

**County** Wilson  
**Department of Social Services**

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**Project Title** Solutions for Homelessness

**Category** Profiles in Community Collaboration  
(Please select one)

### **Project Description and Summary**

**What did you do?**

**Describe your program or project. What did you do? What is the history behind the program/project? What did you hope to accomplish? What was your timeline? Your budget? How did you identify your objectives? How well did you use available resources?**

Our County Department of Social Services, in collaboration with several community partners is working together to address homelessness. We believe our Solutions for Homelessness Initiative is worthy of a best practice award in the category of Community Collaboration. Through a coordinated assessment process, families and individuals in the greatest need are prioritized for service. Emergency Solutions Grant funds are used to rapidly re-house families and individuals, many of whom are single

Moms with children. Our county is working together to house families in the greatest need. Our Regional Housing Committee serves as the backbone agent for collective impact with respect to addressing homelessness. We are housing individuals and families, addressing a myriad of health, legal, employment and supportive service needs by avoiding silos and working together. Our ESG funding received through NCDHHS via HUD allows us to rapidly rehouse families and individuals with an emphasis on serving victims of domestic violence, families with children and veterans.

We have a high rate of unemployment, almost double the state rate at 10%. Poverty and homelessness are real issues in our community. Our County Department of Social Services is committed to addressing needs in our community and serves in leadership roles with the Youth Master Plan and Beyond 21, a community plan to meet the needs of our citizens. Addressing poverty and homelessness is part of our mission. Our staff have an extensive history of serving as leaders in the Regional Housing Committee. Our staff currently serve as Regional Lead, Coordinated Assessment Lead and Webmaster. Our agency is the fiscal sponsor in collaboration with Hope Station, a local men's homeless shelter, to administer the Emergency Solutions Grant(ESG) funded by HUD through the North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services. We have a lot of families who need assistance with housing and we have limited funding to help these families. We have cultivated a unique approach to maximizing the \$69,252 ESG grant funds to serve as many homeless individuals and families as possible.

Our county made a choice to implement our Emergency Solutions Grant funding in a unique manner to house as many families as possible. Collaboration is the key to our success. We lead a Regional Housing Committee that is part of the 79 county Balance of State Continuum of Care. Our state partners at the NC Coalition to End Homelessness provide consultation and technical assistance in our service to homeless individuals and families.

Through a coordinated assessment process, families and individuals in the greatest need are prioritized for service. ESG funds are used to rapidly re-house families and individuals, many of whom are single Moms with children. There are two shelters in our county, Hope Station and Wesley Shelter; both shelters are primary referral sources. Wesley Shelter provides

temporary housing for victims of domestic violence and their children as well as women who are experiencing homelessness; Hope Station serves men who are homeless. The local school system also refers families through our coordinated assessment process. Our agency is able to access funding to assist with utilities or furniture and household items. We have a Faith Connections program that is a network of over 60 churches who respond with in-kind donations as well as financial contributions when families are in need. The local entity responsible for the operation and maintenance of the City's electric and gas has generously offered to waive partial late utility fees in order to help house those in need. Through advocacy via our Regional Committee, the local Housing Authority changed their service definitions to prioritize homeless families and individuals. The local Housing Authority maintains a waiting list for housing that they opened for homeless families and individuals only. The local Housing Authority's Director highlighted our Regional Committee work as a best practice at a statewide conference in Greensboro, NC in October. In 2015, 86 individuals were assisted with housing; in 2016, 198 individuals have moved from homelessness into permanent housing. Of the 198 individuals served, 65% are female, with a large number of single parent households. Forty percent were experiencing homelessness for the first time, twenty-nine percent have been victims of domestic violence and twenty-six percent reported a disability. Hope Station implements our ESG work in the community and this requires housing inspections, coordinating services, addressing multiple barriers such as unemployment and mental health challenges. Hope Station employs a social worker through ESG funding to provide a single point of contact for families in need.

Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week is held in November each year and our Regional Committee organized a series of events to raise awareness and meet the need in our community. Operation Wrap it Up is a beautiful way to raise awareness and practically meet a need. Donated scarves were tied around trees on a public park where those who are homeless are known to gather. A note was attached with the following, "I am not lost. If you need this to stay warm, please take it. Help someone else when you can." We received donations from community partners such as: a local Girl Scout troop, faith community members and agency employees. Many local businesses and community partners are

participating in Spare Change for Social Change. All proceeds collected benefitted Wesley Shelter and Hope Station.

We conduct a point in time count annually to collect data on homelessness in our county. Hope Station and DSS conduct this count with the assistance of the local Police Department. We provide care packages, donated by Wesley Shelter to anyone found during the street count and offer shelter for the night. Community volunteers also assist by interviewing customers at the local soup kitchen. We make sure we have Spanish speaking interviewers while completing this outreach.

### **Project Success and Impact**

**What was the outcome?**

**Was your program/project a success? What was the impact? How did you measure the impact? How widespread is the impact of your program/project? How were you able to overcome obstacles and challenges? Did your program/project meet your established objectives?**

Our Solutions for Homelessness programming could be replicated in other counties. The awarding of ESG funding is a competitive process, and there are other funding opportunities to support housing. We were able to address some obstacles by remaining in contact via monthly meetings with a diverse group of community partners. The stakeholders around the table have provided input with respect to best practice, community resources, and have served as referral sources. Through coordinated assessment, individual and family case information is shared through an online mechanism to better serve families and manage a waitlist. To raise awareness of hunger and homelessness, our agency uses social media to call attention to the issue. During our Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, we developed an online forum, Project Connect to discuss hunger and homelessness locally. Homelessness doesn't occur in a vacuum. The families and individuals we serve oftentimes have complicated mental health and substance use disorders.

Emergency Solutions Grant data is entered into a statewide database as a grant requirement. This data is shared with HUD and informs future funding priorities.

We received \$69,252 from the NC Division of Aging and Adult Services to address homelessness in our community. DSS and Hope Station have been working together to administer the grant. Many agencies have staff that

contribute a significant portion of their time to addressing the needs of homeless: DSS, Hope Station, Wesley Shelter, Veterans Residential Services, Eastpointe, local school system, Legal Aid, local Housing Authority, NC Works, Health Department, and Community Health Center. There is a staffing investment in addressing housing needs that exceeds the grant's scope. These agencies are coming together to address issues of poverty and housing.

We have a clear mission as a community as we work together to address our challenges and the spirit of collaboration is demonstrated through multiple agencies working together. Our county has a multidisciplinary group of stakeholders implementing a plan of improvement for our children, the Youth Master Plan and a plan for adults; Beyond 21. Homelessness is identified as a community driven plan goal. There are numerous examples of blending funding, sharing responsibility for projects and initiatives and measuring our progress through a set of agreed upon outcomes. We have a dedicated group of professionals who are committed to addressing homelessness. We meet on a regular basis and share information to better serve our families. We are committed to addressing poverty and homelessness and are working together to do so. In 2016, Hope Station served 135 individuals for shelter, while 82 households received ESG rapid rehousing services; 100 adults and 77 children made up those households. Through prevention services, 6 households with 14 adults and 7 children were served. In total, 198 individuals were rehoused by working together to maximize housing funding, exceeding our objectives in relation to numbers served. Our Solutions to Homelessness program was awarded a National Association of Counties (NACo) achievement award in 2017.

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