Suburban Homelessness Action Plan for Eastern Jackson County

November 11, 2022

Introduction

There are homeless people in urban, suburban, and rural areas across the United States. However, people often think of homelessness as an urban issue to be managed by urban communities. Some may think of homeless people as unemployed, disheveled in appearance, and likely carrying all their belongings in bags on their person or in a shopping cart that travels with them wherever they go. Regardless, homeless people can also be employed, work in offices and other venues, and look like the average housed person. An unhoused person could be living on the street alone, with friends, and/or with family members, including children. They could be spending nights in their cars, staying at friends' or loved ones' homes for a few days or weeks, or temporarily staying in a shelter (if one were available to them).

A person or family could be homeless for any number of reasons or situations. Some may have become homeless due to unforeseen circumstances, such as layoffs at their jobs and rent or house payments that could not be met, resulting in eviction or foreclosure. Others could be escaping domestic abuse or other unhealthy household and home conditions. Some could be struggling with mental and behavioral health concerns, or substance abuse. There are also homeless people working jobs, trying to save enough money to move from the street, their car, a loved ones' home, or emergency shelter into an apartment or house of their own. Further, as Carolyn Whitney, Executive Director of Sisters in Christ (Raytown, Missouri), pointed out, "If you don't have a house and you don't have a car, then you have nowhere to sleep and you have to sleep out on the street."

The factors and circumstances that contribute to homelessness are complex and varied. It is also difficult to know exactly how many homeless people are in a community at a specific time. According to the January 2022 Point-in-Time Count from the Greater Kansas City Coalition to End Homelessness, which serves Jackson and Wyandotte Counties, there were 711 unsheltered people, 386 in emergency shelter, and 469 in transitional housing in Jackson County, Missouri. Single adults, chronically homeless, families with children, youth (18 to 24 years of age) and single veterans make up the County's unsheltered, emergency shelter, and transitional homeless population. Single adults, chronically homeless, and families with children are the top three types of homeless populations in 2022[1].

The number of unsheltered people in Jackson County grew from 243 in 2019 to 711 in 2022—an increase of 192%. The growth is partially connected to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. It caused shutdowns that impacted households everywhere. No longer able to work, lacking emergency resources, and dealing with health crises, or other concerns, more people became homeless. Cities across the country, including suburban Jackson County communities, saw people living outside in encampments, moving in with friends or family members, searching for emergency shelters, and more.

In response, five cities in the Eastern Jackson County Shared Services Initiative—Blue Springs, Grandview, Independence, Lee's Summit, and Raytown—reached out to the Mid-America

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[1] ***Zero KC: A Plan for Ending Homelessness in Kansas City***. City of Kansas City, August 2022, https://www.kcmo.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/9034. Accessed October 11, 2022.

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Regional Council (MARC) during summer 2022 to help brainstorm an action plan that they could use to help tackle suburban homeless in Eastern Jackson County together. Vireo provided planning, engagement, and research support for the effort. They incorporated the outcomes into the engagement activities, guiding principles, goals, strategies, and priorities described on pages 2-15 of this document. Detailed engagement findings and noteworthy case studies are included in the Appendix.

Engagement and Research Process

The process to develop the action plan began during August and concluded October 2022. It involved collaborative discussions with municipal staff and officials along with community organizations who have administrative and/or on-the-ground experience working with each cities' homeless residents. Specific engagement activities included interviews, a workshop, and a presentation to the City Managers Roundtable.

Stakeholder Interviews

Twelve (12) small group and/or individual stakeholder interviews were held during August 2022 via Zoom. MARC invited stakeholders with expertise in unhoused needs and services within Eastern Jackson County, specifically focusing on Blue Springs, Grandview, Independence, Lee's Summit, and Raytown, to participate. They shared the invitation with elected/appointed officials, municipal staff, law enforcement personnel, social service agency representatives, faith-based leaders, physical and mental healthcare professionals, persons with lived experiences, neighborhood leaders, school district leadership and/or personnel, and others. During the interviews, they discussed:

- Community-specific views of homelessness.
- Needs, available services and supports, and existing gaps.
- Community engagement experiences and recommendations.
- Initial ideas on potential solutions and opportunities to explore.
- Other comments and ideas.

Common themes from the interviews involved:

- **Needs and Gaps:** Although various resources exist in each municipality, interviewees commented that needs and gaps related to:

    o Mental health resources.

    o Affordable and/or attainable housing.

    o Resources that could help families at risk of homelessness pay housing costs in order to stay housed.

    o Hotels or other properties serving as shelters for unhoused individuals and families.

    o Transportation assistance to get people to work or to essential services.

    o Public health and safety resources for unhoused populations.

- Strategies for delivering essential services to unhoused individuals who frequently seek assistance (also known locally as "high utilizers") with non-life-threatening needs.

- City-specific data on homelessness.

- Difficulties gaining buy-in, political support, and funding due to lack of supporting data, public resources, or understanding about potential solutions.

- Faith-based organizations providing food and essential items, but not shelter or stabilizing services.

- Crime and public safety issues, such as tent cities and trash clean up, connected with homelessness and impacting both law enforcement and emergency response resources.

- **Opportunities to collaborate:** Stakeholders saw several opportunities where they could work together including:

  - Bringing decision-makers— Jackson County and the five jurisdictions—to the table, so they can be educated (and trained) about homelessness, the extent of the communities' homelessness problem, solutions for responding to it in a collaborative fashion, and the need for accountability on commitments made.

  - Coordinating and pooling resources through the Eastern Jackson County Shared Services Initiative as a political tool and mechanism for receiving and sharing funding, resources, and lessons learned as well as assistance from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) since three of the five jurisdiction are entitlement cities.

  - Appointment of leadership who will work as a team to consider the best practices utilized in other suburban communities responding to homelessness; explore a range of solutions (no cost, low cost, and beyond); hold courageous community conversations about the issues and collaborative strategies for addressing them; and work toward implementing a strategic action plan for addressing homelessness in Eastern Jackson County.

  - Coordinating communication and education efforts in a way that shares information across all five jurisdictions, making sure the materials describe available resources and include contact persons for them.

  - Establishing partnerships that have an informational and educational focus, so the idea of "what's really needed" for Eastern Jackson County's homeless residents is communicated to the public and municipal leadership. Real needs involve providing basic household necessities, making available indoor and safe places to sleep at night, helping people re-establish themselves when hard times strike, and more within an understanding and supportive environment.

  - Improving continuity in terms of intake and Continuum of Care while continuing to find thoughtful ways to care for veterans, other individuals, and families within the system. Through the process, endeavor to understand and communicate across all five jurisdictions the types of services, e.g. mental and physical health, legal, and otherwise, that are needed; where homeless populations are living; and the resources needed to address their needs. Ease the intake process by making it

possible for an individual or household to fill out only one application when applying for assistance.

- o Identifying locations for drop-in centers where unhoused populations can obtain supplies for meeting their basic needs, utilize assistance services for locating housing, and/or access supports to help get them back on their feet. Consider and explore opportunities to develop a regional facility that pools homelessness resources from all five municipalities into one place and thereby expands the potential reach of any funding allocated for them. When feasible, incorporate emergency shelters into the proposed regional service location. Note: The [Guesthouse from Turning Point](#) in Gladstone, Missouri, is a local example of a drop-in center. It provides case management, computer and internet access, laundry facilities, meals, and more.

- o Bringing together school districts and local governments. By working with and through school districts, municipalities may be able to affect change in homeless issues across their corporate limits. School districts could also be part of a multi-jurisdiction consortium focused on addressing Eastern Jackson County's homelessness issues.

- o Advocating for a categorized regional database of unhoused people, the care they receive, and available resources for them. The database should also include other data, such as landlord contact information and particular types of hard-to-house people.

- o Collaborating with faith-based and community organizations by engaging them in the search for funding sources that could benefit both the cities and the organizations and potentially increase the number of homeless people served in each community.

- o Utilizing communications and/or public relations experts to help the five municipalities elevate public awareness about homelessness in Eastern Jackson County, drawing attention to: the fact that anyone could become homeless; efforts being used to respond to the needs of unhoused populations; obstacles affecting the success of efforts taken to respond to homelessness; and what can be done to improve outcomes.

- o Expanding inter-agency collaboration. Comprehensive Mental Health Services and the cities of Blue Springs and Independence have been successfully coordinated and could be expanded to the other municipalities. Similarly, ReDiscover coordinates closely with Grandview, Raytown, and Lee's Summit. If resources are limited, collaborative relationships could be focused on serving unhoused individuals and groups who are most in need of assistance.

- o Identifying transportation funding assistance, e.g. to support ridesharing, for unhoused persons that can be used when they lack access to services.

- **Housing:** More residential development, including multifamily units, are necessary. However, they need to be what residents will support. Many suburban residents view multifamily housing and very small homes unfavorably. Regardless, housing types that would serve unhoused community members could include:

- o Easier to access attainable emergency and/or transitional housing, including hotel rooms.

- o Attainable (affordable, workforce) housing options.

- o Rental units made available by landlords or new property owners who are willing to accept Section 8 Housing Choice vouchers.

- • **Useful Resources:** The following could serve as a reference or model for future programs:

Resource	*Location*
o 988 Suicide and Crisis Line	Nationwide
o McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act	Nationwide
o Re-Discover Mental Health Court	Kansas City Municipal Court, Raytown Municipal Court, and Jackson County Municipal Court
o Human Services Advisory Board critical success factors	Lee's Summit, MO
o Health Education Advisory Board critical success factors	Lee's Summit, MO
o Community CareLink (case management software)	Kansas City, MO
o STRIVIN Referral Portal (one referral; multiple community resources)	Independence and Raytown, MO
o Community Services League (CSL)	Blue Springs, Buckner, Grain Valley, Independence, Oak Grove, and Raytown, MO
o Homeless Outreach Team (Police Department)	Independence, MO

Priority Projects Workshop

Leveraging the stakeholder interview results, Vireo researched approaches to addressing homelessness in suburbs across the country. They organized the findings into a series of draft guiding principles, goals, and project ideas to explore with the five cities at a virtual Priority Projects Workshop via Zoom.

The event was held on September 13, 2022. MARC extended invitations to stakeholder interview invitees and the Shared Services contact list of over 70 people. The workshop began with a short presentation. Then the 60 participants were organized into two groups to review and comment on potential projects, adding and removing ideas as needed via Mural.co virtual whiteboards. They used their voices, the Zoom chat box, and Mural's digital post-it notes, pens,

and icons to comment. They also discussed the potential level of effort and impact associated with each project, organizing them into the following categories: Quick Wins, Major Projects, Small Projects, and Quick Tasks.

Quick Tasks (high effort, low impact) included:

- Virtual (or in-person) collaborative meetings focused on "high utilization" people.
- Providing financial support to meet basic family needs via cash, gas, or grocery cards.
- Coordinating with utility companies for utility assistance.
- Providing mobile health outreach (dental and medical).
- Working with landlords on eviction prevention.

Major projects (high effort, high impact) involved:

- Creating a drop-in center(s) where homeless residents can receive assistance, such as housing location services, overnight shelter, and/or mental health support, within a friendly environment.
- Identifying and funding a "homelessness czar" for Eastern Jackson County.
- Establishing a "faith-based alliance" who can coordinate services among one another and serve more unhoused people.
- Developing and deploying public information campaigns tied to homelessness.
- Creating a process to review and analyze housing conditions.
- Increasing the number of emergency shelters and supporting them with case management.
- Building more housing options (traditional and/or innovative).
- Facilitating public-private partnerships or municipal and social justice agency partnerships.
- Keeping the UMKC Homelessness Intervention Mapping System (database) current by making updates part of funding requirements.
- Developing an ambassador program to help generate positive political will toward addressing homelessness in Eastern Jackson County.

Next, workshop participants identified the following key issues to address:

- The differing wrap-around services for target populations.
- Educating the public on what homelessness services are needed and the commitment needed to provide them.
- Identifying the types of homelessness that could be solved.
- Utilizing simple on-boarding methodologies that ask the right questions and help prioritize by the greatest need.

- "Deeper accountability" programs that address generational issues.

In addition, workshop participants said efforts to serve the unhoused should focus on people who are:

- Consistently on the brink of homeless.
- Difficult to house due to felony convictions and/or sex offenses.
- Suffering from drug and mental health issues.

They commented that near-term strategies within the three remaining months of 2022 should focus on:

- Homeless prevention.
- Partnerships that can help address homelessness.
- Developing public understanding about homelessness.

Long-term efforts should concentrate on:

- Developing multiple public and private partnerships, such as those between the cities and community organizations; the cities and schools; the cities and social justice agencies; and the cities and housing providers (landlords and developers). For example, municipalities could partner with school districts' trauma-informed educators to hold homelessness prevention meetings with landlords across jurisdictions.

- The "homelessness czar".

- Exploring the possibility of constructing transitional and emergency housing in the years beyond 2023.

- Establishing a reserve fund to cover property maintenance or other costs for landlords willing to accept Section 8 vouchers.

- The UMKC database.

- Possibilities for rent control legislation.

City Managers Roundtable

Vireo and MARC presented the workshop findings to the regional City Managers Roundtable on October 4, 2022. Reactions related to a desire for:

- Faith-based involvement.

- Improved political will.

- Use of innovative techniques to build affordable (attainable, workforce) housing in a cost-effective manner.

- Strategies for increasing housing affordability.

- Preventing landlords from declining sources of income, such as Section 8 vouchers, for housing.

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Guiding Principles

Addressing homelessness requires deciding to recognize the problem, dedicating resources to addressing it, and committing time to explore and implement a combination of short- and longer-term strategies for it. Based on research findings and engagement results, the following principles guide the *Suburban Homelessness Action Plan for Eastern Jackson County*:

- Focus on prevention to help at-risk households maintain housing.
- Decrease the homeless population.
- Learn from the successes of other suburban communities.
- Recognize that low/no-barrier Housing First approaches to tackling homelessness have been successful across the country.
- Maximize partnerships and collaborate whenever and wherever possible, including those with school districts, domestic abuse shelters and agencies, and faith-based organizations and community-based groups.
- Encourage the five cities and Jackson County to consider an allocation of existing Community Development Block Grant or other resources to help prevent homelessness through case management, rent assistance, and similar strategies.

Goals and Strategies

Six goals with corresponding strategies will help Eastern Jackson County communities address homelessness together:

- **Goal:** Increase collaboration across Eastern Jackson County.
    - **Strategy:** The five Eastern Jackson County cites should utilize their shared services partnership to work through the menu of options provided in this homelessness action plan, identify and pursue funding for them, and more. Over time, they should explore the feasibility of pooling their resources to fund a new position: Eastern Jackson County Homelessness Coordinator.
    - **Strategy:** The police departments of all five cities should organize virtual (or in-person) collaborative meetings focused on "high utilization" people. The effort should be a venue within which participating law enforcement representatives, healthcare and social service providers, and community organizations brainstorm comprehensive approaches to better serve those in continual need of assistance because of homelessness.
    - **Strategy:** When funding becomes available, the five cities should identify a location for a regional drop-in center and establish it. They should consider targeting the center to a mapped COMBAT area where data shows concentrations of drug abuse and/or drug-related crime. In addition, the municipalities should learn from Gwinnett County, Georgia. The community had one of the largest homeless populations outside of Atlanta and became the first

suburban county to enroll in the [HomeFirst Initiative at United Way of Greater Atlanta](). Via the program they were able to hire an experienced staff person to serve as Gwinnett County's "homeless czar". The czar's job is to tackle homelessness daily by connecting services more efficiently and effectively and working through an established action plan. Gwinnett County also established an assessment center located in a building attached to a community church. The facility provides space for the assessment director, case manager, a medical clinic, and rooms for residents.

- **Goal:** Improve public understanding.

  o **Strategy:** The administrative departments of each of the five cities should work together to develop an initial strategic communications campaign that introduces homelessness and its common causes, e.g. rent hikes, unexpected job losses, and healthcare concerns, to their non-homeless community members. Include a press release, news article, social media content, and/or poster with the campaign. During the campaign development process, consider the example from Dakota County, Minneapolis. Dakota County viewed homelessness as a symptom of other issues, such as mental health concerns and stress-causing happenings, including job loss. They applied for and received a $6,500 grant from the Federal Housing Fund to launch their "Home is where the heart is, until it's gone" campaign. It consisted of stark posters and key messages, such as "Daddy lost his job. Now I sleep in the back seat.". They targeted it to churches and community centers in effort to bring attention to the fact that most of their homeless population in January 2014 consisted of families with children.

  o **Strategy:** Municipalities should collaborate to follow the initial campaign with a series of strategic ones that center "community sensitivity" (caring about one's homeless neighbors). One of the campaigns should describe types of homelessness services and housing options—emergency, transitional, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive—proven to successfully address homelessness in the United States. Another should outline the options to be explored collaboratively in the five Eastern Jackson County communities.

- **Goal:** Develop positive political will.

  o **Strategy:** The five municipalities should work with a variety of partners to make solving homelessness feel personal to their communities' elected officials. As part of the effort, they should present the final *Suburban Homelessness Action Plan for Eastern Jackson County* to elected and appointed municipal leaders, school board officials, and other groups within their cities and to nearby communities. They should also share the plan with Jackson County leadership. In addition, they should use developed informational and educational tools to help officials understand homelessness and the range of traditional and innovative strategies available to address it. Informed municipal staff, such as Independence Police Department's Community Services Unit (homeless outreach team) representatives, should introduce officials to key stakeholders and champions working with unhoused populations and take them to experience outstanding initiatives and projects happening in the region.

  o **Strategy:** The five local governments should coordinate to develop an ambassador program focused on homelessness. Next, they should utilize the

ambassadors to showcase successful strategies and projects, such as Hillcrest Transitional Housing. Located in Independence and Lee's Summit, Hillcrest's program serves youth, individuals, and families and is intended to move program participants out of homelessness to self-sufficiency.

- **Goal:** Enhancing or expanding existing programming.
    - ○ **Strategy:** Leadership from all five cities should approach school district administrators about the range of trauma-informed activities, such as "Morning Check-ins", that they apply and then determine if the topic of homelessness prevention could be included among those that students, teachers, and staff discuss. Doing so, may make it easier for youth in families who are on the brink of homelessness to share their situations with trusted teachers and/or school counselors and be connected to helpful resources before their family is without a home.
    - ○ **Strategy:** Recognizing that youth homelessness is a concern in almost all communities, the five municipalities should work with school districts to establish or expand Host Home Programs in all schools. Hennenpin County, Minnesota's communities can access the MoveFwd Suburban Host Home Program, which offers an online customizable toolkit to make the set-up process easier. The [Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOY)](#) also provides a Host Home Program toolkit. In addition, the TNOY program includes resources for frequently asked questions, a memorandum on legal issues connected to host homes, a letter of understanding that the parent/guardian may use, mentor home agreement, and graduation road map for the student. Working in partnership, the municipalities and school districts should also review the Jackson County Children's Service Fund's resource allocation to ensure that an important share of resources are serving the needs of at-risk children and families, including homeless youth in Eastern Jackson County. In addition, the partners should work with organizations, such as Foster Adopt Connect and Community Action Agency of Greater Kansas City, on youth services.
    - ○ **Strategy:** Municipal leadership and staff should encourage expanded reach for and coordination between established faith-based institutions, such as Sisters in Christ and the Hope Network of Raytown. They can do so by helping connect them to compatible organizations who serve similar geographic areas. They can also encourage them to form a "faith-based alliance" that meets regularly to strategize how to help more people meet their basic needs, get funding for vehicle repairs, and secure rent and/or utility assistance.
    - ○ **Strategy:** Municipalities should build relationships with philanthropic groups and leverage relationships with area businesses to understand whether they can provide gift cards for groceries, gas, or other household needs to unhoused people in their communities. Next, they should help identify methods of deploying the benefit, e.g. through community organizations and/or the business community. Establishing such partnerships and mechanisms within Eastern Jackson County's would reflect cross-jurisdictional understanding that some households in Blue Springs, Grandview, Independence, Lee's Summit, and Raytown are making tough choices between food, gas, and rent. A little bit of

money, such as $150 provided via a philanthropic organization at the end of the month, might make the difference between being able to pay rent, having enough gas to get to work, or meeting another household need.

o **Strategy:** Each of the five municipalities should collaborate with utility companies to provide utility assistance services to customers. Typically, services involve tools with which customers may apply for bill paying assistance and establish payment plans. As an example, for two decades, the city of Independence has provided bill payment support via the [IRAP program](). IRAP continually pays half of a qualifying customer's bill. Independence's [I-Share program]() pays a qualified customer's bill one time. The city increased funding to both programs due to rising energy costs and the community's elderly population. Municipalities should work together to ensure that households with utility bill needs are aware of, and secure support, through the Mid-America Assistance Coalition, Community Action Agency of Greater Kansas City, or other utility assistance providers.

o **Strategy:** Assuming an established partnership with school districts, the five municipalities should work with landlords to develop and implement trauma-informed approaches to eviction prevention. Proactive practices involve landlords thoughtfully discussing rent payment issues with tenants; striving to understand the problems and remaining sensitive to them; and working out long-term resolutions that are agreeable to both parties. Municipalities should work with other partners, such as Legal Aid of Western Missouri, to provide legal service support to households who are at-risk through eviction court.

o **Strategy:** Local governments should work with healthcare organizations to expand their existing mobile health routes, so they include homeless shelters as well as transitional and permanent supportive housing developments. For reference, HOPE Dental in Blue Springs serves Jackson County. They bring their mobile oral health services to senior living centers, mental health facilities, and a partner school. Students and clients of partner organizations are eligible.

o **Strategy:** Realizing that the Kansas City region is home to several service and resource databases, a representative(s) of the five municipalities should continue participating on the advisory committee for the development of UMKC's Homelessness Intervention System Mapping Initiative Project (database). Once the tool is completed, the municipalities and their partner organizations should commit to keeping it current. Sustaining commitments may involve tying database hosting, management, and/or maintenance to funding that community organizations receive to tackle homelessness.

o **Strategy:** With the understanding that Blue Springs, Grandview, Independence, Lee's Summit, and Raytown police departments are already utilizing co-responder programs to manage calls involving homelessness and individuals struggling with stability, continue working with local law enforcement agencies to establish robust homeless outreach programs in all five cities. Include cross-jurisdictional information and resource sharing with program development. Model the program in each city on the following examples:

- **Independence, MO:** Striving to build repour with its homeless population living in camps and abandoned homes and buildings, the City of Independence Police Department has established a homeless outreach and enforcement team that works to secure identification cards, household needs and birth certificates for the unhoused as well as getting them into shelters and/or on the list for permanent housing. Their give-a-ways, e.g. deodorant, baby wipes, toothbrushes, toothpaste and more, are from donations and provided to those in need as "blessing bags" that are distributed one to two days a week. The team's main partners include the Community Services League, Veterans Administration, and Comprehensive Mental Health Services. They encourage community members to provide support by visiting their sub-station and/or calling a designated phone number.

- **Sarasota, FL:** The police department in Sarasota, Florida, also uses homeless outreach teams. Their program involves small teams who meet homeless people where they are. Then they provide education about the options available to them and encourage use of services and assistance. They apply enforcement strategies only if laws are broken. The Sarasota program partners with the Salvation Army to offer homeless community members a free night in a bed if an outreach team member brings them to their facility. The program also includes case management support and a connection with the Sarasota Housing Authority for Section 8 vouchers.

- **Goal:** Providing Housing First housing options, including emergency, transitional, rapid re- housing, and permanent supportive housing.

  - **Strategy:** All five cities should come together and set a goal for the number of beds to be established for the unhoused via the development of one or more emergency shelters in eastern Jackson County. As part of the process, the municipalities should identify: 1) possible approaches to providing housing and 2) available properties on which small shelters could be established with the help of community partners, such as faith-based organizations with vacant and/or extra space within their existing facilities. The work should ultimately increase the number of shelter beds in Eastern Jackson County and help some communities shift from temporary shelters used only for heatwaves and cold weather to emergency shelters offered whenever needed.

  - **Strategy:** Over the long-term, the five municipalities should get involved in the work of establishing public-private partnerships or municipal-social justice agency partnerships that can help develop low-barrier shelters and permanent supportive housing projects that are supported with case management services. San Diego County, California, partnered with the San Diego Rescue Mission to build low-barrier shelters in three areas of the county that have never had them. Having a case manager is the only requirement. Also located in San Diego County, the City of Oceanside partnered with San Diego Rescue Mission to re-purpose a former school as a low-barrier entry homeless shelter. Locally, Kansas City, Missouri, developed short-term emergency housing as a tiny home village via the Veterans Community Project (VCP). Suburban Longmont (a suburb in Boulder County, Colorado) also built a VCP project.

- **Strategy:** All five municipalities should encourage shelter providers to include case management and referral services with them. Beyond encouragement, municipalities can consider awarding grant funds to agencies who provide the needed services. Social service providers in Independence are currently using the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and MAACLINK smartphone apps to track and collect data on unhoused individuals, but according to stakeholder participants, police officers are not. If they could begin using them too, some of the service duplication might decrease and help address continuing issues with individuals.

  - In addition, the City of Raytown is using Community CareLink's software to identify the root causes of homelessness and connect people in need to services. Raytown and Independence are also using STRIVIN, which is a Community Backed Anti-Drug Tax (COMBAT) funded initiative that brings concerned citizens, faith-based organizations, mental health providers, law enforcement representatives, and schools together to collaborate and pool resources for those in need.

  - STRIVIN has established physical "hubs" at Hawethorne Place Apartments (Independence) and The Safe Zone (Raytown) from which people in need can get assistance. In addition, those trying to help, such as police officers, can use STRIVIN's referral program to provide assistance. The possibility of expanding use of smartphone apps, Community CareLink software, and STRIVIN to other cities should be explored.

  - **Strategy:** The five cities and their partners should be intentional about seeking state, federal, and philanthropic funds to support affordable housing development in their communities. Housing construction projects cost millions of dollars and those serving homeless populations also need wrap-around services to help residents re-establish themselves and prevent homelessness from happening to them again. Salt Lake County, Utah, established [The Road Home (TRH) Program](#) to tackle similar issues. The program serves hundreds of people in the county via on-site resource centers and mobile outreach.

- **Goal:** Explore housing innovations.

  - **Strategy:** The five municipalities should work together to identify new partners, including utility providers, employers, colleges, and universities, and others who are willing to examine ways to support at-risk individuals and families who need to maintain or secure housing. After developing the list, municipalities should convene prospects to better understand the possibilities and capacities for addressing homelessness in a multi-partner collaborative fashion.

  - **Strategy:** All five Eastern Jackson County cities should work together to explore innovative and cost-effective shelter option(s). Examples to investigate should include those from the [Rapid Shelter Innovation Showcase](#) online resource. Its Los Angeles-based organizers describe it as the world's largest display of its kind. A sampling of examples from the website include:

- **The Scaffold:** Conceptual temporary housing at high-density with each unit measuring 60 square feet, built in less than 90 days, and costing $1,815 per resident/bedroom.

- **Maidan Tent:** A congregate shelter that can 1) be subdivided into eight areas or 2) serve as a community gathering space with shade. Each Maidan tent holds 20 residents, can be set up in 7-14 days, and costs $50,000 (or $2,500 per resident).

- **Connect Shelter:** Built in sets of three, Connect Shelters are modular homes with installed bathrooms and separate mechanical rooms. Each home is 320 square feet, can be built in 60 days, and has an estimated cost of $20,000 - $30,000 each.

- **Boxabl Casita:** A 375-square foot, single bedroom home that can serve four residents, and be set up in 30 days. Each Casita costs $50,000.

- **Container Emergency Housing:** Made from a 320-square foot, high-cube shipping container, it provides housing for two residents in one bedroom, is constructed in 18 days, and costs $50,000.

- **Rapid Response Modular Supportive Housing:** 60-unit housing in three stories, built in 10 days on site (or 80 days off site) at a cost of $125,000 per bed.

Implementation

Due to the vastness of the homelessness issue, implementation activities should focus on the following target populations: people who are consistently on the brink of homelessness; those who are difficult to house because of felony or sex-related convictions; and people with drug and mental health issues. Near- and long-term implementation steps for cross-jurisdictional coordination and collaboration should involve:

- **Near-term (October to December 2022):** Strategies should be geared toward prevention, education/information-sharing, and partnerships. Specific activities should include:
  - Working with local emergency managers and community organizations to identify and establish one or more cold weather shelter spaces or solutions in Eastern Jackson County. Ensure the locations consider proximity to existing grocery stores, faith-based and community organizations, healthcare facilities, and emergency responders. Then establish them as a temporary option for unhoused community members and educate nearby neighbors about them.
  - Providing an information sheet (in digital and hardcopy formats) of available homelessness resources, programs, and contacts to landlords, schools, and faith-based groups. Then encouraging them to share the materials with their tenants, students, and congregants via bulletin boards, direct mailers, and/or other commonly used channels to educate those in need about supports they can use to improve their situations. Since Eastern Jackson County communities are diversifying, municipalities should consider developing the materials in more than one language for targeted areas.

- o Using the City of Independence, Missouri, as a model, engage utility providers and work with them to develop strategies that can help prevent households from losing service and thereby decrease their chances of becoming homeless due to unpaid water and/or electric bills. Reach out the philanthropic and local business community to see if they can provide gift cards that homeless households can use to pay utilities. Continue working with utility providers, community organizations, and businesses to develop and deploy a public relations campaign with broadcasting and grassroots elements that helps announce new assistance strategies and contacts for them.

- o Partnering with school districts to help conduct Landlord Lunches with a focus on trauma-informed landlord education. Convene the lunches in at least five locations throughout Eastern Jackson County. Include homeless prevention, an introduction to the trauma-informed approach, the need to care about unhoused residents, and available programs and resources for addressing issues with the meeting agenda.

- o Developing a list of hotels and landlords who are willing to provide emergency shelter for unhoused people. Once the list is established, the five cities should conduct a high-level review of the locations and then create a mechanism or fund to compensate them. Each municipality should contribute a proportional share to support associated hotel and housing rental costs.

- **Long-Term (January to December 2023+):** Strategies should focus on the consortium, homelessness coordinator, housing options, landlord supports, the UMKC database, and legislation. Key activities for multi-jurisdictional coordination and collaboration relate to:

  - o Creating a municipal consortium through the shared services initiative that will focus on addressing homelessness in all five cities and implementing the recommendations of the ***Suburban Homelessness Action Plan for Eastern Jackson County*** (and eventually developing a new paid position: "Eastern Jackson County Homelessness Coordinator").

  - o Continuing to develop a range of public-private and/or municipal and social justice agency partnerships to comprehensively address homelessness issues by increasing the reach of available funding and resources, exploring emergency and transitional housing options, and exploring new strategies and approaches (to be determined).

  - o Establishing a loss reserve fund to help protect landlords from property losses or other costs when they accept Section 8 vouchers and/or unhoused people.

  - o Strengthening property maintenance programs (rental inspections) while preventing housing providers from offering unlivable/unkept properties. Specifically, work with tenants and landlords to develop a Tenant Bill of Rights that the cities can adopt. It should provide guidance on minimum health and safety standards, basic rights, and more. See Committee Substitute for Resolution No. 190934, which establishes the Tenants Bill of Rights in Kansas City, Missouri, for an example.

  - o Utilizing the UMKC database to identify and coordinate resources and then committing to keeping it current. Sustaining commitments may involve tying database hosting, management, and/or maintenance to funding requirements.