 2007. The agencies and the governments currently participating in the CoC endorse this effort. The mix of political leadership will include elected and appointed members of cities, villages and townships, as well as the County Board of Commissioners. The mix of political leadership will also include members of housing commissions, transportation agencies, planning commissions, neighborhood watch organizations, tenant associations, and affordable housing developments or providers.

Objective **Provide legislative assistance for program or policy change as needed.**

- Action Step 1* **Develop draft model policies and ordinances** to enhance affordable housing within the county and its cities, villages and townships.
Project Leader: CoC to appoint subcommittee including local elected officials
Target Date: November 2007
Benchmark of Success: Model drafts prepared for review
- Action Step 2* **Advocate on behalf of the model policies and ordinances**, as well as for affordable housing development in Van Buren County.
Project Leader: CoC Chair
Target Date: Ongoing after November 2007
Benchmark of Success: Presentation of models to locals and County and adoption
- Action Step 3* **Develop draft model policies to enhance transportation services** within the county.
Project Leader: VB Public Transit director and board
Target Date: November 2007
Benchmark of Success: Models drafted
- Action Step 4* **Advocate on behalf of policies promoting transportation services**, as well as the development of transportation services in Van Buren County.
Project Leader: SWMPC, HSCC, Van Buren County Administrator
Target Date: When requested
Benchmark of Success: Improved level of service

Political Leadership in Van Buren County

Van Buren County has enjoyed political support from the following elected leaders. Their support to this plan is critical to its success. By meeting with service providers, consumers, community and municipal leaders, these legislators can better understand the important issues related to homelessness, service delivery, and future prevention programs. By working together, changes and improvements can be made to raise the quality of life for every resident of the county.

Van Buren County Legislators

<p>Tom George, State Senator District 20 SenTGeorge@senate.michigan.gov 320 Farnum Bldg. P.O. Box 30036 Lansing, MI 48909-7536</p> <p>District 20 includes: Kalamazoo County <i>Van Buren County (Part)</i> Antwerp Township Paw Paw Township</p>	<p>Tonya Schuitmaker, State Representative District 80 tonyaschuitmaker@house.mi.gov N1099 House Office Building P.O. Box 30014 Lansing, MI 48909-7514</p> <p>District 80 includes: Allegan County (Part) <i>Van Buren County</i></p>
<p>Ron Jelinek, State Senator District 21 senrjelinek@senate.michigan.gov 405 Farnum Building P.O. Box 30036 Lansing, MI 48909-7536</p> <p>District 21 includes: Berrien County Cass County <i>Van Buren County (Part)</i> Almena Township Arlington Township Bangor City Bangor Township Bloomingdale Township Columbia Township</p>	<p><i>Van Buren County (District 21 continued)</i> Covert Township Decatur Township Geneva Township Gobles City Hamilton Township Hartford City Hartford Township Keeler Township Lawrence Township Pine Grove Township Porter Township South Haven City (Part) South Haven Township Waverly Township</p>

**Fred Upton, Member, United States
Congress - District 6**
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District 6 includes:

Allegan County (Part)
Berrien County
Calhoun County (Part)
Cass County
Kalamazoo County
St. Joseph County
Van Buren County

Van Buren County Commissioners

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APPENDIX

Survey

The following survey questions were asked of Housing Continuum of Care members, Human Services Collaborative Council members, and other service providers. Information received was incorporated into the plan.

Name of Organization: _____

Address: _____

Contact person: _____

Phone numbers: _____

Email: _____

1. RESOURCE DATA

What resources do you use to provide **housing** assistance? This means any resource that has a direct correlation to the **housing** of your clients. *(The prevention of eviction, the provision of shelter, utilities, rental assistance/subsidies, or the purchase of a home)* For consistency in reporting, please use the following suggested format:

Questions	Samples of answers
A. Name of Program (s)	<i>Include initiatives, grants, donations, or foundations, etc.</i>
B. Funding Source	<i>State, Federal, local, private, other</i>
C. Type of assistance	<i>Vouchers, housing, shelter, other</i>
D. Level of assistance	<i>Full or partial payment assistance, long or short term, monetary or physical</i>
E. Eligibility requirements	<i>Gender, income, age, health, etc.</i>
F. Length of service	<i>One time assistance, long term assistance, 30-day, 6-month, unlimited, etc.</i>
G. Used resources - numbers of people served with each resource or with a particular service	<p><i>What data regarding housing assistance and homelessness do you maintain? For example: Do you have point in time counts, HMIS reports, year-end reports to grantors, discharge reports, follow-up reports, tracking data, client information system, or other?</i></p> <p><i>Please provide copies of these reports for grant year 2003, 2004, 2005, and year-to-date 2006 to be used in the data analysis phase of the plan. (Please do not provide any names or identifying personal information so that confidentiality may be strictly observed)</i></p>
H. Unused resources and why?	<i>Vouchers, money, rooms, houses, etc. Does assistance go unused? Why?</i>

2. HOW DOES IT WORK?

Please consider and evaluate each of the programs or resources you use in the following terms.

- *Does it work?*
- *Why does the delivery work? What/who makes it happen?*
- *Why does it not work? What are the barriers or gaps?*
- *How would you make it better?*

3. LOCATION vs. SERVICE AREA

What is your service area? (Berrien, Cass, Van Buren?) If you have a different service area for some of your assistance resources, please indicate which resources are limited to which geographic areas. Are there transportation issues?

Where are you located in relation to the majority of people you are trying to assist?

- *Are you in the same town, the same county, or are you more than 50 miles away?*
- *Is there public transportation to your office?*

4. IS THERE A STORY?

Understanding the stories behind the statistics provides valuable qualitative information. Are there typical scenarios and/or unusual anecdotes? Do you have a story with a successful outcome? Is there a story that clearly illustrates an unsuccessful outcome because of service gaps, challenges, or issues?

5. WHAT DOES IT COST?

What is the cost of homelessness? Do you have any specific monetary or non-monetary data?

What does it cost the county? What does it cost your municipality? What does it cost your agency/organization? What does it cost your department? Consider administrative costs if you make phone calls to assistance providers, etc.)

6. WHY DO WE HAVE HOMELESSNESS HERE?

There are plenty of national statistics, but why do the people you work with experience homelessness?

7. WHAT ELSE DO YOU KNOW THAT WOULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Very few questionnaires or surveys ask all the right questions - do you have any other information you would like to share?

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Staff of Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC), the regional planning agency for Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties, attended and facilitated meetings with the Van Buren County Housing Continuum of Care, the Human Services Collaborative Council, and the Advisory Board. These meetings provided knowledge of the current service delivery system and helped establish understanding of service gaps and the barriers to improved service provision. Public input was sought through presentations and small-group discussions at a well-advertised and well-attended countywide visioning session.

SWMPC staff attended conferences and seminars to gain knowledge of affordable housing and other related initiatives. Interviews and surveys of affiliated agency staff were conducted for the purpose of collecting data for analysis. Previously completed plans to end homelessness were also studied with useful and pertinent information referenced as resource material.

Van Buren County Resources
Excerpted from the
BERRIEN-CASS-VAN BUREN
COMMUNITY RESOURCE DIRECTORY
(Provided by Michigan Works)

ADULT EDUCATION-COLLEGE-EDUCATION-LITERACY-SCHOOLS & CAREER TRAINING

Hartford Public Schools-Adult Education-639-0359, 410 Erie St., South Haven

Paw Paw Community Education – 657-8830, 119 Johnson Street, Paw Paw

South Haven Public Schools - L C Mohr High School, Migrant Education
(269) 637-0574, 554 Green Street, South Haven

Van Buren Intermediate School District – 668-7452, 27857 Birmingham Ct. Paw Paw

Van Buren Intermediate School District Learning Center – 674-8091, 701 S. Paw Paw Street, Lawrence

Van Buren Intermediate School District - Learning Center – 674-8096
701 South Paw Paw Street, Lawrence

CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

Greater Decatur Chamber of Commerce – 423-7014, P.O. Box 211, Decatur

Greater Paw Paw Chamber of Commerce – 657-5395, P.O. Box 105, Paw Paw

Greater South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce – 637-5171, 606 Phillips St., South Haven

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Department of Human Services (DHS) – 621-2800

Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan – (269) 382-0490 (a non-profit organization that provides employment, education, and training services to people in their community).

Paw Paw - 655-1632, 309 East Michigan Avenue

Lion's Club - Paw Paw – 657-3444, CR 665

Paw Paw Area Rotary – 657-2223, 34462 First, Paw Paw (serving the Paw Paw, Mattawan, and Lawton areas) rotary@pawpawarearotary.com

Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency – 674-7175 or 800-968-3905 155 N. Paw Paw Street, Lawrence.

United Way – 657-2410, 181 West Michigan Avenue, Paw Paw

Van Buren County - Youth Services – 657-7711, 1007 Wells Street, South Haven

Van Buren Public Health Department – 621-3143

COUNSELING, SELF-HELP & SUPPORT GROUPS

Van Buren Mental Health – 657-5574 or 621-6251

Samaritan Center of Southwestern Michigan – 637-6236, 651 Phoenix St., South Haven

EMERGENCY SERVICES – DIAL 911

Adult Abuse HotLine – 800-992-6978

Child Abuse HotLine – 800-800-5556

Crisis Services (24-hour) – 1-800-922-1418

Crisis & Suicide Intervention Hotline – (574) 232-3344

Decatur Family Shelter – 925-9077, 30 days emergency shelter with follow-up case management. No single men).

Domestic Assault Crisis Hotline (24-hour) – 1-800-828-2023

Emergency Shelter, DASC – (269) 279-5122 (shelter for victims of abuse)

Emergency Shelter Services – 925-1131

Environmental Protection Agency – 800-424-8802

Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency – 445-3831 or (877) 474-6251 (assists people in economic need to achieve and sustain self-sufficiency. Programs to allow low-income individuals and families to own and maintain their own home. Emergency temporary housing).

Marcellus Area Assistance Program – 646-3439 or Emergency 646-9309 (helps the needy, senior citizens, people who are out of work, disabled, and those who find themselves in an emergency situation. No one is denied if they are low-income and live within the service area.

Michigan Poison Control Center – 800-764-7661

Poison Center – 800-632-2727

U.S. Marshall – (574) 236-8291

U.S. Secret Service – (317) 226-6444

United Way – First Call For Help – 800-310-5454

Women’s Resource & Referral – 800-82-WOMEN

FAMILY SERVICES

ADDvocate Center, Inc. – 782-9200

Adult Protective Services – 621-2800

Area Agency on Aging, Inc. – 1-800-442-2803

Ask a Nurse – 1-800-678-1092

Building Strong Families, MSU Extension – 445-8661 or 657-7745

Child & Family Services of Southwest Michigan – 925-1725, 1485 M-139

Child Care Resource/Day Care – 1-800-343-3470

Children’s Protective Services – 1-800-343-3470

Community Aids Resource & Education Services (CARES) – 1-800-944-2437

Domestic Violence Coalition – 1-888-655-9008

Family Support Network – 1-800-359-3722

Family Violence Prevention Help Line – 385-2869 or 385-3587

First Call for Help – 1-800-310-5454, (925-7707)

Gateway Family Violence Help Line – 1-800-996-6228 – Crisis line for domestic violence and the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable adults.

Grief & Loss – Call toll free 1-866-797-2277 (9am – 9pm daily)

Head start – 657-2581

Tri-County – 1-800-792-0366 (low-income children & families)

Healthy Kids & MI Child Insurance – 1-888-988-6300

National Immunization Information Hotline – 1-800-232-2522

No Means No – 1-877-666-3267 (24x7 – MI sexual assault hotline, 1x crisis intervention)

Parent Helpline – 1-8000-942-4357

Parent Information & Training Services – CAUSE – 1-517-347-2283

Parent Training & Information Centers “Cause” – (517) 347-2283

Poison Center – 1-800-632-2727

Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians Family Services – 1-800-517-0777

Pokagon Band of Pottawatomie Indians – 782-6323, 58620 Sink Road, Dowagiac
National Hopeline Network (Suicide threat) – 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)
RAINN (Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network) – 1-800-656-4673, National crisis line
The Link Crisis Intervention Center – 1-800-310-5454, 983-5465
Turning Point Substance Abuse Services – 616-235-1574, Boston Ave SE Grand Rapids
United Way - Emergency Fund - Denial from DHS
US Department of Health & Human Services – National Bi-lingual Community Health Helpline for Hispanic families – toll free – 1-866-783-2645
We Care, Inc. – 637-4342 (food diapers and milk, other essentials)
WIC Program – Women, Infants & Children under 5 – 621-2800, 427-7914
Van Buren County – Public Health Dept., 657-6052, 801 Hazen St., Paw Paw

FOOD / CLOTHING

Southwest Gleaners Food Bank – 983-7260 (is a branch warehouse of the Second Harvest Gleaners Food Bank of West Michigan, and they serve Berrien, Cass & Van Buren

HELP LINES

Adult Abuse Hotline – 1-800-992-6978
Alzheimer's Disease Education & Referral – 1-800-438-4380
American Diabetic Association – 1-800-366-1655
American Institute for Cancer Research – 1-800-843-8114
Child Abuse Hotline – 1-800-5556
Child Help USA Hotline – 1-800-422-4453
Children's Protective Services – 1-800-343-3470
Cocaine Problems – 1-800-COCAINE (262-2463)
Crisis & Suicide Intervention Hotline – 1-574-232-3344
Cystic Fibrosis Foundation – 1-800-344-4823
Domestic Assault Crisis Hotline (24-hour) – 1-800-828-2023
Domestic Violence Coalition – 1-888-655-9008
Down Syndrome Hotline – 1-800-221-4602
Drug Abuse Referral Hotline – 1-800-662-4357
Emergency Shelter Services – 925-1131
Environmental Protection Agency – 1-800-424-8802
Family Shelter – 423-9450, 210 E. Delaware, Decatur
Family Violence Prevention Help-Line – 385-2869 or 385-3587
First Call for Help – 1-800-231-4377 (temporary housing/legal/training)
Gateway Family Violence Help Line – 1-800-996-6228 – Crisis line for domestic violence and the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable adults.
Gateway Parent Help Line – 1-800-942-4357
Gateway RAP Line – 1-800-292-4517 (Runaway assistance, crisis intervention)
Gateway Sexual Assault Help Line – 1-877-666-3267
Multiple Sclerosis Foundation – 1-800-441-7055
National Adoption Center – 1-800-TOO-ADOPT
National AIDS Hotline – 1-800-342-AIDS
National Center for Missing & Exploited Children – 1-800-843-5678
National Council on Child Abuse & Family Violence – 1-800-222-2000
National Grief Recovery Hotline – 1-800-445-4808
National Health Information Center – 1-800-336-4797

National Hopeline Network (Suicide threat) – 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)
National Institute for Literacy's Hotline – 1-800-228-8813
National Literacy Hotline – 1-800-228-8813
National Lyme Disease Hotline – 1-800-886-LYME
National Mental Health Association – 1-800-433-5959
National Parkinson's Foundation – 1-800-327-4545
National Reye's Syndrome – 1-800-233-7393
Organ Donor Hotline – 1-800-24-DONOR
Orton Dyslexia Society – 1-800-ABCD-123
Prostate Information – 1-800-543-9632
RAINN (Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network)–1-800-656-4673, National crisis line
Runaway Hotline – 1-800-231-6946
Safe Shelter – 24 hour line – 983-4275
SIDS Alliance – 1-800-638-7437
Statewide Hotline for Vulnerable Adults – 1-800-996-6228 (elder abuse/neglect)
United Way – First Call For Help – 1-800-310-5454
Women's Resource and Referral – 1-800-WOMEN
Youth Crisis Hotline – 1-800-HIT-HOME

HOUSING

24-HOUR SHELTER – 1-800-ASHELTER (1-800-274-3583)
Department of Social Services (DHS) – 621-2800
Next Door Shelter in Decatur – 349-2119
Van Buren Shelter in Decatur – 423-9450
White Oaks Assisted Living – 624-4811, 300 White Oak, Lawton

JOB SEARCH & EMPLOYMENT SERVICE WEB SITES

Michigan Talent Bank	www.michworks.org
Michigan Works!	www.michiganworks.org
4Work	www.4work.com

MEDICAL CARE

ASK A NURSE – 1-800-678-1092
Inter Care Community Health – 427-7937
Medicaid Managed Care – (800) 642-3195
Van Buren Public Health Department – 621-3143

GENERAL CONTACTS

Family Violence Prevention Hotline – 1-800-996-6228

Mental Health Association in Michigan - 1-800-482-9534

Michiana Addiction Prevention Services – 651-1212 (Sturgis)

Michigan Association for Children with Emotional Disorders -248-552-0044

National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence -800-344-3400

National Hope Line Network (Suicide threat) – 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)

Public Health (Substance abuse) – 657-5596 or 621-3143

Turning Point Substance Abuse Services-616-235-1574, Boston Ave SE Grand Rapids

Van Buren County - Public Health Department, Drug & Alcohol Abuse Program
657-5596

Van Buren Mental Health – 657-5574 or 621-6251

Women's Resource & Referral Network – 1-800-829-6636

MIGRANT ASSISTANCE

Farm Worker Legal Services of Michigan – 1-800-968-4046

Head Start – Tri-County – 1-800-792-0366 (low-income children & families)

Michigan State University - 1-866-432-9900 (high school equivalency program (HEP), College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), GED and college enrollment).

Michigan Works! Berrien-Cass-Van Buren – 1-800-533-5800 (offers a full spectrum of employment and training programs and services designed to prepare youth and adults for entry into the labor force and to help individuals who are disadvantaged or who face serious barriers to employment obtain the training and skills necessary to get and keep a job. Programs offered include: Adult—Year-Round Youth Programs, Veterans, Migrants, Programs for Older Workers; Training and Readjustment Service for Dislocated Workers, Displaced Homemaker, School-to-Work/Career Preparation Programs).

Telamon Corporation – 655-9916 (emergency assistance to migrants and farm workers. Helps migrants and farm workers “settle out” (move into mainstream employment and stay in the area) by assisting with housing, transportation, childcare, etc. Based in Paw Paw and serves a number of counties, including Cass.

US Department of Health & Human Services – National Bi-lingual Community Health Helpline for Hispanic families – toll free – 1-866-783-2645

Amigos en Accion – 461-6737 (support for education and training of migrant students. Assistance to families who have settled out.

Dowagiac Union Schools, Migrant Education – 783-1322 (assistance for students to get their high school diploma and continue their education through college enrollment).

South Haven Public Schools - L C Mohr High School, Migrant Education
(269) 637-0574, 554 Green Street, South Haven

Southwest Michigan Migrant Resource Council – 445-3831 (networking and information sharing resources for migrant workers)

Telamon Migrant Head Start – 423-6137 (2 weeks to 5 years in Decatur)

SENIOR – ADULT SERVICES

White Oaks Assisted Living – 624-4811, 300 White Oak, Lawton

STATE & FEDERAL RESOURCES

America's Literacy Directory- www.literacydirectory.org *or* www.servicelocator.org

Attorney General Office – 517-373-1110 – www.ag.state.mi.us
Business Start-Up – 517-373-9017
Child Care Resource/Day Care – 1-800-343-3470
Department of Veterans Affairs – 1-800-827-1000, www.va.gov
 Register your DD-214 at this web-site
Disability Resource Center – 345-1516, 517 East Cross-Town Parkway, Kalamazoo
Farm Worker Legal Services of Michigan – 1-800-968-4046
Healthy Kids & MI Child Insurance – 1-888-988-6300
Michigan Association for Children with Emotional Disorders – 1-248-552-0044
Michigan Association for Deaf, Hearing & Speech Services – 1-800-968-7327
Michigan Association of United Ways - 1-517-371-4360
Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns – 1-877-499-5932
Michigan Council on Crime & Delinquency - 1-517-482-4161
Michigan Department of Career Development – **517-241-4000**
 www.TalentFreeway.org (career planning, job search, one-stop)
 BeeFreeway (e-education, on-line training courses for business)
 Career Education Consumer Report (shop for education & training)
 Internship Center (high school and post-secondary internship matching)
Michigan Education Development Plan (organize training/education goals)
Michigan Occupational Information System (middle/high school students)
Michigan Talent Bank (comprehensive job-matching system)
Michigan State University (High School Equivalency Program (HEP), College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), GED and college enrollment, 1-866-432-9900
Michigan Virtual University - 517-336-7733 – Web-based training course, Lansing
Michigan Department of Civil Rights – 1-313-256-2663 – www.mdcr.state.mi.us
Michigan League for Human Services – 1-517-487-5436
Michigan Legal Services – 1-313-964-4130
Michigan Protection & Advocacy Service – 800-288-5923 – www.mpas.org
Michigan Rehabilitation Services – 1-800-605-6722 (voice), 1-888-605-6722 (TTY) 185 Main Street, Benton Harbor
Michigan State University Extension Family Program–925-4822, 1737 Hillandale Rd
Michigan Unemployment Agency – 925-1118
Michigan Virtual University – 517-336-7733 – Web-based training course, Lansing
Michigan Works! Service Centers – 1-800-285-WORKS
 Child Care Resources – 1-800-343-3470
 Displaced Homemaker Program
 Migrant & Seasonal Farm Workers
 Non-Custodial Parent (NCP)
 Partnership for Adult Learning (PAL)
 Telemon Corporation
 Food Assistance Program
 Work First
 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Adult Program
 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Dislocated Worker Program
 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Services for Workers – plant closures, lay-offs
 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth Program
National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence – 1-800-344-3400
National Institute for Literacy's Hotline – 1-800-228-8813

Office of Special Education & Early Intervention Services

Birth through 2: 1-517-373-6335

Ages 3 through 5: 1-517-373-8215

State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency – 1-517-373-3391

Statewide Hotline for Vulnerable Adults – 1-800-996-6228 (elder abuse/neglect)

United Negro College Fund – 1-313-965-5550

Veterans Network (lots of information) – www.veteran.net

Benefits on-line – <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp>

Outpatient Clinic – 2nd Floor Mercy Hospital, Benton Harbor

Small business administration – www.va.gov/OSDBU/vetctr.html

UTILITIES – ASSISTANCE

The Heat & Warmth Fund (THAW) – Applicants calling Tel-Help at (313) 226-9888 or 1-800-552-1183 are referred to a community action agency in their area. Calls are also taken at 1-800-866-THAW.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

Michigan Rehabilitation Services – 1-800-605-6722 (voice), 888-605-6722 (TTY)

State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency – 517-373-3391

American Cancer Society – 517-263-2317, Adrian

American Diabetes Association – 1-800-DIABETES

American Lung Association of Michigan – 1-248-359-5864 or 212-315-8700

Americans with Disabilities (ADA) – 1-800-729-2253 or 800-699-3362

Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired – 458-1187, www.abvimichigan.org

Autism Society of Michigan – 1-800-223-6722

Division on Deafness – 1-877-499-6232, www.mfia.state.mi.us/mcdc/dod.htm

Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan – 1-800-377-6226 (evaluation, testing, diagnosis and treatment of Attention Deficit Disorder and disorders in children and adults.

Mental Health Association in Michigan – 1-800-482-9534

Michigan Association for Children with Emotional Disorders – 1-248-552-0044

Michigan Association for Deaf, Hearing & Speech Services – 1-800-968-7327

Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns – 1-877-499-5932

Michigan Rehabilitation Services – 1-800-605-6722 (voice), 1-888-605-6722

National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence – 1-800-344-3400

National Hopeline Network (Suicide threat) – 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)

National Kidney Foundation of Michigan – 1-800-482-1455

State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency – 1-517-373-3391

2000 Population Density by Municipality					
				Density per square mile of land area	
Geographic area	Population	Housing Units	Total Area (Square Miles)	Population	Housing Units
Van Buren County	76,263	33,975	1090.2	124.8	55.6
Almena Township	4,226	1,633	34.8	122.6	47.4
Antwerp Township	10,813	3,968	35.1	309.9	113.7
Lawton Village	1,859	668	2.3	823.0	295.7
Mattawan Village	2,536	1,024	4.1	615.4	248.5
Paw Paw Village (part)	91	50	0.0	2167.6	1191.0
Remainder of Antwerp Township	6,327	2,226	28.7	222.2	78.2
Arlington Township	2,075	943	35.0	60.1	27.3
Bangor City	1,933	804	1.9	995.4	414.0
Bangor Township	2,121	942	34.5	62.9	27.9
Bloomington Township	3,364	1,461	35.1	98.7	42.9
Bloomington Village	528	206	1.1	469.5	183.2
Remainder of Bloomington Township	2,836	1,255	34.0	86.1	38.1
Columbia Township	2,714	1,433	35.5	79.6	42.0
Breedsville Village	235	85	0.7	350.7	126.9
Remainder of Columbia Township	2,479	1,348	34.8	74.1	40.3
Covert Township	3,141	1,683	35.0	89.8	48.1
Decatur Township	3,916	1,611	35.5	111.3	45.8
Decatur Village	1,838	792	1.2	1599.1	689.1
Remainder of Decatur Township	2,078	819	34.4	61.0	24.1
Geneva Township	3,975	1,567	35.3	112.5	44.4
Gobles City	815	333	1.0	786.9	321.5
Hamilton Township	1,797	723	35.6	52.1	21.0
Hartford City	2,476	1,023	1.4	1805.6	746.0
Hartford Township	3,159	1,183	33.8	93.7	35.1
Keeler Township	2,601	1,562	35.0	76.5	45.9
Lawrence Township	3,341	1,516	35.9	95.4	43.3
Lawrence Village	1,059	434	1.8	600.4	246.1
Remainder of Lawrence Township	2,282	1,082	34.1	68.6	32.5
Paw Paw Township	7,091	3,248	37.0	201.4	92.2
Paw Paw Village (part)	3,272	1,461	2.8	1248.0	557.3
Remainder of Paw Paw Township	3,819	1,787	34.2	117.2	54.8
Pine Grove Township	2,773	1,123	35.0	80.5	32.6
Porter Township	2,406	1,380	35.4	72.3	41.4
South Haven City (part)	5,013	2,958	3.5	1467.9	866.2
South Haven Charter Township	4,046	1,890	17.5	230.7	107.8
Waverly Township	2,467	991	34.4	72.3	29.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1

Support Letters

FRED UPTON
6TH DISTRICT, MICHIGAN

**ENERGY AND COMMERCE
COMMITTEE**

CHAIRMAN, TELECOMMUNICATIONS
AND THE INTERNET SUBCOMMITTEE
COMMERCE, TRADE AND CONSUMER
PROTECTION SUBCOMMITTEE
HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE



**Congress of the United States
House of Representatives**

☐ **DC OFFICE:**
2183 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE
WASHINGTON, DC 20511
(202) 225-3761
FAX: (202) 225-496

☐ **MICHIGAN HOME OFFICE**
157 SOUTH KALAMAZOO MAL
KALAMAZOO, MI 490
(269) 385-0039
FAX: (269) 385-286

800 CENTRE, SUITE 1
800 SHIP STREET
ST. JOSEPH, MI 490
(269) 982-1966
FAX: (269) 982-022

www.house.gov/up
E-MAIL: tellupton@mail.h

September 6, 2006

Ms. Shelley Klug
Southwestern Michigan Commission
185 E. Main Street, Suite 701
Benton Harbor, MI. 49022

Dear Ms. Klug:

This letter is in strong support of the Van Buren County 10-year plan to end homelessness.

The most cost effective manner to deal with this issue is through aggressive prevention strategies. I applaud efforts to provide outreach services to at-risk families. In addition, the availability of safe and affordable housing is an important component, along with a streamlined delivery of services, improved economic and educational achievements, and an adequate funding stream.

The partnerships formed through the planning process also provide a collaborative approach that will improve these important community systems.

Again, I strongly support these efforts to combat homelessness, and will offer support and assistance to end homelessness in our community.

Very truly yours,

Fred Upton
Member of Congress

FSU:alp



RON JELINEK
MAJORITY CAUCUS VICE-CHAIR
21ST DISTRICT
P.O. BOX 30036
LANSING, MI 48909-7536
PHONE: (517) 373-6960
TOLL-FREE: (866) 305-2121
FAX: (517) 373-0897
senrjelinek@senate.michigan.gov

THE SENATE
STATE OF MICHIGAN

MEMBER, SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
CHAIR, K-12 SCHOOL AID/EDUCATION
SUBCOMMITTEE
CHAIR, COMMUNITY COLLEGES
SUBCOMMITTEE
VICE CHAIR, AGRICULTURE SUBCOMMITTEE
MEMBER, NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE
MEMBER, POLICY COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND TOURISM

September 12, 2006

Shelley Klug
Southwestern Michigan Commission
185 East Main Street, Suite 701
Benton Harbor, MI 49022

To Whom It May Concern:

Homelessness. Everyone wants to stop it but in the past we have "short-term fixes" that haven't really addressed the problem and how to eradicate this in our state and country. I strongly support Michigan's initiative to come up with a long-range plan to end homelessness so it is an honor to express my support of the Van Buren County 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.

As a legislator I recognize the value found in the goal statements contained in this plan. Preventing homelessness before it occurs is of the utmost importance because it is the most cost effective and efficient method in solving this problem. We must make the availability of safe and affordable housing an important component of this plan as well as the streamlining of the programs that deliver needed services through improved economic and educational achievements. We must also supply adequate funding, and where necessary – policy change.

It is my intent to closely follow the progress of the 10-year action plan and to offer my assistance and support and legislative action when needed. After reviewing the plan I agree with the vision contained in the plan and that is this: Even one homeless person in Van Buren County is one too many.

Sincerely,

RON JELINEK
State Senator



TOM GEORGE

20TH DISTRICT
P.O. BOX 30036
LANSING, MI 48909-7536
PHONE: (517) 373-0793
TOLL FREE: (866) 305-2120
FAX: (517) 373-5607
sentgeorge@senate.michigan.gov

**THE SENATE
STATE OF MICHIGAN****COMMITTEES:**

APPROPRIATIONS:
HISTORY, ARTS, AND LIBRARIES (C)
CAPITAL OUTLAY (VC)
COMMERCE, LABOR AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (VC)
COMMUNITY HEALTH (VC)
FAMILY INDEPENDENCE
AGENCY (VC)
HEALTH POLICY
MICHIGAN CAPITOL COMMITTEE (C)

September 14, 2006

Shelly Klug
Southwestern Michigan Commission
185 East Main Street, Suite 701
Benton Harbor, MI 49022

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of the Van Buren County 10-year Plan to End Homelessness.

Recognizing the need for a change, Van Buren County rose to the challenge of ending homelessness in their area. After much study and planning they devised a plan focusing on prevention.

I intend to follow the progress of the Van Buren County 10-year Plan and am pleased to offer my support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Tom George'.

Tom George
State Senator
20th District



LakeView Hospital Board
RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, every day there are men, women and children in Van Buren County who do not have a place they can call home; and

WHEREAS, Van Buren County should not ignore homeless people in our community; and

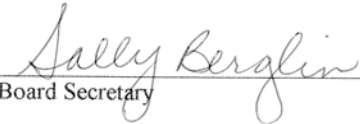
WHEREAS, treating people who have already become homeless is far more expensive than preventing homelessness; and

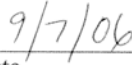
WHEREAS, a plan to end homelessness in Van Buren County has been developed; and

WHEREAS, the plan focuses on treating the causes of homelessness, and provides opportunities for unprecedented collaboration between the private, public and non-profit spheres; and

WHEREAS, the LakeView Hospital Board is supportive of the efforts to end homelessness in this community.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that this Board endorses and supports the Van Buren County Plan to End Homelessness in the next Decade.


Board Secretary


Date

LakeView Hospital Board
RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, every day there are men, women and children in Van Buren County who do not have a place they can call home; and

WHEREAS, Van Buren County should not ignore homeless people in our community; and

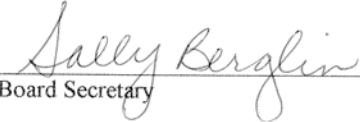
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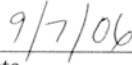
WHEREAS, a plan to end homelessness in Van Buren County has been developed; and

WHEREAS, the plan focuses on treating the causes of homelessness, and provides opportunities for unprecedented collaboration between the private, public and non-profit spheres; and

WHEREAS, the LakeView Hospital Board is supportive of the efforts to end homelessness in this community.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that this Board endorses and supports the Van Buren County Plan to End Homelessness in the next Decade.


Board Secretary


Date

ALMENA TOWNSHIP
27625 CR 375
PAWPAW, MI 49079

Telephone: (269) 668-6910
Fax: (269) 668-6913

Doug Stiles, Supervisor
Josephine Burns, Clerk
Wayne Nelson, Treasurer

September 11, 2006

To Whom It May Concern:

Recognizing the value of Michigan's statewide initiative to end homelessness, it is an honor to express Almena Township's support of the Van Buren County 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.

Leaders of Almena Township recognize the value found in the goal statements within the plan. Preventing homelessness before it occurs is of utmost importance because it is the most cost effective and efficient method. The availability of safe and affordable housing is also an important component as is streamlined service delivery, relevant service programs, improved economic and educational achievements, adequate funding, and where necessary -- policy change.

It is the intent of Almena Township to actively participate when possible and to facilitate steps as needed to keep the progress of the 10-year action plan moving forward.

The leaders and residents of this community agree with the expressed vision in the plan that even one homeless person in Van Buren County is one too many.

Sincerely,

Almena Township Board



Doug Stiles
Supervisor, Almena Township

ALMENA TOWNSHIP

27625 CR 375

PAWPAW, MI 49079

Telephone: (269) 668-6910

Fax: (269) 668-6913

Doug Stiles, Supervisor

Josephine Burns, Clerk

Wayne Nelson, Treasurer

RESOLUTION OF SUPPORT

Whereas, Almena Township believes all of its residents should enjoy the opportunity to live in peace and safety; and

Whereas, measures designed to prevent homelessness before it occurs will provide the most efficient and effective means to stop homelessness in Almena Township; and

Whereas, safe, affordable, permanent housing is an essential component of strong families and communities; and

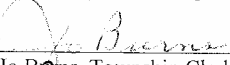
Whereas, breaking the cycle of poverty and homelessness requires innovation and commitment to action; and

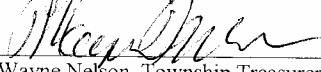
Whereas, the collaboration of governmental units, human service providers, business owners, housing providers, educational institutions, economic developers, and individual citizens will have a profoundly positive impact on the overall quality of life in Almena Township; and

Whereas, we are dedicated to ending homelessness, we support and endorse the Van Buren County 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.

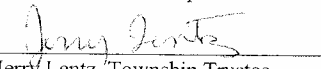

Doug Stiles, Township Supervisor


Sept. 12, 2006
Date

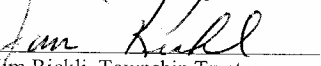

Jo Burns, Township Clerk


Wayne Nelson, Township Treasurer


Marv Flick, Township Trustee


Jerry Lentz, Township Trustee


Jim Manning, Township Trustee


Jim Rickli, Township Trustee



24221 Front Avenue
Mattawan, MI 49071

September 11, 2006

To Whom It May Concern:

Recognizing the value of Michigan's statewide initiative to end homelessness, it is an honor to express the Village of Mattawan's support of the Van Buren County 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.

Leaders of the Village of Mattawan recognize the value found in the goal statements within the plan. Preventing homelessness before it occurs is the utmost importance because it is the most cost effective and efficient method. The availability of safe and affordable housing is also an important component as is streamlined service delivery, relevant service programs, improved economic and educational achievements, adequate funding, and where necessary – policy change.

It is the intent of the Village of Mattawan to actively participate when possible and facilitate steps as needed to keep the progress of the 10-year action plan moving forward.

The leaders and residents of this community agree with the expressed vision in the plan that even one homeless person in Van Buren County is one too many.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Terri McLean', is written over a horizontal line.

Terri McLean
Village President
Village of Mattawan

Village Office: (269) 668-2128 • FAX: (269) 668-4324 • E-Mail: offices@mattawanmi.com • Police Department: (269) 668-3661

This Institution is an Equal Opportunity Provider

**Village of Mattawan
Resolution of Support**

Whereas, the Village of Mattawan believes all of its residents should enjoy the opportunity to live in peace and safety; and

Whereas, measures designed to prevent homelessness before it occurs will provide the most efficient and effective means to stop homelessness in the Village of Mattawan; and

Whereas, safe, affordable, permanent housing is an essential component of strong families and communities; and

Whereas, breaking the cycle of poverty and homelessness requires innovation and commitment to action; and

Whereas, the collaboration of governmental units, human service providers, business owners, housing providers, educational institutions, economic developers, and individual citizens will have a profoundly positive impact on the overall quality of life in the Village of Mattawan; and

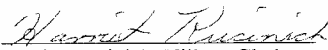
Now, therefore, let it be resolved by the Village of Mattawan Council to support and endorse the Van Buren County 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.

YEAS: Kucinich, Kirklin, Slane, McLean, Hatzinikolis, Phillips, Smith

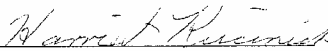
NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Resolution Declared Adopted.


Harriet Kucinich, Village Clerk

I hereby certify that the foregoing constitutes a true and complete copy of a resolution adopted by the Village Council of the Village of Mattawan, County of Van Buren, Michigan, at a regular meeting held on September 11, 2006.


Harriet Kucinich, Village Clerk

**Resolution
of the
Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency
Board of Directors**

Whereas everyday there are men, women and children in Berrien, Cass and Van Buren Counties who do not have a place they can call home; and

Whereas we should not ignore the homeless people in our communities; and

Whereas it is more cost effective to prevent homelessness than to treat people who have already become homeless; and

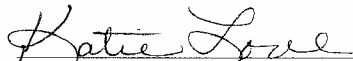
Whereas the Continuums of Care in SMCAA's service area of Berrien, Cass and Van Buren Counties in cooperation and coordination with the local Community Collaborative and other agencies and organizations have developed plans to end homelessness; and

Whereas these plans focus on treating the causes of homelessness and providing opportunities for unprecedented collaboration between the private, public and non-profit sectors; and

Whereas the SMCAA Board of Directors is dedicated to ending homelessness in the communities we serve.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Board endorses and supports the 10 Year Plans to End Homelessness that have been developed and adopted in the Counties of Berrien, Cass and Van Buren.

Adopted by the SMCAA Board of Directors on September 20th, 2006


Katie Love, Secretary



VAN BUREN INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT

VBISD.org

Jeffrey C. Mills
Superintendent

October 3, 2006

Ms. Shelley Klug
Southwestern Michigan Commission
185 E. Main Street
Benton Harbor, MI 49022

Dear Ms. Klug:

I am writing this letter to express support of the Van Buren County 10-year plan to end homelessness.

The Van Buren Intermediate School District's mission statement is to "Provide Educational Services for a Better Tomorrow". Our mission statement is, therefore, a perfect fit for Goal 5 of the 10-year plan: **To Reduce Poverty and Improve the Educational and Skills Capacity of the Current and Future Workforce of Van Buren County.**

The Van Buren Intermediate School District will continue to partner with many other agencies through the planning and implementation stages of the 10-year plan. We have responsibility for the homeless under the McKinney-Vento act and embrace all populations with regard to both mandated and elective educational opportunities.

We look forward to continued partnership and will continue to provide innovative educational opportunities to the citizens of Van Buren County in an effort to provide economic success and independence for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeffrey C. Mills'.

Jeffrey C. Mills, Superintendent
Van Buren Intermediate School District

490 South Paw Paw Street, Lawrence MI 49064 • Phone: 269.674.8091
Special Services Fax: 269.674.8726 • VBTC Fax: 269.674.8954 • VBISD Conference Center Fax: 269.674.8030
Michigan Relay Center 1.800.649.3777 (Voice and TDD)

The Van Buren Intermediate School District is in compliance with State and Federal laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, weight, height, or marital status, arrest record, or genetic information, handicapping condition or disability.

October 12, 2006

To whom it may concern,

Van Buren Community Mental Health Authority whole heartedly embraces the collaborative effort between itself, the Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency, Van Buren County Department of Human Services, the Domestic Violence Coalition, the District Health Department and all other parties involved in creating a 10 year plan to end homelessness in Van Buren County. This consortium of organizations has come together to plan a continuum of housing options adequate to meet the needs of the diverse residents of this county. The plan includes the design, development, implementation and maintenance of an accessible, affordable, available, robust, complete housing continuum open to those that may not be eligible for more traditional housing options.

Both management and supportive services provided by all partners will help to ensure a good fit within the existing and proposed housing culture and will strive to make this enterprise a valued resource matched with a positive reputation as viewed by both users and the general community.

The reality of having mentally ill individuals residing within all communities has existed for nearly 30 years. This is partially the result of the process of deinstitutionalization; and for the most part has been without incident. Home ownership, foster care facilities, room and board, apartment, semi-independent living, and other variegated housing options all represent the continuum of living arrangements needed by those with mental illness and those without it. This particular long term collaborative project between the above named parties and all other parties is premised on prevention, service system coordination, education and political will to name a few. Substantial, and sustained commitment to the plan has already been demonstrated and is expected to continue. Multiple organizations' efforts are critical to the execution of this 10 year plan and will help to ensure that normalization, integration, and inclusion within the community is accomplished successfully and effectively.

Cordially,

John Clement
CEO

City of Hartford

19 West Main St. • Hartford, Michigan 49057



Telephone: (269) 621-2477

Fax: (269) 621-2054

www.hartfordmi.com

October 13, 2006

Shelley Klug
Southwestern Michigan Commission
185 East Main Street, Suite 701
Benton Harbor, Michigan 49022

To Whom It May Concern:

10 - YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS

Recognizing the value of Michigan's statewide initiative to end homelessness, it is an honor to express the City of Hartford's support for the Van Buren County 10-year Plan to end Homelessness.

The City Commission of the City of Hartford recognizes the value found in the goal statements within the plan. Preventing homelessness before it occurs is of utmost importance because it is the most cost effective and efficient method. The availability of safe and affordable housing is also an important component as is streamlined service delivery, relevant service programs, improved economic and educational achievements, adequate funding and where necessary – policy change.

It is the intent of the City of Hartford to actively participate when possible and to facilitate steps as needed to keep the progress of the 10-year action plan moving forward.

The City commission of the City of Hartford on behalf of its residents agrees with the expressed vision in the plan that even one homeless person in Van Buren County is one too many.

Sincerely,


Yemi Akinwale
City Manager
cc: City File

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