



Homelessness in the Southern Midcoast

Implications for Shelter Capacity and Services

**For: Tedford Housing
Brunswick, Maine**



September 29, 2016

**Frank O'Hara and Sarah Curran
Planning Decisions, Inc.
Hallowell, Maine**

I. Executive Summary

The purpose of this study is to estimate the number of shelter beds needed in the midcoast area of Maine for homeless single people and for families, and to make recommendations with regard to facility design for Tedford Housing. As shelter beds are just part of a larger system needed to help people move from crisis to stability, the study also addresses broader issues that the homeless face in the area.

Tedford provides emergency homeless shelter for single adults at 49 Cumberland Street; the house can accommodate up to 16 homeless (12 male and 4 female). Tedford also provides emergency shelter for homeless families in 6 private apartments with 29 beds at 34 Federal Street. Guests at both shelters work with a case manager to develop an individual plan to obtain permanent housing and other services. Tedford also manages six supported housing apartment complexes with a total of 37 units for previously homeless individuals and families. Finally, Tedford provides homeless prevention and case management services for homeless youth in three area school districts.

Over 400 individual adults approached Tedford shelter for help in 2015. Only a quarter (118) could be directly helped with shelter housing. Likewise, of nearly 300 families calling Tedford in 2015, only 22 were able to be sheltered.

Almost every adult and family in the shelter comes from the immediate area – about a third from Brunswick, a third from Bath and Topsham and Sagadahoc County, and the remainder from rural towns (Table 3).

About 4 in 5 shelter guests are male (78%). About two in three have some kind of disability (67%). Over half (54%) have symptoms of mental illness. About a third (31%) has a problem with substance abuse.

In all, 118 individual adults were served in the adult shelter in 2015. On average, they stayed 47 days (Table 1). For the first six months of 2016, a little over half (56.9%) were able to move on to permanent housing.

Twenty-two (22) families with 72 family members were housed in the family shelter in 2015. They tended to stay much longer (98 days average length of stay), because of the difficulty of finding larger apartments. On the other hand, a higher proportion of homeless families (60%) were able to achieve permanent housing.

Homelessness continues to increase in Maine and the midcoast, even though the unemployment rate is getting lower and wages are beginning to increase. The fate of the poorest seems to be diverging from other income groups.

About one in nine people live below the poverty level in the housing market area (Lincoln County, Sagadahoc County, and Brunswick, Freeport and Topsham). Among children under the age of 18, one in six lives in a household below the poverty level. Of these, two in three live in families with only one parent, in most cases female.

People living under poverty in the area are more likely to have no more than a high school degree; to have a disability; to have little work experience; to have no health insurance; and to pay over half of their income for rent alone. A single crisis – the car breaks down, a health problem, a job layoff – and these families are on the move. Sometimes, when there is nowhere to move, they end up homeless.

Tedford cannot build enough shelter units to meet all of the need. Instead, it needs to emphasize service delivery to the homeless, under its own direction and in coordination with other community resources, that can avoid the need for shelter when possible, and when shelter is necessary, to help them move through as quickly as possible to private housing. With this philosophy in mind, the report recommends that Tedford build a new, consolidated shelter on a site on the Brunswick Explorer bus line. The facility should both increase beds and increase the agency's capacity to help with Rapid Re-housing (and other models proven effective in preventing homelessness and sustaining housing stability).

Specific recommendations (in no particular order) include:

- 1) **Expand Rapid Re-housing services** for those who contact Tedford, and for those who are served in Tedford's shelter. This means helping those who are in danger of eviction to negotiate agreements with landlords; or those who are on the street to find a new place without going to a shelter; and those in the shelter, to move on quickly.
- 2) Rapid Re-housing works best with individuals and families that do not have chronic mental health, substance abuse, or other disabilities. For such people, **additional supported housing placement options** are needed.
- 3) **Build a new facility** that houses all shelter beds, all administrative offices, living and eating spaces, and space for classrooms and meeting rooms. This is the model that

national and area research indicates can be most successful in helping to implement the Rapid Re-housing service model. The new facility should incorporate flexible spaces to accommodate Tedford's current and potentially growing housing navigation and health and human services case management services, as well as complementary community services. This will allow Tedford to offer classes on site on rental responsibilities, job search, financial management, rent-finding, substance abuse help, child care, and so forth. It will centralize Tedford service staff and increase their ability to specialize, to communicate, and to provide effective case management. It will create savings in ongoing expenses such as meals, utilities, property management, and the like. And it will provide a nice area for community meetings.

- 4) The new facility should be built on **a site that has easy access to regular public transportation** to such services as hospitals, the career center, social services, and jobs. It should also be in an area with a residential character that allows shelter residents to be and feel part of the community. At this time, such a site can only be found in Brunswick.
- 5) **Shelter beds should be increased** to meet a greater percentage of the need, but to a size that is administratively and financially manageable for effective services. Tedford staff feels that an additional fourteen beds for individual adults – 6 for women, 6 for men, and 2 for people with disabilities – would substantially increase capacity. Assuming a 25% reduction in average length of stay, and the helping of 25% to avoid the shelter by negotiating with landlords (see Table 14), this size would meet almost all of the individual need (see Table 15). The beds should be part of the central facility that has the integrated services and programs described in recommendation 3.

For families, Tedford staff recommends doubling its units from 6 to 12, and adding 7 family bedrooms. This would help more families, and also reduce the family bed vacancy rate (by going from 5 beds to 3 beds per family). Large families could be accommodated by movable partitions that could increase bed capacity. This would allow Tedford to serve twice as many families, considerably better than today, but still less than a third of those in need.

- 6) In order to achieve the goal of helping families move through the shelter more quickly, and avoid shelter stays when possible, **Tedford should work with Bath Housing Authority and Brunswick Housing Authority to create a centralized system for tracking rental vacancies, and for establishing and maintaining**

personal relationships with landlords in the area. This could involve funding a shared person serving all three agencies, or an electronic referral service, or a landlord-tenant council, or other cooperative arrangement.

- 7) **Tedford should work with Maine Housing to make it possible to use Housing Choice rental vouchers available for use in towns and cities in the midcoast.** Currently, administrative rules require that the vouchers only be used in areas not covered by another housing authority. In the Midcoast region, this means that vouchers can only be used in areas outside of the service areas of the Bath and Brunswick Housing Authorities. This means that the vouchers can only be used in the very rural areas of the midcoast, where there are few apartments and poor access to services.