

100-DAY CHALLENGE CASE STUDIES

LOUISVILLE, KY: CoC AND POLICE DEPARTMENT COLLABORATION

The 100-Day Challenge in Louisville facilitated a strong new cross-system partnership between the Continuum of Care (CoC) and the Louisville Metro Police Department (LMPD) in order to better meet the needs of youth experiencing homelessness. This partnership has been sustained through a commitment to collaboration that has helped build trust and working relationships on both sides.

HOW LOUISVILLE MADE IT HAPPEN

During its 100-Day Challenge, Louisville worked to build a stronger, more cohesive system of partners and agencies to support youth experiencing homelessness. Early in the process, the community identified law enforcement as a critical new partner to bring to the table. The involvement of local police provides a connection to the streets, serving as the “eyes and ears” of the community in a way that no other organization can. In Louisville, the police department (LMPD) often serves as an initial point of contact connecting supportive adults with youth experiencing homelessness.

The 100-Day Challenge team worked to build trust between the homeless response system and LMPD, establishing procedures for collaboration and incorporating officers into local outreach efforts to help find and support youth experiencing homelessness. As a result of this relationship, “coffee with a cop,” an event between police and community providers to inform and share resources, developed a focus on youth and became part of Louisville’s efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness. The increased trust and understanding between the CoC and LMPD has fostered more trusting relationships between youth experiencing homelessness and law enforcement. Through a partnership with LMPD and a national coffee chain, Louisville has also become the second city in the country to implement a Safe Place Program for LGBTQ victims of hate crimes.

Key Takeaways:

- Law enforcement is a crucial partner in efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness, as they are connected to the community and the experiences of the streets.
- Developing a partnership between the CoC and law enforcement requires knowledge sharing, understanding, and trust. It is important to help each system understand what the other brings to the table in terms of resources, requirements, and perspectives.
- Police officers are able to identify and engage youth experiencing homelessness who are often “hidden” from the homeless response system, including youth with substance abuse issues and victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking.
- Safety is an important component of CoC and law enforcement collaboration. Police officers work to ensure the safety of individuals experiencing homelessness as well as outreach workers.
- Sharing ideas can help overcome barriers to law enforcement involvement in youth outreach and engagement.

LESSONS LEARNED

1) Build Cross-System Trust and Understanding

Prior to the 100-Day Challenge, there was not a system in place to support sustained communication and outreach between the homeless response system and the LMPD. The process of creating a sustainable cross-system partnership required the CoC to learn about how law enforcement operates, the requirements of their work, and the perspective they bring to working with youth experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Similarly, the police department learned about resources available within the homeless response system, tools – such as HMIS and Coordinated Entry – that are used to connect individuals to services, and the methods by which homeless service providers conduct outreach and provide direct care.

Additionally, the CoC and LMPD engaged in honest conversations across systems to build trust and dispel fears regarding the law enforcement response to youth experiencing homelessness. It was important to have a law enforcement officer at the table during the 100-Day Challenge who was interested in doing this kind of work and was able to speak to compassionate policing strategies.

The 100-Day Challenge process helped create a mutual understanding and trust between the two systems, as the Louisville CoC and police department shared knowledge of resources available to them and identified how to work together to provide a compassionate community response to homelessness. Both the CoC and LMPD reported that collaboration is now engrained as a community value in local efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness.

2) The Police Department is a Valuable Partner in Identifying and Supporting “Hidden” Youth

Collaboration with LMPD helped the CoC to identify and support youth experiencing homelessness who were completely outside the homeless response system, including youth with substance abuse issues. The community found that youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to be hidden from outreach workers and face significant safety risks associated with living in unsheltered conditions. LMPD has helped the CoC find and support these “hidden youth”, provide them with safety, and bring them into services.

Collaboration with LMPD has also helped shine a light on the prevalence and needs of youth who are victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. This increased visibility for victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking has helped the CoC and its partner organizations to consider new housing and service interventions to best serve this population of youth experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the LMPD began expanding its Human Trafficking Task Force and its work with local service providers, The Kristy Love Foundation and Women of the Well Ministry, to increase support and services for victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

3) A Focus on Safety Supports Strong CoC and Law Enforcement Collaboration

LMPD brought a strong focus on safety to the work of preventing and ending youth homelessness. Since the 100-Day Challenge, a designated Louisville police officer has trained CoC and outreach workers on safety in conducting street outreach, including information on de-escalating conflict when working with individuals experiencing homelessness who may have a mental illness. In addition, LMPD officers provide information to homeless outreach workers regarding safety concerns they may face in conducting outreach and providing support. Safety is also the focus of LMPD’s outreach to people living in encampments and other unsheltered situations, with the goal of identifying people living in unsafe situations and connecting them to appropriate resources and services.

4) Share Ideas and Be Responsive to the Other System's Point of View

Throughout Louisville's 100-Day Challenge, the CoC and LMPD worked to share ideas for incorporating law enforcement into the community's homeless response system. Key to success was LMPD's ability and willingness to attend meetings and learn about community needs and concerns. During 100-Day Challenge meetings, youth with lived experience identified the fact that LMPD attended meetings in uniform as a barrier to relationship building and trust. This prompted police officers to not only attend 100-Day Challenge planning meeting in plain clothes, but also to conduct initial outreach with youth experiencing homelessness in plain clothes until a trusting relationship could be established.

The CoC also recognized the need to provide information on homeless resources to police officers in a way that could be used on-duty. The CoC has responded by creating pocket resource documents and one-page information sheets that can be kept by police officers on their person or in their patrol car when conducting community outreach or responding to a call. LMPD officers began carrying packets of information from the CoC that provide information on daily life needs and accessing homeless resources while on the beat so that they can easily make connections to services for individuals, including youth, experiencing homelessness.