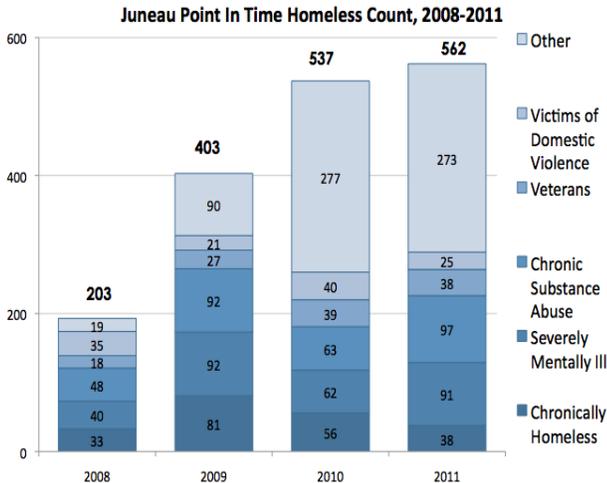


# HOUSING FIRST PROJECT IN JUNEAU

## Homelessness in Juneau

Every year the Juneau Homeless Coalition participates in the annual Point-In-Time (PIT) Homeless Count. In 2011, the Coalition determined that there were 562 persons in the community experiencing homelessness.



On September 26, 2011 the Juneau Homeless Coalition facilitated a community meeting to address the chronically homeless portion of the overall homeless population. By definition a **chronic homeless individual** means someone who has a disabling condition and has been continuously homeless for over a year, or has been homeless on at least four different instances within four years. Disabling conditions include substance abuse issues and mental illness.

The Juneau Homeless Coalition has focused on finding solutions for this population for two reasons:

1. This population is the most vulnerable and likely to die on the streets;
2. This population utilizes an enormous amount of community resources (Emergency services, hospital & detoxification services, police calls).

## What is Housing First?

**Housing First** is a "best practice" used by governments and social service-agencies to provide permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless persons, many that have severe mental illness or substance abuse issues.

The **Housing First approach** is based on the concept that a homeless individual or household's first and primary need is to obtain stable housing, and that other issues that may affect the household can and should be addressed once housing is obtained.

**Housing First** programs are in operation all across the United States and Canada. Two facilities recently opened in Alaska – RurAL CAP's Karluk Manor in Anchorage and Tanana Chiefs Conference facility in Fairbanks.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH, and cities and states, like Washington D.C. and Utah, have adopted **Housing First** as a preferred strategy to address chronic homelessness.

## Housing + Supportive Services = Housing First

**Housing:** Tenants **pay rent and hold leases** just as in any housing arrangement. The housing provided is permanent and "affordable," meaning that tenants pay 30% of their income towards rent.

**Supportive Services:** **Housing First** programs are well-staffed and use careful management and arrangement of the building and services to stabilize residents, and maintain safety for staff, residents, and neighbors. Program staffing often include residential support staff, behavioral health case managers, and nurses. Other services are brought on-site as needed.

# HOUSING FIRST PROJECT IN JUNEAU

## Principles of Housing First

1. **Use of assertive outreach** to engage and offer housing to the most vulnerable, chronic homeless persons, many of whom utilize a high number of costly community services. (Police, Fire, and EMT calls, & Emergency Services calls, bed nights utilized at Rainforest Recovery Center, Emergency Room visits at Bartlett Regional Hospital).
2. **Direct placement** into housing.
3. **Utilize the Harm Reduction approach** to substance abuse, meaning addressing the harms caused by risk-taking activities but not requiring abstinence to maintain housing.
4. **Social and community integration**: No requirement that participants use supportive services -- but making sure services are readily available on-site. Staff actively engages tenants on a daily basis to encourage work on their lives that have been neglected or damaged by long term substance abuse.
5. **Focus on housing**: consistent effort by staff and social service agencies to keep the person housed.

## Housing First in Juneau What Is Being Done?

### Assertive Outreach: Vulnerability Index Survey

In March 2012, 35 volunteers and Juneau Homeless Coalition members canvassed Juneau in the early morning hours to make contact with homeless people where they stayed, to deliver basic food and amenities, and to complete surveys. **In total, 55 people experiencing homelessness completed Vulnerability Index surveys, of which 40 were vulnerable.** The Coalition estimates that this was approximately 80 percent of the known target population.

- 40 of the 55 respondents were considered “vulnerable”;
- 85% of respondents were chronically homeless;
- 96% have in the past or currently experience substance abuse; and
- 55% have in the past or currently experience mental illness.

### Conclusion: Vulnerability Index Survey

There are a significant number of people living on the streets that experience conditions that make them vulnerable and are at risk of premature death. These individuals don't have access to housing and also utilize a large amount of community resources. These individuals would benefit from a **Housing First** program.

### Community Training For Local Agencies

In August 2012, the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA) sponsored an on-site training at two **Housing First** facilities in Minnesota. In attendance were representatives from the Alaska Mental Health Board/Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, City and Borough of Juneau, JAMHI, Juneau Police Department, Rainforest Recovery Center, and Tlingit-Haida Regional Housing Authority.

**The New San Marco Apartments** in Duluth, Minnesota has 70 units of permanent supportive housing; 30 units of Single Room Occupancy (SRO) apartments for those that are chemically dependent and 40 units of Project based Section 8 rentals. **Anishinabe Wakaguan** in Minneapolis has 45 units of SRO apartments for those that are chemically dependent.

Upon return from the training local representatives concluded that:

- **Housing First** is a successful model for the most vulnerable chronic homeless population;
- **Housing First projects** are community projects with opportunities for client engagement, job training, etc.;
- **With housing**, residents reached a level of self-respect that made them more willing to help themselves;
- **Housing First** facilities are clean, respectable places that are appreciated by the community;
- **Housing First is a housing program**, meaning case management is based on client need and utilization of mainstream services available in the community;
- **Housing First** is only a piece of the local affordable housing and homelessness puzzle.

Agencies that received training continue to work on potential development of a local Housing First facility.

For more information on the local Housing First effort, visit the Juneau Homeless Coalition website or contact Scott Ciambor at (907) 465-5114 or [scott.ciambor@alaska.gov](mailto:scott.ciambor@alaska.gov).