

DOCKET FOR HOMELESS PERSONS

3-Year Cumulative Report

June 2013 - June 2016

A Brief History

While planning the first Project Homeless Connect in January 2012, United Way of Central Maryland and the Baltimore Mayor's Office of Human Services learned about a special homeless court in San Diego. Together with several partners, they developed a Docket for Homeless Persons (DHP) in Baltimore in June 2013. The DHP could not have been created without the collaboration of Judge Albert Matricciani and the District Court of Baltimore City, the Homeless Persons Representation Project, the Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office, the Office of the Public Defender, United Way of Central Maryland, The Journey Home and many nonprofit service providers. The DHP is a unique partnership between the City's legal system and local nonprofits that helps people experiencing homelessness receive support services as an alternative to criminal penalties.



Removing Barriers to Self Sufficiency

The goal of the DHP is to remove barriers to self-sufficiency, such as minor criminal offenses that can prevent people experiencing homelessness from obtaining housing and employment¹, while giving individuals access to services they need.² Research shows that homeless court participants have criminal charges that exhibit “symptoms” of homelessness rather than dangers to public safety.³ For example, trespassing is a common offense because people experiencing homelessness are looking for places to sleep. Theft charges for stolen food items also are common because people often get desperate when they are hungry.⁴ Because the offenses they commit are still illegal, they may receive jail time or a fine. The routine criminal justice system is a revolving door for individuals experiencing homelessness and does not address the underlying issues an individual may be experiencing.⁵ In Baltimore City, the DHP is striving to break that endless cycle.



Service Providers

DHP clients are supported by the following service providers who meet face-to-face with participants biweekly at the courthouse and connect them to critical services.

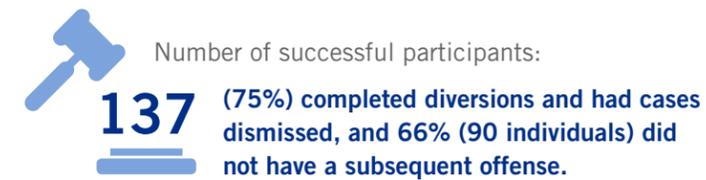
- **Catholic Charities** provides an array of services including job training through their Work for Success program and shelter services.
- **Gaudenzia** specializes in drug and alcohol treatment and provides programs for expectant and parenting mothers, adolescents and adults.
- **Health Care for the Homeless** is a federally qualified health center that offers pediatric and adult medical care, mental health services, social work and case management, addiction treatment, dental care and vision assistance.
- **Seedco** provides *EarnBenefits* services that assist participants in screening and accessing public benefits such as food stamps, temporary cash assistance, etc.
- **St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore** operates several programs that assist with food, clothing, emergency shelter, transitional housing, emergency financial assistance, homeless outreach, job skills training, career counseling and child and youth services.



Note: This is the core group of providers that attend the DHP regularly twice a month but several other providers have contributed to the success of the DHP.

1 National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (2014). *No Safe Place: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities*.
 2 United States Department of Housing & Urban Development. (n.d.). *Employment services for homeless exoffenders*.
 3 International Journal of Drug Policy (2013). *Exposure to project-based Housing First is associated with reduced jail time and bookings*.
 4 National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (2014). *No Safe Place: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities*.
 5 Binder, S. (2012). Homeless Court Program: Taking the Court to the Streets. *Judges' Journal*, 51(2), 29.

Data Results: June 2013 - June 2016



Benefit Services (Seedco):

“When homelessness is added to the barriers experienced by low-income people in general, the process of completing a successful application for mainstream benefits can be daunting.”⁶ The bilingual Seedco *EarnBenefits* specialist streamlines the process working face-to-face with the person in need.

- From May 2014-June 2016, 45 DHP participants were screened by the *EarnBenefits* specialist; 32 of the 45 screened were assisted with the benefits application process. The benefit in most demand was SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). So far, at least eight individuals received SNAP, five individuals received medial assistance, four individuals received Tel-Life (a free cellphone program) and 10 individuals received the Needy Meds Drug Discount Card.



6 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research. (2010). *Strategies for Improving Homeless People's Access to Mainstream Benefits and Services*.

Top 5 Charges on the DHP:

- Open Container/Alcohol Related Offense
- Trespassing
- Disorderly Conduct/Failure to Obey a Lawful Order
- Drug Possession (Not Marijuana)
- Theft < \$100

Top 5 Services Received at the DHP:

- Health Care Treatment/Health Care Education
- Mental Health Treatment
- Substance Abuse Treatment
- Education/Employment/Job Training
- Housing/Housing Assistance

Data Results (Continued):

Project Homeless Connect 2016:

- DHP had a prominent presence at Project Homeless Connect. A representative from the Baltimore City's State's Attorney's Office checked open warrants or current cases for potential DHP clients. Of the six misdemeanor, open warrant cases selected for DHP consideration, five of the six warrants were recalled in court. Several of these individuals also made appointments with service providers. With their legal problems behind them, these people no longer worry about being arrested for their outstanding charges, and can focus on pursuing a more stable life.

DHP Success Story:



Before Mr. Brown* became involved with DHP, he was sleeping on the steps of a homeless services agency. He was arrested for an alcohol-related offense and placed on a DHP docket. When he arrived at court, he agreed to engage in services with a service provider for 90 days. After those 90 days had passed, the service provider stated that he was actively engaged with the agency and very receptive to services, often frequenting the agency several times a week. Upon returning to court, Mr. Brown's case was dismissed and he stated that he just received his housing voucher and was picking it up in a week (after his matter in the court was resolved). The process to receive a housing voucher is quite competitive in the city, but because he had been diligently working with his case manager for months and keeping his appointments, he was able to secure one. He is now sober and well on his way to self-sufficiency, with all his legal matters behind him.

**Name changed to maintain client confidentiality.*

Cost Savings:

- Maryland taxpayers spend \$288 million on correctional costs in Baltimore City. "For the cost of sending one person to jail, Baltimore City could pay for half of a high school teacher's salary, employment training for seven people, two-bedroom apartments for 30 families for one month, or a GED course for 37 people."⁷
- According to the Central Booking and Intake Center in Baltimore City, it costs approximately \$149 per day to house one person in jail. The DHP is saving the city thousands of dollars every year by referring people to the DHP who are released on their own recognizance, rather than spending time in jail, unable to post bail or awaiting a trial.⁸
- Criminal records are barriers to employment. Programs such as the DHP can produce economic growth by reducing correctional costs and increasing earnings in the labor market and in taxpayer revenues.⁹

⁷ Justice Policy Institute and Prison Policy Initiative. (2015). *The Right Investment: Corrections Spending in Baltimore City*.

⁸ Metraux S, Caterina R, Cho R. "Incarceration and Homelessness" Toward Understanding Homelessness: The 2007 National Symposium on Homelessness Research. Ed. Deborah Dennis, Gretchen Locke & Jill Khadduri. Washington DC: US Department of Housing & Urban Development, 2008.

⁹ Economy League of Greater Philadelphia (2010). *Economic Benefits of Employing Formerly Incarcerated Individuals in Philadelphia*.

For more information on the Baltimore City Docket for Homeless Persons
please contact DHP@uwcm.org.

For more information about homeless courts, please visit the American Bar Association:
<http://bit.ly/HomelessCourts>