

# Ending Homelessness in Florida

By Amanda Rosado and Elissa Plancher



The Florida Housing Coalition provides training and technical assistance statewide to Homeless Continuums of Care (CoCs) and service providers in Florida through a contract with the Department of Economic Opportunity. At the local level, the Coalition contracts directly with local government to develop and implement plans to end homelessness.

## Department of Economic Opportunity

The Coalition, under contract with the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) since 2015, provides free training and technical assistance through webinars, workshops, site visits, and phone/email assistance on a broad range of topics to the 27 local CoC Lead Agencies throughout the state of Florida. CoC Lead Agencies are the organizations HUD recognizes to strategically prevent and end homelessness in their region. They are responsible for managing the network of homeless service and housing providers, applying for HUD funds, and creating the strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness in their community based on an annual assessment.

Since 2015, the Coalition has offered 27 day-long regional workshops, 47 statewide webinars, and 97 local site visits through support from DEO. The Coalition provides the most

up to date, nationally recognized best practices in ending homelessness. The training has helped crisis response systems throughout Florida adopt a housing first philosophy, focusing their efforts on permanently housing individuals and families experiencing homelessness as rapidly as possible. Due in part to a strong economy, but also through improved implementation of these best practices, homelessness has dropped by 20 percent since 2015 in Florida, a reduction of 7,309 individuals.

## Direct Contract Work

The Florida Housing Coalition helps communities on a deeper level to increase capacity, assess homeless crisis response systems, develop plans to end homelessness, and bring stakeholders together to accomplish this tough work through individualized contracts. This past year the Ending Homelessness Team contracted with seven communities.

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Senior staff from CoCs across the state participate in a DEO sponsored workshop in May, 2019.



Elissa Plancher offers insight on managing entities and CoCs.

Most recently, we completed an assessment of Marion County's homeless crisis response system, providing a report to guide their efforts to end homelessness. The report was accepted by both the City of Ocala and Marion County local governments. The Coalition has done similar work in Sarasota, Polk County, and Pasco County. Each community has unique barriers presenting challenges in addressing complex social issues like homelessness. The Coalition is able to bring local communities together to tackle these issues and work together to maximize resources. Don Anderson, Chief Executive Officer of the Coalition for the Homeless of Pasco County, says, "In partnering with the Coalition, we got a clear and unbiased assessment of our CoC's current state. Combine that assessment with the Coalition's knowledge and experience around best practices, we mapped out a plan for the future and quickly secured support to implement it."

In addition to working directly with local governments, the Coalition also contracts with CoC Lead Agencies to complete more in-depth work than can be accomplished through the

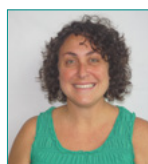
statewide DEO contract. These engagements are tailored to address pressing local issues, be they governance challenges, technical assistance for provider agencies or CoC Lead Agency staff, or education and outreach for the community. This tailored approach ensures the Coalition tackles specific priorities at the local level and is best positioned to help end homelessness in Florida.

Homelessness is complex, requiring skill and expertise to implement solutions impacting Florida's most vulnerable citizens. The solution to homelessness is housing. The best practice for ending homelessness is the Housing First model of rapidly rehousing people experiencing homelessness. Homelessness should be rare, brief, and one-time. Best practices for all people experiencing homelessness need to be continually taught and made available to housing and homelessness service providers. The Coalition's Ending Homelessness Team offers training, technical assistance, and consulting with the goal of ending homelessness through permanent housing for every Floridian. **HNN**



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