

Monroe Evening News Article – June 25th 2008

Creative solutions next step to help homeless

by [Doug Donnelly](#) , last modified June 25, 2008 11:11AM



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Numerous local organizations have teamed up to help fight homelessness in Monroe County, but there's plenty more to be done.

The next step could be a local housing trust fund that helps fill in the gaps for agencies to place people in need into homes.

"We ought to be able, as a community, to address this issue," said Charlotte Mahoney, a former DTE Energy employee, United Way campaign leader and local homeless advocate. "We need a Monroe County trust fund."

Nearly 200 so-called trust funds exist in the country. Private entities, businesses and governmental units contribute money to the funds, which are set aside to support affordable housing.

The county already receives hundreds of thousands of dollars in state and federal grants, but that money often comes with stringent rules, leaving some local homeless people without available funding. A trust fund, Ms. Mahoney says, would fill in the gaps.

However, it takes time - and money - to set up such a fund.

Stephanie Kasprzak, director of the Monroe County Opportunity Program, convened Tuesday's meeting of government, business and organization representatives to gauge the interest in creating a trust fund. Not one of the more than 30 people in attendance objected to the idea, although several people had questions about how it would work.

Those details, Ms. Mahoney said, still need to be worked out. Ms. Kasprzak and Ms. Mahoney called for people to lead committee discussions to get the trust fund idea into the brainstorming stage and begin learning more about how it works and how funds will be raised.

This fall, the group hopes to get back together for more talks.

"We're a long way from giving away that first dollar," Ms. Mahoney said.

Other communities have put money into trust funds by raising private dollars, including foundation grants, corporate contributions or bank commitments. Trust fund revenue also could come from public dollars, such as real estate taxes or fees, developer fees or other fees tacked on by area governments.

Tuesday's meeting included no specific discussion of where the revenue for a Monroe County trust fund would come from.

The county has stepped up its efforts to fight homelessness in the past several years. MCOP has received grant money to get people off the streets and offer counseling. The Monroe County Network on Homelessness was established in 1985, and a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness was adopted in 2006.

At any one time, there could be more than 250 homeless people in Monroe County - many of them children.

"This is a community issue," Ms. Mahoney said. "It would be great to sit here in a room and say we can fix this easily, but we can't."

Several people Tuesday warned the number of homeless people could spike given the poor economy. More people could need community support as they lose jobs, grapple with rising fuel and food costs and face foreclosure on their homes.

Ms. Kazprzak said people are living in tents at campgrounds, staying in cars, sharing couches at friends' houses or sleeping at the homes of relatives while they try to make ends meet. Those people are classified as homeless, but they aren't visible in the community.

"The face of homelessness is changing," she said.