United Way of the Midlands
Progress Report
on Homeless Coordination Contract
In September of 2014, Columbia City Council approved an award to United Way of the Midlands (UWM) to Improve Regional Coordination of Homeless Services in the Midlands. In addition to the award for coordination, the City asked UWM to assume management of the program to provide emergency winter shelter from November 2014 through March 2015. The contract to improve regional coordination was finalized on December 31, 2014. To follow is a report on activities through the first quarter as well as a report on the 2014-2015 operation of the Inclement Winter Center.

UWM serves as lead agency for the Midlands Area Consortium for the Homeless (MACH), the 14-county regional coalition and continuum of care for homeless services in the Midlands. UWM and MACH are partnered in improving quality and coordination of care in the Midlands. UWM also partnered with City Center Partnership, the Midlands Housing Trust Fund, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness-South Carolina to address the scope of work.

Progress Report

The priority for the first quarter was to fully staff the coordination team. Three positions were posted as soon as the contract was signed: Homeless Services Manager (not city-funded but key to the team); the Homeless Services Coordinator (70% city supported) and the Housing Coordinator (100% city supported). The Homeless Services Manager and the Services Coordinator both started on March 16. The Housing Coordinator will start April 16.

Gina Amato, Homeless Services Manager, most recently served as Disaster Assistance Manager with the American Red Cross of Rock Hill. Prior to Red Cross, Gina was Executive Director with Pilgrim’s Inn, an emergency shelter and permanent housing provider in Rock Hill. She is the founder of the local homeless coalitions in Rock Hill and Lancaster counties.

Jacqueline Sloane, Homeless Services Coordinator, recently moved to the Midlands to be closer to family. Jacqueline brings extensive experience with social service and homeless programs including work with the New Jersey Department of Child Protective Services and Jewish Family Services.

Angela Jones, Housing Coordinator, is a licensed attorney with a career that includes serving as an attorney for SCDSS (Lexington and Lancaster), SC Legal Services, and private practice with a specialty in landlord tenant law and legislative analyst for the City of Detroit.

Local Service Coordination

Coordinated Assessment System The statewide Coordinated Assessment System (CAS) team continues to build the system. All four regional client data management systems (HMIS) have been integrated into and 2-1-1, the statewide information and referral line has also been integrated with the client management systems to create a single portal for referral and assistance to homeless services. This new system made South Carolina the first in the country to have a single statewide HMIS integrated with its 2-1-1 system.

Currently, two local agencies are participating in a pilot program for referrals. The team has established timelines to expand the use of 2-1-1 for initial screening calls statewide, to all HUD and ESG funded agencies by end of summer 2015. The CAS Planning Team also endorsed the use of a screening tool (VI SPDAT) that assesses the vulnerability of people who are homeless to prioritize them for placement into housing. The tool was tested by various coalitions during the January Point in Time Count. The CAS and its vulnerability screening strategy will improve coordination of services regionally and across the state and improve use of limited resources.

Program Planning and Evaluation

The Homeless Services Manager is supporting the
MACH’s evaluation committee which has initiated its review of HUD-funded programs in the 14 counties. The Manager and Coordinator will support agency site visits to review outcome performance beginning in May, to be completed by June. The site visits include review of annual benchmarks such as stability of clients placed into housing, bed utilization of the program, data quality, and increases in client income.

**Point in Time Count Data** collection for the annual point-in-time count took place from January 28-February 4, 2015. This annual census of people who are homeless pulls information about people who are sheltered (in emergency or transitional housing programs) from HMIS and collects information from people who are unsheltered through individual surveys collected at service sites (soup kitchens, meal sites, the library, etc.). The Inclement Weather Center participated in the effort. Sixty-six volunteers on 17 teams collected data in Richland County. The report is scheduled for release in April. UWM/MACH provided extensive data on homeless and low- to moderate-income populations to the City’s Community Development Department for its new 2015 Consolidated Plan.

**Employment and Training Coordination** The Homeless Service Coordinator has not yet inventoried employment placement and training programs. UWM has prioritized the meal coordination objective.

**Maximizing Use of Resources** In addition to developing CAS and selection and piloting of a prioritizing assessment tool for housing placement; the homeless services team is supporting MACH in its preparation for the annual HUD competition for Continuum of Care funding including verifying the grant inventory and evaluating current programs. Annually, MACH prioritizes projects and collectively submits an application for almost $3 million in funding to support housing and services for people who are homeless in the Midlands. The competition is expected to open this summer. Additionally, UWM has partnered with the State Homeless Coalition, SC Department of Mental Health, and Veterans Affairs to offer training for homeless services providers on May 6th on Motivational Interviewing (MI). Motivational Interviewing is a client-centered, evidence-based, directive method for enhancing motivation to change behavior by exploring and resolving ambivalence. Use of MI counseling has been shown to improve treatment retention and the likelihood of behavior change in a number of health domains (e.g. alcohol and/or drug use, engagement in further treatment, etc.).

**Housing** UWM/MACH proposed a number of strategies for improved coordination and increased availability of housing resources including rapidly filling available units with eligible people, identifying market or other affordable units that people who are homeless could access and increasing the stock of units. The UWM/MACH team first is focused on increasing placement of homeless veterans using available VASH (Veterans Administration Supportive Housing) vouchers. We were one of 70 communities selected to participate in Zero: 2016, a program of technical assistance to improve placement of veterans and people who are chronically homeless that is the successor program to the national 100,000 Homes campaign. Zero: 2016 supports the goals for improved coordination of housing placement of homeless people in the region. The new housing coordinator will build on this model to improve placement in the local area. During the first quarter, the work focused on establishing baseline data on homeless subpopulations and “take down targets” for the number of people to place into housing per month to reach goals of functional “zero” in both chronically homeless and veteran populations. The Columbia/Midlands target for chronically homeless people is 259 placed into housing by December 2016. We are working with our Zero Coach from the Corporation for Supportive Housing to quantify targets for placement of homeless veterans and have begun efforts to increase
housing placements among veterans. UWM entered into a data sharing agreement with the VA Medical Center to allow VA case management and outreach staff to view HMIS client records to help identify clients matched to VA housing programs. Additionally, UWM staff created a special “leads list” to help identify vulnerable clients with contact information for VA staff. HMIS/Homeless staff coordinates monthly meetings of the outreach workers to increase collaborations and to discuss and document trends in local homeless street populations.

In February, staff began reporting monthly housing placement numbers via HMIS for chronically homeless placements and via the Veteran Administration HOMES system for homeless veterans. On April 1, UWM convened the Zero: 2016 Core Planning Team. This Team will oversee data collection results, discuss community strategies for increasing housing placements, and serve as connectors to community resources.

**March Zero: 2016 Report:**

- Chronically homeless people placed into permanent housing: 4
- Chronically homeless Veterans placed into permanent housing: 8
- Non-Chronically homeless Veterans placed into permanent housing: 18

The Midlands Housing Trust Fund (MHTF), a partner in this contract, has been asked to participate in a City committee to review zoning regulations to address impediments to housing development. The committee is expected to be convened in May.

**Meal coordination** UWM has begun work to improve coordination of meals to people who are homeless in the community. Staff has reviewed the recommendations of the 2012 City Task Force; began updating the list of meal services to the homeless and has scheduled a group discussion with people who are homeless to better understand the availability of meals and to gauge if the services meet local needs. We have also secured background information like DHEC regulations, Safe Serve standards, and the City’s permit ordinance. We have identified and interviewed leadership in other communities who have addressed this issue for strategies that worked for them. The UWM team met with City staff on April 9th to clarify expectations for coordination. UWM will meet with other stakeholder groups for initial input on expectations and convene a steering committee to review the issues and recommend improvements.

**Coordination with Law Enforcement and Justice Systems** The Homeless Court had an inaugural session on January 27 and favorably disposed of one case. Immediately following her hearing, the first client reported for work. The hearing was held in the day center at Transitions in front a large audience that included community representatives and Transitions clients. Since then the committee has been focused on improving processes for referral acceptance into the program. The committee is also developing a manual for the court and marketing materials to reach clients.

UWM has also coordinated with the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill-South Carolina and the Columbia Police Department to enroll the first 10 officers in Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) in May. CIT is a national-level best practice model to train first responders in de-escalation techniques, especially among homeless populations and people living with serious mental illness. This specialized training for City Police staff is funded by the City Regional Homeless contract with UWM.

**Winter Shelter—See attached full report on Inclement Weather Center operations.**