

**Rural Presentation
Seattle
February 2008**

I live and work in Central Oregon, a small, rural community made up of three counties, with a total population of about 200,000 and is geographically one square mile larger than the state of New Jersey.

I've been fortunate to have had the opportunity to work in a major metropolitan area, in a medium size community, to be a member of the Washington Balance of State steering committee and now am in a rural community.

As a result I have different perspectives regarding how to manage and operate homeless programs in a variety of settings. And I know, first hand, that working in the rural areas presents the greatest challenges.

Today I want to spend some time talking with you about Collaborations and Coalescing – getting communities and community members to recognize and work on the issues of homelessness.

Let's revisit the definitions that Jonda shared with us earlier and see if you can add some at the end.

- **communities less than 100,000 people**
- **communities that are more than 100 miles from a major urban area**
- **large geographic areas with many small towns or communities**
- **Large areas which are dependent on one industry such as agriculture, timber, mining, tourism etc.**
- **Higher poverty rates**
- **Lower levels of educational attainment**
- **an area that is described as “country”**

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Unique aspects of rural communities include:

- **lack of public transportation**
- **single agencies providing many services**
- **individuals wear several different “hats”**
- **sense of isolation**
- **fewer dollars when funding decisions are based on population**
- **difficult for staff to attend “state wide” meetings/trainings/workshops**

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Generating Participation:

Who do you need and how do you get “the right folks” to the table when it is time to address homeless issues – especially when there is a perception that rural communities don’t have homeless folks?

PUBLIC:

- State and Local Government
- Public Housing Authorities
- **School Systems – go back to – teachers/counselors/secretaries/principals all know which families are struggling and which kids are homeless**
- Law Enforcement/Corrections
- Local Workforce Investment Board

- Other ?????

PRIVATE:

- Non-Profit Organizations
- Faith Based Organizations
- Funders/Advocacy Groups
- Business (Banks, Developers, Business Associations, Service Organizations – Rotary, Kiwanis, Moose/Elks/ etc.)
- **Hospitals/Medical Representatives – go back to E.R. personnel, discharge planners – Community Clinics**

- Homeless Persons
- Other ????????

What's in it for me/us?

Identify a common goal/need/issue/activity/event

For us it was the Homeless Count. Our community had never done a “street” count – in January 2006 the members of our Homeless Leadership Council (all of the usual suspects identified above) spent 24 hours counting every homeless individual/family we could identify.

(insert some of the how we did it things if time – blankets/food sites/personal gift bags etc.) We produced numbers and statistics that amazed the entire community – media, elected officials, service providers, educators, law enforcement, veterans organizations – we all had an idea – but no one was close to what we discovered that snowy day and night in January. Now we do a count each January and each time we are better,

the entire region participates, and we contact more homeless families and individuals.

Whatever your community decides to do it is imperative to find something for everyone to do – the surest way to guarantee participation is to give folks a job to do.

When we do the Homeless Count some of the “jobs” are:

- **Publicity (media, flyers etc.)**
- **Volunteering and Volunteer Recruitment**
 - **residents of retirement facilities to “bag up” the hygiene packets**
 - **youth groups help us put the food bags together**
 - **People to go out and do the “counting”**
- **Volunteer Training**
- **Secure Donations**

- ❖ **accept cash donations (and use it to buy food to hand out),**
- ❖ **food donations,**
- ❖ **blankets,**
- ❖ **hygiene products,**
- ❖ **pet food**
- **Data Collection/Entry**

Lots of opportunities for folks to make this event “theirs”.

This fall we did our first ever Project Homeless Connect – how many of you know what that is?

A one-day event designed to provide a variety of services to the homeless population of a community.

Now as I go through a very shortened list of services that were available be thinking about how we brought in new partners to work alongside the regular homeless service folks.

- **Medical/Dental/Mental Health/Vision**
- **Child Care**
- **State services – public assistance/child support/food stamps/ID cards-Driver’s Licenses**
- **Substance abuse counseling/referrals**
- **Cooking tips and instructions – Cooperative Extension**
- **Employment/Employers/Work Training**
- **Haircuts and shampoos**
- **Housing information/assistance**
- **Immunizations**
- **Pet Care/Veterinary Services**
- **Senior Services**
- **SSI/SSD applications**
- **Social Services**
- **Transportation to and from the event**
- **Bicycle repair**
- **Veterans Services**
- **WIC**

- **Library**

be sensitive to various interests and keep a place for everyone.

What have these events accomplished for Central Oregon?

Stronger funding proposals, with greater community participation, were submitted which resulted in a new transitional housing program for homeless veterans, increased number of beds at the teen parent shelter and a new shelter for homeless single men.

Community awareness of the issues of homelessness, who and where the homeless families and individuals are.

Hard data to tell the story and to use in funding proposals.

**Advocacy with local, state and federal
decision makers.**

Renewed commitment to make changes

Greater visibility and awareness

Greater Commitment

**Established Credibility of HLC – story of
January 18th.**

Remember -

**Homelessness is not an isolated
problem – it is woven into the
fabric of the community –**