



Governor's Proposed Budget FY16-FY17
Appropriations Hearing, Conservation and Development
Department of Housing
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Middletown

Meriden-Middlesex County-Wallingford Coordinated Access Network

On December 16th of 2015 over 250 people filled the pews at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Middletown, CT. to honor those in our community of homeless persons who lost their lives during 2015. Sadly, fifteen names were read. This long time annual event used to be attended by a handful of social service providers and housing activists but in recent years the event has become owned by those who are the experts, the homeless community that suffers from this unnecessary affliction. As is the custom at this event, one by one men and women stood and stated their name and bravely shared publically that they were homeless. But this year something changed; more and more of those who stood were sharing happy endings! One man announced that "today, after eleven years of being homeless, I got the keys to my apartment." Another said he was the recipient of a voucher and services and would soon be housed. All who sat in that space on that day felt the shift; more and more we heard about positive outcomes, housing, services and futures that had or were about to be changed for the better. In my years of working in the field of housing and homelessness I finally felt that all the efforts that I and my colleagues have been involved with on a state level and on a local level were paying off. Ending homelessness, especially for the expensive and complicated chronic population was finally happening.

The Meriden, Middlesex and Wallingford Coordinated Access Network (M-Mx-W CAN), has forged new ground in providing a front door into a housing system that is efficient, fair, and inclusive. Creating this system within a region that is not necessarily geographically or demographically connected was possible because the Department of Housing provided the absolutely necessary funding to allow for coordination to take place. Just as I felt that local providers were on their knees with exhaustion from the task of developing a complex collaborative system on top of their already intense work schedules DOH offered the critical financial assistance that was the difference between success and dismal failure. Systems change is happening at a rate never before imagined; it is complex, time consuming, challenging and creative; maintaining financial support in the numbers suggested by the Reaching Home Campaign is utterly necessary to provide the foundation for the new system to take root and thrive.

In Middlesex County, our Coordinated Access Network (CAN) now includes our local hospital. Middlesex Memorial Hospital has totally embraced the concept that housing must be part of the treatment plan for its patients, particularly those who suffer from chronic mental health and addiction problems; the staff knows that it is not only humane but it is also cost effective to do so. Hospital staff have become trained in completing CAN intakes and assessments and in entering the results into the statewide data base HMIS. Most importantly, a bond has been creating between the housing community and the medical community that expands our collective goal and reach.

At St. Vincent de Paul Middletown (SVDM) the permanent supportive housing model known as *Housing First* has been practiced with a seriousness that is exemplary in the field for many years and with great success. Now, SVDM is working collaboratively with all of the region's housing providers to make sure that the standards employed at SVDM are practiced throughout our region. The interagency visibility and accountability is a game changer in moving the numbers toward zero. As a region we are housing those who have the deepest need, the most years of homelessness and who are the highest cost to the community, first. As part of the Zero: 2016 Campaign the M-Mx-W CAN is systematically housing our most vulnerable people at a faster rate and holding all of our agencies accountable to a high standard of quality. Maintaining a sufficient supply of housing vouchers and support service dollars is the only thing that could stand in the way of wiping out chronic homelessness in the current year. It is an opportunity that must be taken if we are to reduce the costs associated with homelessness in future budgets.