



Blair County Shelter Task Force- Family Shelter

Creating Innovative Solutions for the Homeless in
Blair County

Family Services Incorporated

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Executive Summary

Homelessness is not just the result of too few houses – its causes are many and varied. Domestic violence, a shortage of affordable housing, unemployment, mental illness, family breakdown and drug and alcohol abuse all contribute to the level of homelessness in Blair County.

The Family Shelter provides a safe, clean and supportive environment for low-income homeless individuals and families in Blair County. The specific goal of the Family Shelter is to shelter homeless individuals and families while assisting them in securing employment and permanent housing, along with comprehensive case management, supportive services, information and referrals.

The current Family Shelter offers 16 beds and serves approximately 200 individuals per year. With a turn away rate of 2107 individuals for the previous fiscal year 2019/2020, Family Services forecasts the need for an additional 12 individuals to be served per month; totaling an approximate 300 individuals provided with shelter services per annum. Family Services seeks to create a 35 bed Family Shelter to address this need.

Due to the shelter's mission of providing safe shelter, supportive services, and comprehensive case management, the long-term goal is to make available 35 shelter beds, provide space for local social service agencies to provide service provision, and to create six double occupancy affordable housing units.

With the additional beds available and comprehensive services provided, the program projects to serve 300 low- income Blair County residents per year, thus moving in a direction of creating innovative solutions for the homeless in Blair County.

Homelessness is a devastating experience and disrupts every aspect of their lives and we must attempt to provide an avenue of support in order to heal the emotional as well as the physical damage. The Family Shelter provides a supportive environment while acting as a conduit to an array of other needed services.

Many individuals and families in our region continue to experience a profound need for shelter services, and Family Services is prepared to address and respond to current and future community needs.

Reducing homelessness is everyone's responsibility.

Blair County's efforts to reduce homelessness must be urgent, as well as sustained.

Introduction

Family Services Incorporated has a long history of providing services for Blair County residents, dating back to the late 1800's. The present agency resulted from the merger of two human service agencies that had special interest and skill in dealing with children and their families. Currently, Family Services offers 6 main programs; Children's Advocacy Center, Counseling, Family Shelter, Intellectual Disabilities Program, Runaway and Homeless Youth Program and the Victim Services Program. In addition to core services, several components are offered within each program that provides service provision to over 4000 individuals and families each year.

In 1999, it was evident that Blair County needed a shelter to address the needs of homeless individuals to include intact families. Recognizing this need, Bon Secours Holy Family Hospital provided a property at 2700 Eighth Avenue, Altoona. Through Emergency Shelter grants and donations, funding was obtained to remodel the house to meet Labor and Industry Standards and City Codes. The new Emergency Shelter Project opened on December 6, 1999.

In 2008 the Board of the Emergency Shelter Project approached Family Services Incorporated to initiate discussions which resulted in Family Services Incorporated taking administrative responsibility for the Emergency Shelter Project in January of 2009.

On September 1, 2009, the Emergency Shelter for Men merged with the Emergency Shelter Project. The combined services were known as the Emergency Shelter Project. In November of 2013 the Emergency Shelter Project became known as the Family Shelter to better reflect the services provided; shelter for homeless families.

The Family Shelter currently offers 16 beds and serves approximately 200 individuals per year. With a turn away rate of **2107** individuals in fiscal year 2019/2020, and an average length of stay being 32 days, Family Services forecasts the need for an additional 12 individuals served per month; totaling an approximate 300 individuals per year utilizing shelter services. Family Services has responded to this community need and will create a 35-bed shelter facility located within the City of Altoona, on a bus route, and within reasonable walking distance of places of employment.

In 2014, Family Services partnered with The Blair County Housing Development Task Force as a Public Private Partnership to remedy the shelter issues facing the homeless in Blair County. The Blair County Housing Development Task Force was realigned to identify development partnerships and knowledge on the lack of affordable housing and shelter bed availability. The task force has located a larger, ADA compliant Family Shelter facility that can offer comprehensive supportive services in one location.

Public Private Partnership members include the ABCD Corporation, Blair County Commissioners, Blair County Community Action, Blair County Department of Social Services, Blair HealthChoices, Community Development Grants Coordinator, D.M. Architects, Durbin Family, and Family Services Incorporated. The Partnership has acquired a facility in the city of Altoona to accommodate this community benefit venture.

Together, the Public Private Partnership will fundamentally change the way Blair County responds to the needs of the homeless by providing a campus complete with a 35 bed ADA compliant shelter, comprehensive supportive services and six double occupancy low-moderate income affordable housing units.

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Problem Definition

The paramount problem facing the homeless in Blair County is the lack of available shelter beds. Along with the lack of shelter beds, other challenges facing the homeless include the ability to participate in supportive services and move into affordable housing. The Family Shelter currently offers 16 beds and serves approximately 200 individuals per year. With a turn away rate of 2107 individuals in fiscal year 2019/2020, and an average length of stay being 32 days, FSI forecasts the need for an additional 12 individuals served per month; totaling an approximate of 300 individuals per year seeking shelter services. The Family Shelter turn away rate per fiscal year:

2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020
327	366	788	2107

Family Shelter Demographics

	Men	Women	Children	Total
2016/2017	59	74	38	171
2017/2018	72	75	30	177
2018/2019	63	91	48	202
2019/2020	60	84	39	183

The numbers above represent Blair County residents that have found themselves homeless. The homeless population of the Family Shelter includes the following:

- * Veterans
- * Persons with mental illness
- * Persons suffering from addiction disorders
- * Recently unemployed/ displaced workers
- * Widows/ divorcees and/or those grieving the loss of a significant other
- * Former inmates who were incarcerated in local county facilities (non-felons)
- * Victims of domestic violence

Since July 2016, the Family Shelter has provided services to over 578 adults. Within those demographics, 91 were Veterans, 383 suffered a mental health diagnosis, 209 adults had drug and alcohol issues, 142 were victims of Domestic Violence and 19 adults served were over the age of 60.

People who become homeless do not fit one general description. However, people experiencing homelessness do have shared basic needs that include affordable housing, adequate incomes, and health care. Some homeless individuals may need additional services such as mental health or drug treatment in order to remain securely housed and employed. All of these needs must be met to prevent and end homelessness. The Family Shelter regularly makes referrals for:

Drug & Alcohol	Mental Health	Employment	Housing	Subsidized Housing
Pyramid, Home Nursing, Cove Forge, & Blair Drug & Alcohol Partnerships	Behavioral Health of the Alleghenies Programs, PHN Crisis, Nulton Diagnostics	Career Link, Temp Agencies: Spherion, Express, Man Power, Advantage	Blair County Community Action, Blair Senior Services, Home Nursing (PATH & HARP Programs) and Family Services (Emergency Solutions Grant)	Altoona Housing Authority, Improved Dwellings for Altoona, Private Entities

It is imperative to note that those being served at the Family Shelter are primarily Blair County residents. Since fiscal year 2013/2014, the following Blair county zip codes (per adult) presented for intake:

16601	Altoona	356	16648	Hollidaysburg	12
16602	Altoona	425	16662	Martinsburg	8
16603	Altoona	2	16664	New Enterprise	1
16613	Ashville	2	16673	Roaring Spring	8
16617	Bellwood	4	16678	Saxton	2
16625	Claysburg	20	16684	Tipton	2
16627	Coalport	4	16686	Tyrone	45
16630	Cresson	5	16693	Williamsburg	10
16641	Cresson	1	16695	Woodbury	1
16635	Duncansville	41	N/A	Unknown	327

Unknown zip codes belong to residents whom couch surf with no known address.

Adjacent Counties:

16823	Bellefonte	2	17063	Milroy	2
16827	Boalsburg	1	17066	Mount Union	2
15905	Johnstown	8	16866	Philipsburg	1
17066	Huntingdon	6	16801	State College	3

Individuals must meet the following admission criteria to enter the Family Shelter:

- ✓ Should be registered on the Continuum of Care's By Name List
- ✓ Must undergo a background check prior to admission. Those with felony convictions for manufacturing methamphetamines on a federal property and violent sexual predators will not be admitted

The Family Shelter is the only shelter for homeless families in Blair County. We do refer residents to other agencies such as Blair County Community Action, Blair Senior Services and the Altoona Housing Authority for assistance but we are the only facility that provides 24-hour shelter and case management for homeless families residing in Blair County.

Family Shelter Identity Statement

Components of Identity Statement	Family Shelter Identity Statement
We advance our mission of	Provide the resources needed to build healthier relationships so that individuals and families may live and grow to their fullest potential
And seek to	Engage with communities to meet the needs of their most vulnerable members
By serving	Families who are homeless or at risk of being homeless
In	Blair County +Contiguous counties
Through	Providing emergency housing along with in-house case management services
Emphasizing our competitive advantage of	Client- centered approaches, Trauma informed counseling, well-established reputation, the only Family Shelter in the county
Sustainable by	United Way, Homeless Assistance Program, Emergency Food & Shelter Program, Nazareth Family Foundation, Veteran's Administration, Private Grants, Agency Fundraising

Family Shelter Market Awareness/Competitive Analysis

Competitor	Services
Altoona Rescue Mission	Christ centered program: Renew- 30 day program Revive- 60 day program Reform- 6 month program Can serve up to 15 men
Salvation Army	6 month to 1 year Recovery Program includes counseling, worship services, Bible studies. NA and AA

Family Services Incorporated operates the only Family Shelter in Blair County which constitutes our asset advantage.

The Family Shelter has tenured staff, who are familiar with the multitude of relevant community agencies and the challenges presented by the homeless. The Family Shelter delivers client-centered care, in house case management, and has a well-established reputation which constitutes our execution advantage.

Family Services seeks to create a 35-bed shelter facility located within the City of Altoona, on a bus route, and within walking distance of places of employment and service provision. The vision for the new Family Shelter will be an ADA compliant facility, offer single and family bedrooms, common living areas, as well as a safe outdoor play area. The family shelter will have kitchen, dining, laundry, bathroom and living room areas accessible to all residents. The new facility projects serving approximately **300** low-income, homeless Blair County residents per year.

Because of the shelter's mission of providing safe shelter, supportive services, and comprehensive case management, the long term goal in addition to offering 35 shelter beds, is to provide space for local social service agencies to provide on-site service provision, and to create six double occupancy affordable housing units; Thus allowing those receiving shelter services to have on-site service provision through other local agencies to advance their goals of housing, employment and an overall improvement in well-being, to include a medical care component.

As many individuals and families in our region continue to experience a profound need for shelter services, Family Services is prepared to address and respond to current and future needs for Blair County residents.

Community Costs of Homelessness

The creation of a 35 bed Family Shelter, with on-site supportive services has the potential to significantly reduce costs to the Blair County tax payer. Law enforcement interaction and the need for community crises services would decline having ample availability to shelter the homeless whom may appear at local businesses, hospitals, and other agencies when they have no other option.

The homeless in Blair County do not present in tent cities or under bridges. They are usually found couch surfing with friends or living in cars in the parking lots of local businesses. This arrangement is typically short lived as friends can't support long term living agreements and businesses do not allow for permanent parking/loitering. In this instance, many area homeless present at the Emergency Room, the Crisis Center and many times, law enforcement is expected to remedy this situation. Without a diagnosis to qualify for crisis center admission, or an act requiring admission to Blair County Prison, the Family Shelter would be the best option if beds were available.

The average cost per emergency room visit = \$1500

The average cost per day to house an inmate = \$70

The average cost per day per individual at the Family Shelter = \$44

The cost savings are significant when sheltering a homeless individual in lieu of the above scenarios which happen frequently within the Blair County homeless population.

Currently, the Family Shelter receives grant funding from the Nazareth Family Foundation, the United Way, Homeless Assistance Program, FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter funds, Veteran's Administration, Affordable Housing, In-kind donations and other small private grants and community donations.

What Is the Impact of Not Having a Family Shelter?

Without shelter bed availability, the homeless arrive at Emergency Rooms, Urgent Care Centers, Business Parking lots, and other social service agencies. Law Enforcement spend time trying to find places for the homeless to go when businesses are calling to have them removed from their establishments. Beyond the cost, the community will continue to endure the above mentioned issues if we, as a community, do not address the root causes of homelessness in Blair County.

What is the Cost to Operate the Family Shelter?

While the cost savings to the community are great when having the ability to shelter as opposed to other options, the operations of a 35-bed shelter also attach a cost.

INCOME	
UNITED WAY	27,000
CONTRIBUTIONS	30,000
GOVERNMENT FUNDING	48,000
GRANTS AND CONTRACTS	150,000
OTHER INCOME	98,407
TOTAL INCOME	353,407
EXPENSES	
TOTAL WAGES(indirect/direct)	207,813
SOCIAL SECURITY	15,898
PENSION	3,117
HEALTH	10,000
WORKERS' COMP INS.	6,234
UNEMPLOYMENT	623
LIFE/DISABILITY INS.	852
ADMIN 10%	15,095
TOTAL BENEFITS	51,819
STAFF DEVEL-DIRECT	500
STAFF TRAVEL-DIRECT	300
STAFF TRVL-TRAINING DIRCT	1,000
MGMT INFO SYS MAINT-DIR	1,000
CONSULTATION	750
LIABILITY INSURANCE	5,000
ALL OTHER INSURANCES	2,000
OFFICE SPPLS-DIRECT	3,000
POSTAGE-DIRECT	100
ADVER/OUTREACH-DIRECT	500
COMMUNICATIONS-DIRECT	3,000
UTILITIES/DIRECT	38,400
MAINTENANCE/DIRECT	17,200
EQUIP MTC-DIRECT	2,000
FOOD	3,000
HOUSEHOLD GOODS	7,000
STAFF RECOGNITION	500
PROGRAM EVENTS	500
INDIRECT EXPENSES(ADMIN)	8,525
TOTAL OPERATIONS	93,775
TOTAL EXPENSES	353,407

PROPOSED FUNDING SOURCES FOR THE OPERATION OF THE COMPLETED SHELTER:

- United Way of Blair County
- Emergency Solutions Grant
- Veteran's Administration
- Sisters of Mercy Healthy Initiatives
- Emergency Food Shelter Program
- Act 137 Funding
- Nazareth Family Foundation
- Private Grants/Foundations
- Rental Income from apartments
- Private donations
- Fundraising Efforts

What will the Project Cost?

The projected costs to create and maintain a 35 bed Family Shelter are found below.

Family Services seeks funding for the rehabilitation of the acquired facility in the City of Altoona to create a 35 bed shelter to serve persons with special needs, the homeless in Blair County, to include battered spouses. In addition, requested funds will be used to construct six double occupancy affordable housing units for low to moderate income persons. The estimated rehabilitation costs equal \$3,322,673. Family Services has committed funding to complete the shelter project from the Emergency Solutions Grant, ACT 137 Affordable Housing Trust Fund, CDBG city & county dollars, Reliance Bank, PHARE, First National Bank, Blair Health Choices, Federal Home Loan Bank and has been approved to request NAP/SPP tax credits working with local investors and banks. Family Services has an established Capital Campaign to assist with project budget and completion. Family Services anticipates a project completion date of Winter 2021.

Committed Source	Amount	Usage
ACT 137	200,000	Can be used for anything to include match dollars
ACT 137	1,500	Marketing dollars
BHC	130,000	Apartments only
CDBG- City 2018	6,006	Shelter only
CDBG- City 2019	135,000	Shelter only- awaiting Act 2 clearance
CDBG- City 2019	50,000	Shelter only
CDBG- City CV 2020	542,985	Shelter only
CDBG- City 2021	21,000	Shelter only- ADA bedroom
CDBG- County 2020	204,633	Shelter only
ESG- County 2020	105,875	2 ADA bedrooms & 1 family bedroom
FHLB AHP	750,000	Very specific; both shelter & apartment rehabilitation
FNB	5,000	Unrestricted
FSI Capital Campaign	86,000	Current as of 1 February 2021
PHARE- County	75,000	Ramp demolition- FSI contract received
PHARE (comm action)	200,000	Apartments only- awaiting contract 6/10
Reliance Bank	50,000	Unrestricted- can be used for match \$
TOTALS	2,562,999	

Projected total= \$3.2
 80% of total project budget
 Needed= \$637,001

Requested Source	Amount	Usage
CDBG-CV Logan	147,000	Shelter only- community room
CDBG- Logan 2019	21,000	Shelter only- awaiting approval
TOTALS	\$168,000	

Total of both tables= \$2,730,999

85% of total project budget

Needed= \$469,001

Potential Source	Amount	Usage
UPMC Foundation (SPP)	50,000	Unrestricted- SPP 2021
KIZ (SPP)	10,000	Unrestricted- SPP 2021
M&T (SPP)	25,000	Unrestricted- SPP 2021
TOTALS	85,000	

Total of all tables= \$2,815,999

88% of total project budget

Needed= \$384,001

FF&E= \$251,000 (40,000 DHS)= \$211,000

Current Situation: A SWOT Analysis

The Public Private Partnership presents the current situation, a SWOT analysis, which depicts Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats facing the project as defined in previous sections.

	Positives	Negatives
Internal Factors	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity & quality of services available • Diversity of viewpoints • Committed and knowledgeable staff • Willingness to cooperate • Existing partnerships • Supportive donors 	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Shelter Space • Shelter is not ADA compliant • Facility is not owned by FSI • Lack of unrestricted funds • Lack of affordable housing options
External Factors	<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage a giving community • Expand housing first model • Explore landlord opportunities • Marketing to the community • Build relationships with business community • Market the need for larger facility with city/county key players 	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community perception • Barriers to affordable housing & employment • Sustainable Funding

Strengths

Diversity and quality of services: The Family Shelter, along with community social service agencies, offers a continuum of care for the Blair County homeless. There are many services available such as sheltering, outreach, transitional housing, and employment readiness. There are also options to support different subpopulations of the homeless, such as the mentally ill, substance abuse, veterans and victims of domestic violence. These relationships between the entities have been established and work well to support the homeless.

Diversity of Viewpoints: Blair County's homeless service provider community is populated by agencies with diverse agendas, missions and viewpoints. This diversity is of immense value,

increasing the chance that tough issues are looked at from a variety of perspectives and therefore will have more considered responses.

Committed and Knowledgeable Staff: those working at the Family Shelter and serving in the system are passionate and committed to reducing the number of the homeless. Blair County organizations providing homeless services have strong leadership and innovative spirits. There are many resources available to solve the problems, especially when agencies combine their strengths.

Willingness to Cooperate: Blair County agencies working with the homeless have a long history of working well together. Providers are well connected, talk to each other frequently and respect one another. There is cooperation, coordination and positive working relationships among providers. The Family Shelter regularly works with Community Action, Blair Senior Services, Catholic Charities, Home Nursing Agency and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Existing Partnerships: Many Blair County homeless providers have worked together and have met on a regular basis for many years. The Blair County Shelter Task Force has been meeting regularly since 2014 to seek a facility for additional shelter beds. The Family Shelter is currently represented at LHOT, Operation Our Town Faith Based Roundtable, Blair County Health and Welfare Council, and Bridges out of Poverty network.

Supportive Donors: There are a variety of donors supporting the efforts of ending homelessness in Blair County- faith-based groups, community members, business owners, and private foundations.

Weaknesses

Lack of Shelter Space: The Family Shelter turns away an average of 897 individuals per year that would otherwise be eligible for shelter. This is due to the lack of shelter beds at our current location.

Shelter is not ADA Compliant: The current Family Shelter is not ADA compliant. Family Services does not own the facility and lacks the funds to create necessary components for ADA compliance.

Facility is not owned by Family Services: The current Family Shelter is owned by UPMC. Family Services has been notified that UPMC will be repossessing the property in the near future for redevelopment opportunities.

Lack of Unrestricted Funds: The Family Shelter does not receive funding streams to cover the costs of operations or to provide additional services/staffing.

Lack of Affordable Housing Options: Blair County faces a lack of affordable, decent, and safe housing. There is a lack of housing programs designed for individuals who need enhanced supervision. There are inadequate resources to pay rent, security deposits, and utility deposits to help families move into new safe housing.

Opportunities

Leverage a Giving Community: We build on the strengths of the Blair County Shelter Task Force, which increased and demonstrated unity among public private entities. We plan to work with the media to reenergize and refocus support for homeless service providers and engage the larger community in developing solutions to the issue. We will challenge volunteers and donors to provide assistance and funds for needs that are strategic rather than feel good projects. We will continue to promote collective impact among key donors, engendering public awareness and goodwill.

Expanding the Housing First model: Blair County can become a housing first community to augment the services already provided in our community. Housing First is a research-based approach built on the belief that homeless individuals can more effectively deal with other issues such as addiction, employment and physical or mental health once they have housing.

Explore landlord opportunities: We strongly support creating a local network to give preference to reserve a percentage of Section 8 vouchers for homeless individuals and families to include victims of domestic violence. We have developed strong relationships with landlords to be able to house more homeless individuals/families.

Marketing to the Community: We can challenge the Blair County community to refashion their beliefs, views and perceptions regarding the homeless. We can do this through community education and presentations.

Build Relationships with the Business Community: In addition to education and presentations on the perceptions of the homeless, we can challenge the Blair County business community to modify their policies about criminal backgrounds so more people can be employed in a safe manner for the both the employer and employee.

Market the need for larger facility with city/county key players: We can challenge the Blair County key players to refashion their beliefs, views and perceptions regarding the homeless. We can do this through community education, meetings and presentations.

Threats

Community perception: People have difficulty seeing the long-term benefits of aggressively and humanely addressing the needs of people who are homeless. The Blair County homeless are blamed for their situations rather than being helped to address the root causes. There is generalized impatience with the change process required for people that are homeless.

Barriers to Affordable Housing and Employment: The current system does not provide adequate infrastructure for housing and employment. There isn't enough employment opportunities-especially for persons with a criminal background. With a lack of affordable housing options in Blair County, inadequate and limited financial resources, getting and keeping a job is a challenge. Homeless people who succeed in finding employment often find themselves a victim of the "cliff effect"; when a low-wage worker who receives subsidies for housing, child care, food stamps, etc. loses all or some of those subsidies when their wages increase.

Sustainable Funding: The Family Shelter must seek sustainable revenue streams to include commitments from local investments, community groups and renewable funding streams.

Partnership Priorities and Recommendations

The Public Private Partnership has met regularly since 2014 to seek a 35 bed Family Shelter facility that includes comprehensive supportive services on-site and double occupancy affordable housing units. The Partnership has located and purchased the ideal location for this all-inclusive campus that would allow for the redevelopment of almost an entire city block in the city of Altoona, and turn existing structures into tax paying properties. Below are the Partnership's key priorities and recommendations for addressing homelessness in Blair County.

- 35 Bed Family Shelter Facility- The main building on the identified property will be renovated to accommodate 35 shelter beds. The facility will be ADA compliant and will provide living room, kitchen, laundry and common areas accessible to all populations served. The shelter property is owned and operated by Family Services Incorporated.
- Campus Site Development- A member of the Partnership, will provide site development for the campus property.
- 6 Double Occupancy Low-Moderate Affordable Housing Units- The main building on the identified property will be renovated to accommodate 6 double occupancy low-moderate affordable housing units. Unit income will be used to offset operation costs for the Family Shelter and the units themselves. The apartment property sits directly above the shelter and is owned and operated by Family Services Incorporated.
- Comprehensive Supportive Services On-Site- The campus will include the headquarters for the Community Action Agency. The Partnership has begun talks with other social service agencies to provide on-site services. MOU's will be created and the Partnership will continue to talk with service providers such as medical and mental health. The goal is to make the campus a one stop shop for the homeless to assist with gaining employment and safe, secure long term housing.
- Recruit Community Support and Involvement- The Partnership has and will continue to meet with community leaders and members to educate on the benefit of having a Family Shelter Campus. Information shared will include the cost benefit to the community, the testimonials from past clients, research regarding the benefits of providing comprehensive solutions to the homeless population, and the plan for sustainability.
- Seek Seed Funds from Local and State Government- The Partnership has requested Community Development Block Grant funds from the City of Altoona and the Home

Investment Partnership Grant Funds from the city of Altoona. The Partnership has talked with and plans to apply for Department of Community and Economic Development funds, Housing and Urban Development funds, County Community Development Block Grant funds, Logan Township Community Development Block Grant funds, Act 137 Dollars, Blair Health Choices Community Investment Dollars, Family Services Capital Campaign, Federal Home Loan Bank Pittsburgh Affordable Housing grant, and Private Foundation grant opportunities.

- Seek Community Investments- The Partnership will engage with local banks, credit unions, business owners, and mortgage lenders to promote the financial support for the Family Shelter campus project. The Partnership will explore local investment opportunities and leverage Neighborhood Assistance Plan (SPP) tax credits for community member investments.

What is The Benefit of Having a Family Shelter?

The Partnership has come together to support and create an innovative solution to the Blair County Homeless. We believe the community should want to provide a quality continuum of care to those who are most vulnerable. When provided the proper support and services, the homeless can and will become tax paying citizens; Blair County citizens who work, rent, and support local businesses. Testimonials below are from former Family Shelter guests- the names have been changed to protect confidentiality:

On 6/10/2016 Jennifer and her three children entered the Family Shelter. Her boyfriend had been incarcerated and she was evicted due to non-payment of rent. Intake assessments were completed and a shelter service plan was created. Jennifer was also recovering from drug addiction and was on methadone. She realized things had to change so she could provide a good life for her children and herself. After much guidance and supportive counseling Jennifer got off methadone, and identified the path she wanted to take. she pursued a chance to obtain more schooling and to become a RN. Jennifer was accepted to Greater Altoona Career & Technology Center. She was then referred to Blair County Community Action for housing assistance; she was approved for the transitional housing program that would help with her rent for a year. Jennifer and her children moved into their apartment on 8/17/2016 after spending 68 days at the Family Shelter.

On 2/20/17 Dan was admitted to the Family Shelter. Due to substance abuse and several poor choices, Dan found himself in the Blair County Prison. After his release he stayed with friends till he was able to get a bed at the Family Shelter on 2/20/17. Dan was proactive in his recovery and seeking employment. On 2/22/17 Dan obtained employment at Progressive Publishing and worked there till 3/19/17. He was then able to secure employment with Osmose Utilities at a higher pay rate. Dan was discharged on 3/26/17 with housing provided by his employer.

On 11/27/17, Bob, a veteran of the US Army entered the Family Shelter. Bob relocated from NC to be with his son who has medical issues. After being in Altoona for about 2 months his funds run out and he did not have any success obtaining employment. Bob slept in his car for about one month and contacted the VA Hospital for help. The Veterans Homeless Coordinator contacted the Family Shelter for housing. Bob, with the assistance of the shelter staff, developed a resume' and started looking for employment. On December 11th PGW Staffing agency held a recruiting program at the Family Shelter. Bob was hired that same day. He was able to obtain

housing with the assistance of the SSVF program through Veterans Affairs. Bob moved into his new apartment on 12/28/2017, spending thirty-one days at the Family Shelter.

This letter was written to Family Shelter staff:

Bryan and Staff of the family shelter:

Hello everybody I am writing you today to let you all know how much I appreciate all the help you have given me to get my life moving in the right direction. I came to you a very broken man. I had been engaged and thought my life was great, I was working and living with my family thinking life was good, but my ex was not feeling the same way and she was not letting me know that. So she decided to leave and go back to her parents, she did this at a time when I was on medical leave from work to completely detox from the methadone program that I was on. So all the money I had was used to tie up all the bills at the house we lived in. This all hit me from the blind side and put me in a panic. I was calling around looking for a place to live and by the grace of god a spot at your shelter became open for me to move into. I was sleeping in a car and that option was about to be gone as well. So I came down the mountain scared, depressed and hopeless. I felt like life was not worth living. All of you as well as all of the residents welcomed me with open arms. There were ups and downs with my stay here and I kind of kept the fact that I was in a deep depression to myself because I don't want to bother people with my problems. But you all helped me without even knowing it. You gave me hope, my self-worth has become much better since I have been here and each and every one of you is a part of that. I would get upset and think that people did not like me but you all stood by me, motivated me to move on with my life, and showed me that there are good people in this world that care. I cannot put my appreciation into words. You all changed my life for the better, you helped, and you cared. I have love in my heart for the shelter and everyone here. I am proud of myself for what I am doing, how well I'm moving forward. The Family Shelter helped me find that pride. So from the bottom of my heart I thank each and every one of you for putting up with me and helping to guide me in the right direction.

Sincerely

Mike

In Closing

The homeless in Blair County do not present in tent cities or under bridges. They are usually found couch surfing with friends or living in cars in the parking lots of local businesses. This arrangement is typically short lived as friends can't support long term living agreements and businesses do not allow for permanent parking/loitering.

Homelessness is not just the result of too few houses – its causes are many and varied. Domestic violence, a shortage of affordable housing, unemployment, mental illness, family breakdown and drug and alcohol abuse all contribute to the level of homelessness in Blair County.

Many individuals and families in our region continue to experience a profound need for shelter services. Homelessness is a devastating experience and disrupts every aspect of a community member's life and we must attempt to provide an avenue of support in order to heal the emotional as well as the physical damage. The Family Shelter provides a supportive environment while acting as a conduit to an array of other needed services.

The paramount problem facing the homeless in Blair County is the lack of available shelter beds. Along with the lack of shelter beds, other challenges facing the homeless include the ability to participate in supportive services and move into affordable housing.

The Partnership agrees that solutions should promote dignity and self-worth, and that system improvements are needed along with work to help the brokenness of those trapped in homelessness. It should be noted that site development and building renovations, while challenging, will couple with the challenge of securing ongoing operating funds for the campus. We are requesting community support to allow for this much needed project to be sustainable.

Together, the Public Private Partnership will fundamentally change the way Blair County responds to the needs of the homeless by providing a campus complete with a 35 bed ADA compliant shelter, comprehensive supportive services and six double occupancy low-moderate income affordable housing units.

The Family Shelter is the only shelter for homeless families in Blair County.

Reducing homelessness is everyone's responsibility. Blair County's efforts to reduce homelessness must be urgent, as well as sustained.

Appendix 1

The Public Private Partnership Membership is comprised of the following agencies and members.

Agency	Member
ABCD Corporation	Pat Miller
Altoona Housing Authority	Cheryl Johns
Blair County Commissioners	Bruce Erb
	Donna Gority (former)
Blair County Community Action	Sergio Carmona
Blair County Department of Social Services	Jim Hudack
	Melissa Gillin
Blair Health Choices	Amy Martin-Shanafelt
Catholic Charities	Jean Johnstone
City of Altoona Community Development	Mary Johnson
D.M.Architects	Dave Macharola
Delozier Contracting	Donald Delozier
Durbin Family	Brian Durbin
	Scott Durbin
Family Services Incorporated	Lisa Hann
	Mary Billick
	Rhonda Smith
Grants Coordinator for Community Development	Trina Illig
Home Nursing Agency	Diana Packech
Senator Judy Ward	Amanda Walker
Sheetz Corporation	Joe Sheetz
UPMC Altoona Foundation	Tim Balconi