

# Perry County, Ohio Ten-year Plan To end Homelessness

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## **Introduction**

Perry County has a population of 35,246 with 13,059 housing units. The lack of safe and decent and affordable housing, good jobs, water, and public transportation has caused significant economic needs within the county. The impact of generational poverty in this rural community has sustained both a sense of hopelessness and it's counterpart a sense of entitlement.

The Perry Housing Coalition was birthed in April of 2006, after a meeting with local representatives of the Family and Children First Council and RHISCO representative, Terri Donlin Huesman to discuss the on-going and often hidden issues of substandard housing and homelessness in our county. More on the RHISCO project will be discussed later.

The development of this plan has been helpful in many ways; it has brought to the forefront awareness of the face of rural homelessness, it has identified programs and services that are already in place as well as what still needs to be accomplished as we work towards the ultimate goal of assuring our citizens access to safe, decent, affordable housing.

Coalition members have begun discussions about bridge building, developing partnerships, researching innovative programs/services locally and nationally. They have come to appreciate the many strengths and realize that although there is yet much to do, this community has the dedication and willingness to work towards positive change in housing efforts for all who choose to live here.

This plan, viewed as a living document, will be used as guidance for working towards the goals set forth by the Coalition.

## **Background**

Twenty-five years ago there was not widespread homelessness in America. Tonight approximately 750,000 men, women and children will be homeless, despite a two billion dollar a year infrastructure designed to deal with the problem.

While the seeds of homelessness were planted in the 1960s and 1970s with deinstitutionalization of people living with mental illness and loss of affordable housing stock, widespread homelessness did not emerge until the 1980s. Several factors have affected its growth over the last two decades. Housing has become scarcer for those with little money. Earnings from employment and from benefits have not kept pace with the cost of housing for low income and poor people. Services that every family needs for support and stability have become harder for very poor people to afford or find.

In addition to these systemic causes, social changes have exacerbated the personal problems of many poor Americans, leading them to be more vulnerable to homelessness. These social trends have included new kinds of illegal drugs and more single parent and teen-headed households with low earning power and thinning support networks. These causes of homelessness must be addressed. People who are homeless must be helped. The current system does this reasonably well for many of those who become homeless. But the homeless assistance system can neither prevent people from becoming homeless nor change the overall availability of housing, income and services that will truly end homelessness.

Many people think of homelessness as strictly an urban phenomenon because homeless people are greater in number and are more visible in urban areas, but homelessness, including people who live in housing not meant for habitation, is pervasive in rural areas. The number of people who experience rural homelessness is unknown, but the last national count of homeless people found that 9 percent live in rural areas. In actual raw numbers, this translates into roughly 67,000 people on any given night. (Burt, 1996) Evidence suggests that if the number of people who experience homelessness in rural areas was viewed and counted more accurately, the number would be far greater.

### **Rural Homelessness**

Advocates and researchers often refer to people who experience rural homelessness as the “hidden homeless.” Many people who experience housing instability in rural areas go unnoticed and uncounted because rural homelessness takes shape differently than urban homelessness. Most rural homeless people live in doubled up situations with friends or family or in motels, in cars, campgrounds and other places not intended for habitation. This is largely because most rural areas do not have large emergency shelters systems.

While those doubled up households do not meet HUD’s definition of homelessness, people living temporarily with friends and family are essentially homeless and they experience similar problems with housing instability. Many researchers and advocates argue for expanding this view of homelessness to capture the unique situations rural homeless people face. If the view of homelessness included households who double up, the numbers of people who experience homelessness in rural areas would increase exponentially.

The same structural factors that contribute to urban homelessness, such as a lack of affordable housing and inadequate income to pay for housing, cause rural homelessness. Other predictors of homelessness, such as mental illness and drug abuse, while still present among the rural homeless, are not pervasive. However, people who experience rural homelessness do report higher rates of alcohol abuse and domestic violence than their urban counterparts.

## **Rural Poverty**

Rural poverty has some unique characteristics. Areas concentrated with rural poverty can be identified throughout the South, West and the Midwest of the United States. The scarcity of jobs, goods, and services has caused an outward migration of rural populations to places with more opportunities. As a consequence, the rural communities with high rates of poverty are sparsely populated and their poverty populations are severely impoverished.

High rates of poverty and unemployment in rural areas also drive homelessness. Rural homelessness is most dramatic in areas that experience high rates of unemployment because of declining industries, for example farming, timber, mining, or fishing. (Aron and Fitchen, 1996) The lack of available jobs and steady incomes means that poverty rates are higher in rural areas; the poverty rate in non-metropolitan areas is 14 percent, almost 11.6 percent less than in metropolitan areas. It is not surprising that one in five children living in rural areas is below the poverty line. (USDA Economic Research Service, 2004)

## **The RHISCO Project area**

Counting and estimating the number of people who experience homelessness is extremely difficult and costly, and even more so in rural areas. Statewide estimates from the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio report that 179,718 people experience homelessness in Ohio over the course of a year and 27,867 Ohioans are homeless on any given night. At this time, estimates from the seventeen rural counties that comprise the RHISCO Project area, the Rural Homeless Initiative of Southeast and Central Ohio, are becoming available.

Counts of homeless people in Southeastern and Central Ohio are being planned and executed presently. The poverty and unemployment rates in these areas suggest that homelessness is prevalent. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (See Table 1, below), poverty rates in the counties of Southeastern and Central Ohio range from 3.8 percent in Delaware County to as high as 27 percent in Athens County. The poverty rates in Appalachian counties tend to be higher than other counties. About half are higher than the national poverty rate of 14 percent. Unemployment rates in rural Ohio counties are also high, ranging from 7 percent to 20 percent. In Meigs and Morgan Counties, the unemployment rates reach 20 percent, 15 percentage points higher than the national average of 5 percent. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005) People who live in poverty are at higher risk of homelessness. Although relatively few people of the region are homeless, the problem affects the entire community as a persistent and debilitating social issue.

Please see the table on the following page.

**Table 1**

County	Type	Population	Pop over 65		Pop at or below 100% poverty		Median income	Household not in the Labor Force
			N	%	N	%		
Delaware	Rural	125,399	9,833	7.80%	4,118	3.80%	\$67,258	7%
Fayette	Rural	28,176	4,048	14.40%	2,810	10.10%	\$36,735	12%
Knox	Rural	56,037	7,496	13.40%	5,159	10.10%	\$38,877	13%
Licking	Rural	148,731	17,872	12.00%	10,602	7.40%	\$44,124	13%
Madison	Rural	40,365	4,498	11.10%	2,790	7.90%	\$44,212	11%
Pickaway	Rural	53,437	5,842	10.90%	4,402	9.60%	\$42,832	15%
Union	Rural	43,010	4,066	9.50%	1,763	4.60%	\$51,743	10%
Athens	Appalachian	63,266	5,860	9.30%	14,728	27.30%	\$27,322	16%
Fairfield	Appalachian	129,161	14,058	10.90%	7,064	5.90%	\$47,962	12%
Hocking	Appalachian	28,481	3,737	13.10%	3,711	13.50%	\$34,261	18%
Jackson	Appalachian	32,854	4,362	13.30%	5,286	16.50%	\$30,661	17%
Meigs	Appalachian	23,111	3,377	14.60%	4,506	19.80%	\$27,287	20%
Morgan	Appalachian	14,749	2,302	15.60%	2,691	18.40%	\$28,868	20%
<b>Perry</b>	<b>Appalachian</b>	<b>34,408</b>	<b>4,110</b>	<b>11.90%</b>	<b>3,970</b>	<b>11.80%</b>	<b>\$34,383</b>	<b>16%</b>
Ross	Appalachian	74,469	9,048	12.20%	8,120	12.00%	\$37,117	15%
Vinton	Appalachian	13,128	1,597	12.20%	2,529	20.00%	\$29,465	17%
Washington	Appalachian	62,561	9,622	15.40%	7002	11.40%	\$34,275	17%

### **Needs Statement**

Perry County is a very rural area in southeast Ohio. Currently there is no homelessness program. The county has various social service agencies providing many services for families, but none are specific to the needs of homeless individuals. Some services, such as hospital services, can be accessed only in neighboring counties. It is unclear what happens when an individual or family becomes homeless. If they are receiving services from one of the social service agencies or are affiliated with a church, it is possible that they receive help, but there is no clear procedure and no agency that is responsible to provide assistance with locating housing. There is no shelter here; however, there is a shelter in Muskingum County that can be accessed for emergencies.

In Perry County there are some income-based rental units, such as apartment buildings. There are also rental houses, many of which are substandard and sometimes owned by landlords who are not sensitive to the needs of their tenants. Homelessness in Perry County is not immediately obvious as it is in large cities, but it most likely takes the form of two or more families living in one home, or individuals “staying with” relatives or friends for extended periods of time. This type of homelessness is difficult to track since it cannot be easily seen. Finding a way to get an accurate picture of whom and where our homeless individuals are will be challenging.

The Perry County Housing Coalition will work toward ending homelessness in this county. We are looking at who needs to be involved and in what capacities. We are identifying the stakeholders and discussing ideas about how we will proceed. We are gathering information about services that are available in Perry County as well as those available in neighboring counties. We will see that information about our coalition is disseminated throughout the county. We will do at least one count of the homeless in the near future.

### **Prevention Services**

Although the matter of homelessness in Perry County has been viewed as a “hidden” phenomenon there are some prevention services already in place. These services are however, limited and generally attached to some eligibility requirements.

- **Financial Assistance**

Perry County Jobs and Family Services is a one-stop agency that can provide emergency financial assistance to qualifying residents who face eviction or other threats to housing stability.

The county’s churches and Ministerial Associations provide emergency financial assistance upon request. Churches may pay for a motel room for a short period of time or provide financial aid to prevent an eviction. These services are generally very short-term and are intended to respond to emergency situations.

- **Housing Assistance**

The Perry County Metropolitan Housing Authority oversees the subsidized housing that is available in the county. Access to subsidized housing is income driven and lengthy wait lists exist in Perry County.

The Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities provides supportive housing for Perry County residents who have a qualifying disability. The supportive housing is viable prevention of homelessness for disabled residents.

The Mental Health & Recovery Services Board through Six County, Inc. provides supportive housing for Perry County residents who have a severe mental illness.

- **Employment Assistance**

Perry County Jobs and Family Services provides employment assistance to those seeking employment in the county and can help prevent homelessness by providing access to employment and income stability.

Tri County Community Action Agency offers services for dislocated workers, welfare to work participants and employer pre-screening and consulting services.

- **Disaster Assistance**

A unit of the Red Cross Chapter out of Muskingum County recently located in Perry County. Red Cross provides emergency housing for disaster victims. Having a unit in Perry County will enhance response times and alleviate some of the transportation burden on Perry County residents when applying for assistance.

The Salvation Army provides various disaster services to Perry County residents.

- **Miscellaneous Assistance**

Tri County Community Action Agency offers food assistance, home repair assistance, weatherization assistance, and emergency heating/cooling assistance for low income families.

Southeastern Ohio Legal Services handles cases concerning public benefits, family problems, fair housing, utilities and other cases that may be related to housing stability.

The Salvation Army assists in preventing homelessness by providing emergency shelter, clothing, furniture giveaway, emergency food assistance and community open suppers.

There are several Food Pantries operating in Perry County. They are located in various parts of the county and are generally accessible by all county residents.

The agencies providing the services have been quick to remind us that even with the prevention services that are already in place there are many gaps and unmet needs in the area of prevention.

- The lack of any shelter capacity in the county is a gap in preventing homelessness. Transportation to shelters located several miles away presents a barrier to residents needing shelter.
- The subsidized housing available Perry County is woefully inadequate. Waiting lists are staggering in length and demand for subsidized housing grossly surpasses availability.
- The lack of enforcement of codes and zoning creates an abundance of substandard housing and limits housing that meets an adequate standard and is affordable.
- The lack of community awareness or education regarding rural homelessness.
- The lack of outreach efforts and coordination of services.
- The lack of funding in the county for building housing units.

It is the belief of Coalition members that it will be essential to the success of this plan that we incorporate strategies that will address gaps in prevention services. Current plans are as follows:

1. Conduct a needs assessment that includes a point in time count to assess need for shelter capacity in the county.
2. Determine steps to be taken to increase number of subsidized housing units in the county.
3. Utilize Temporary Assistance to Needy Families for financial assistance in preventing eviction or foreclosure.

4. Centralize information regarding available services and assistance and inform public where information can be obtained.
5. Raise community awareness through education and engage key community members having the potential to effect change in the dialogue.
6. Advocate for tighter code enforcement and zoning laws.
7. Advocate for looser eligibility requirements and guidelines.

### **Coordination of Services**

Coordination of services to assist families who are at risk of becoming homeless, are homeless, or are living in unsafe housing has been somewhat sporadic, often extremely time consuming and almost always frustrating to the worker and the family or person who finds themselves in the situation.

There have been a few Resource Directories compiled over the years and caseworkers generally make direct contact to the provider based upon clients' needs.

Currently there is no formal Service Coordination mechanism to meet the needs of people who find themselves in this situation.

As work on this plan continues the following has been identified as gaps or needs in the current coordination of services throughout the county.

- The Metropolitan Housing Authority provides important services to homeless and low-income individuals in the county. Attendance at the Coalition meetings has been sporadic. Coalition members feel that the MHA is too important a resource to not have its full participation in this planning process.
- Many of the resources are not local which creates the need to expand relationship building into neighboring counties.
- Coalition members are still identifying services that are being offered through some of the lesser known entities such as churches, and other out reach programs.
- Time or the lack of time for caseworker/managers and others who are seeking services has proven to be at the very least a barrier in service coordination.
- The lack of a centralized location where people in need can go for accurate and up to date information about available services.

In identifying efforts and gaps in current Service Coordination the coalition will seek to incorporate the following strategies to reduce the barriers and enhance service coordination:

- MHA – Continue to keep the Director informed of upcoming meetings and provide meeting minutes. Ask Director to complete a task that will assist in the planning process. Appoint a Coalition member to make a personal contact.
- Relationship Building in neighboring counties – learning the contact information and criteria for services outside the county is essential. Coalition members will continue in their efforts of identifying and then inviting those people to join the coalition when appropriate.
- Services Identification – Continue to actively search for services by contacting the lesser known entities. All coalition members will remain vigilant in this effort and will provide the coalition coordinator with the information. The coalition coordinator will log the information.
- A Housing Specialist must be hired. This person will be significant in serving not only the staff of agencies and organizations who work with identified clients but will most importantly be a point of contact for the very people whose lives are devastated by the reality of being homeless or at risk of becoming homeless or who are living in unsafe conditions.

## **Outreach**

Outreach is a vital step in the right direction to make any program work. A survey of local agencies and what they provide helped prepare a basis for identifying and expanding outreach efforts.

Currently Perry County utilizes the following outreach activities:

- Community Action. A resource guide listing local Health & Human Services is available
- The Perry County Chamber of Commerce
- Family & Children First meeting presentations
- Job & Family Services Caseworker awareness
- Children's Services caseworker awareness
- The local Inter-Church Council
- Local Food Pantries
- Working with local Law Enforcement

A gap of centralized information is evident. Communication gaps are being identified between schools, social service agencies, faith-based entities, law enforcement and service organizations. All mentioned are in some way working with people experiencing being homeless or sub-standard housing, but a clear, singly identifiable resource to aid each agency is not coordinated at present.

A survey of local agencies and what they provide helps prepare a basis for identifying and expanding outreach efforts. The Community Resource Guide being readily available to all providers is also a key piece. Family & Children First meeting presentations, Children's services caseworker awareness, Job & Family Services caseworker awareness, contacting local Law Enforcement, along with invitations to all the mentioned agencies to coalition meetings and informal networking will expand the foundation being built that will "help get the word out". Another important piece is getting information to the general public, and that will take a coordinated effort with the local media.

A lack of public awareness can be addressed in various ways. First, local media coverage is vital. A Community Awareness/Stakeholder meeting planned for sometime in the early months of 2007, and scheduling face-to-face meetings with key community leaders are considerations. Bringing the Community Investment Program to the table would help communicate to the private sector. Having a strong volunteer base would help strengthen the "getting the word out" campaign. Also, a resource website for both those in need and those who want to become better educated and proactive would be an invaluable tool.

### **Workforce Development**

Although it is evident that generational poverty is a long time condition of many residents in our community, addressing the need to prepare residents to perform effectively and successfully in their jobs has been a priority for sometime. Below are several of the county's current services in enhancing workforce development.

- Hocking College
- Vocational Schools
- Perry County One Stop
- Perco (MRDD services)
- Bureau of Vocational Rehab/Job Retraining
- RSC
- Perry County Able Program
- Chamber Of Commerce
- Mature Works
- Job and Family Services
- Holland Center
- Perry Emergency Assistance Program
- Job Club
- Community Improvement Corporation

Living in a rural community, riddled with poverty, brings the unintended but never the less extreme lack of living wage jobs and high paying; couple that with the lack of public transportation, this community has significant needs in the area of employment. We are able to provide education and training for many who seek it yet without the expectation of obtaining a job at the end of the training, some area residents have expressed an attitude of "what's the use". We find it necessary to identify not simply a gap in service of workforce development but also the noteworthy need for jobs in general. Gaps are identified specifically as:

- Affordable education/training for high paying jobs
- Economic Development which will provide living wage and higher paying jobs
- Affordable transportation to the workplace
- Programs that meet personal needs of the employee and their family

Although the topic of an effective workforce has been addressed in many discussions throughout the years, this plan will encourage through appropriate stakeholders the following strategies to meet the needs addressed above:

- Research funding opportunities for job training and encourage employers to offer on the job training and career enhancement education classes
- Encourage expanded collaboration with community organizations in bringing more jobs to the area
- Research and encourage programs that will address perspective employees' individual needs such as appropriate clothing, child care, etc.

### **Building support and liaison work**

The organized effort to work on the issue of homelessness in Perry County is in its early stages of development. The liaison work that has taken place to date has focused primarily on identifying agencies and individuals interested in working on the planning project that is currently being funded by the Osteopathic Heritage Foundation. The Family and Children First Council was chosen to be the lead agency for the project. Members of that group have formed the nucleus of the original planning group.

The planning group has met monthly over the past six months. The group has identified a number of additional groups/agencies that we think it would be helpful to have involved with this project. We have contacted individuals from some of those groups and have invited them to join our group. Our goal has been both to learn more about their work and to inform them about the project.

We recognize that we have a lot of work to do in the area of building support. We have identified a number of groups and individuals that we would like to include in our planning process. At the local level we need to connect with the various office holders at the county, city/village, and township level. This includes the county commissioners, mayors, and township trustees as well as township zoning commissions. We also want to work with business leaders and development groups such as: the Community Improvement Corporation, the Downtown Revitalization Group, the Chamber of Commerce, builders, banks and credit unions, and media representatives (newspapers, radio/TV stations). We also recognize the importance of seeking the involvement of landlords, tenants, and individuals who have experienced homelessness.

We want to continue to build our relationships with service providers who have contact with individuals who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless. This includes agencies and groups such as Community Action, mental health agencies, Job and Family Services, the Metropolitan Housing Authority, Veterans Affairs, Domestic Violence Shelters, child care providers, the Salvation Army, food banks, the Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, the Area Agency on Aging, the Health Department, foster care networks, and health care providers.

We need to expand our connection with local service organizations, faith-based communities, schools and colleges. We also need to be in touch with funding entities such as foundations and the United Way. In addition, it is important that we have contact with individuals involved in law enforcement and the criminal justice system including police officers, sheriffs, probation officers, prosecutors, and judges.

At the state level we need to connect with our state representative and our state senator. In addition, we need to build a relationship with representatives of federal and state agencies such as HUD, USDA, the Ohio Department of Transportation, the Ohio Department of Development, the Ohio Department of Mental Health, and the Appalachian Regional Commission.

There are a number of ways that we can engage new partners. One of the main ways is through outreach and education. We plan to utilize multiple strategies for getting the word out to let people know about our initiative and what we are doing. We plan to use the media as one component of the educational process. We have not yet identified a person who will be responsible for working with the media.

We plan to work with Marci McCaulay, RHISCO Project liaison consultant to help us with our liaison work at the state level. Members of the planning group will be doing the initial liaison work over the next few months. As our network grows, there will be additional people doing the work.

We have generated a list of potential contacts at the local level. One strategy that we have been using to build support and expand our base is to invite individuals whose work relates to housing and homelessness to speak to our planning group. That provides us with an opportunity to learn more about their work and also provides them with an opportunity to learn about our initiative. We recognize the importance of identifying areas of common concerns and common goals. We plan to continue inviting new people to our planning meetings over the next few months.

We have begun planning for a community gathering to raise awareness about homelessness in Perry County. We have been developing a list of individuals that we plan to invite. We have had preliminary discussions about possible formats for that meeting. We want to let participants know how they can both contribute to and benefit from our efforts. We recognize the importance of keeping the expectations for others' work clear, specific, and time-limited. We anticipate having the community gathering early in 2007. Members of the Perry County Housing Coalition will take the lead in planning this event.

Another strategy that we have discussed is identifying a liaison or contact person within local organizations and agencies. In selecting individuals we plan to build on existing contacts or friends of friends of members of the coalition. We feel that it is important that we see these as mutually beneficial connections. One way to facilitate these connections would be to provide individuals with opportunities to share conversation and food. One of our goals is to identify areas where we can share/trade resources including working together on identifying and seeking funding sources.

## **Data Collection**

Perry County has not yet developed or implemented a data collection strategy. We anticipate doing our first Point-in-Time Count sometime in the coming year. We recognize that in addition to counting individuals who fit the HUD definition of homeless, we are interested in gathering information about individuals who may be at risk of homelessness. We have discussed using a service-based approach as a part of our point-in time data collection process. We are in the process of developing an instrument that service providers can use throughout the year as well as a form that clients can complete at the time of intake. These instruments will provide us with additional information about both the extent and the type of needs that individuals in Perry County have related to housing and homelessness.

In addition to developing an approach to gathering information about individuals who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness in Perry County, we also need to develop a plan to assess the local resources. We need to identify existing subsidized housing options, groups for which they are available, occupancy rates, and length of waiting lists. In addition we need to find out more about the availability and cost of rental properties in the county.

We are in the process of developing our data collection methodology. We are looking at models of data collection being used in other counties in the RHISCO project. We are also reviewing approaches that have been used in other rural areas such as Kentucky and Colorado. This is definitely a work in progress. Since we are in the early stages of this process, we will be trying out some things for the first time and we will be modifying them as we learn more about what works and what doesn't.

## **Sustainability Planning**

A comprehensive plan to end homelessness needs to have a clear set of priorities as well as strategies to obtain the resources needed to address these priorities. The Perry County Housing Coalition is in the early stages of developing an accurate picture of the type and extent of housing needs in our county. It is the belief of a number of members of our coalition that substandard rental property and a lack of affordable alternatives is an issue for a number of our residents. It is also our belief that doubling up is a fairly common occurrence, further supporting the view that there is an inadequate supply of affordable housing options for low to moderate income individuals and families in Perry County. We also recognize that there is a need to provide better coordination of existing services and easier access for those in need of assistance related to housing and homelessness issues. In addition, we have identified some sub-populations such as individuals with mental illness, drug and alcohol issues, and children leaving foster care for whom additional housing options and support may be needed. We need to collect additional information to determine if these are indeed the most pressing needs in our county.

We will be considering a number of possible sources of funding for our work, depending on what we identify as our priorities. One option that we have discussed is seeking funding to support a housing specialist position to address some of the coordination needs identified above. That person could also help to develop lists of available rental properties and provide support to both landlords and tenants. They could also assist consumers who qualify for financial support through Perry County Job and Family Services to access Prevention, Retention, and Contingency (PRC) assistance.

As we work to expand the support available for individuals in need of emergency rental or utility assistance we will seek funding through the Homeless Assistance Grant Program from the Ohio Department of Development. Funding for programs to provide housing support for individuals with mental illness will be sought through the Ohio Department of Mental Health's PATH program. We will also work with our regional mental health board to identify additional programs that might be available.

We will also explore programs to support low-income individuals in purchasing homes, including counseling, down payment assistance, and sweat equity programs. Financial support and technical support for these programs could be sought through the Housing Assistance Grant Program of the Ohio Department of Development and the Housing Assistance Council.

There are currently a number of individuals receiving housing support through the Perry County Metropolitan Housing Authority. We will gather additional information about individuals currently being helped as well as those on waiting lists to help us determine what additional programs may be needed.

## Implementation Strategy

<b>Objectives to End Chronic Homelessness in Perry County</b>	<b>Local Action Steps</b>	<b>Short -Term Goals</b>	<b>Long – Term Goals</b>
1. Determine need for shelter access in the county.	1. Conduct a needs assessment that includes a point in time count annually.	1. Establish a method for conducting a needs assessment the first quarter of each calendar year.	1. Establish shelter capacity in Perry County.
2. Increase number of subsidized housing units in Perry County.	2. Establish a strategy and planning committee to increase the number of permanent subsidized housing units.	2. Engage the Metropolitan Housing Authority in planning process.	2. Increase the number of permanent subsidized housing units available in Perry County by 25%.
3. Reduce the number of evictions and/or foreclosures in Perry County.	3. Establish an emergency funding pool to provide financial assistance to county residents facing eviction or foreclosure.	3. Engage potential financial contributors in a discussion regarding emergency funds.	3. Reduce the number of evictions or foreclosures in the county by 10% within 3 years.
4. Increase access to centralized information for services and assistance.	4. Collect information regarding services and assistance available in the county.	4. Establish a centralized access point where consumers can obtain information.	4. Provide information regarding the available services in the county at a single access point.

<b>Objectives to End Chronic Homelessness in Perry County</b>	<b>Local Action Steps</b>	<b>Short -Term Goals</b>	<b>Long – Term Goals</b>
5. Implement tighter code enforcement and zoning regulations.	5. Consult with code enforcement agency and zoning board regarding current laws and enforcement activities.	5. Explore with appropriate entities ways to strengthen existing codes and zoning regulations.	5. Implement code enforcement and zoning practices that encourage housing development.
6. Employ a Housing Specialist for Perry County.	6. Secure funding to hire a Housing Specialist for Perry County.	6. Identify and apply for funding within the first half of the calendar year.	6. Maintain funding for Housing Specialist position.

**Regionalism**

Perry County does collaborate with service organizations in contiguous counties especially the more densely populated and economically viable Fairfield and Muskingum. Because there are currently no homeless or emergency shelters in Perry County, those found to be in need are “exported” to these neighboring counties. The extent of the counties’ service to these individuals is access to limited funds for transportation to the shelters.

Until the socio-economic conditions in Perry County improve, regionalism and collaboration with agencies of surrounding counties is essential. In the interim, showing strategies used to positively impact issues relating to housing and homelessness would be beneficial.

Organizations that are well established could share the structure, operational procedures, and means by which they secured community acceptance and participation.

Currently Perry County lacks the financial resources needed to seriously impact substandard housing and homelessness within its boundaries. But it does not lack the will and desire to end these conditions. Successfully ending these unacceptable realities that often touch the lives of some residents will require the human and financial resources that regionalism will provide.

## **Conclusion**

The Perry County Housing Coalition is the first step in building a county-wide consensus of the problem of homelessness and the negative impact it has on the families who want to live in this beautiful community.

With a promise to stay at the forefront of all the issues, coalition members are dedicated to increasing awareness to the local government officials, employers, and residents; researching funding resources; encouraging the appropriate entities to apply for available funds; attend trainings/conferences that will continue to educate and challenge members; and become a voice for change as we use the information in this plan to make Perry County a place where families and/or singles can work, play, shop, be educated, worship, serve, and live a fulfilling, prosperous lifestyle in a safe, decent, affordable home of their choosing.

We are excited about this endeavor and we are committed to promoting and incorporating significant and definitive change over the next decade.

## **Membership Roster**

**Patti Smith, Housing Coalition Coordinator** PC Family and Children First

**Jennifer Ball**, PC Childrens Services

**Dorothy Barlow**, PC Jobs and Family Services

**Elaine Curry**, United Way

**Susan Dorsky, Director** Perry Counseling Center

**Steve Holekamp, Health Commissioner** PC DOH

**Maria Isham**, Community Action

**Marci McCaulay**, Community Member

**Beth Pompey, Business Manager**, PC MRDD

**Larry Rentschler, Superintendent**, New Lexington School District

**Carole Sowards, Director** PMHA

**Jan Watts, Executive Director**, Perry Behavioral Health Choices

Respectfully submitted by the Perry Housing Coalition, Perry County, Ohio  
December, 2006