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**Interview with Ann Thoresen, Director of the Atlantic Homeless Alliance:**

**Implementing Atlantic County’s Single Point of Entry Program**

By Kate Leahy, New Jersey Coalition to End Homelessness

On July 2nd, I had the pleasure of interviewing Ann Thoresen Director of the Atlantic Homeless Alliance, part of Jewish Family Service- of Atlantic and Cape May Counties. She has led the implementation of New Jersey’s newest Single Point of Entry program, coordinating services for individuals and families who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless in Atlantic County. The program, which falls under the Atlantic County Continuum of Care (CoC), links four agencies and is hosted by the Atlantic County Government: Jewish Family Service, Atlantic City Rescue Mission, Pleasantville Housing Authority and John Brooks Recovery Center. Officially operational on February 18th of this year, Governor Christie has applauded its “streamlining (of) the homeless system…bringing help to those who need it most.” Below is a transcript of the interview with Ms. Thoresen:

*Kate:* Thanks so much for taking the time to talk with me. I know our partners throughout the state would love to learn more about your work. Can you tell us about the motivation for Atlantic County to implement a Single Point of Entry System?

*Ann:* The program was actually a few years in the making. When the Atlantic County CoC was developing its 10-year plan to end homelessness, one of the things identified as a best practice was a coordinated, single point of entry for people experiencing homelessness. Services were fragmented, and sometimes people weren’t getting connected to services in as timely a matter as they could if efforts were coordinated.

*Kate:* What were some challenges you faced to make it happen?

*Ann:* From the beginning, there was by-in from everyone at the CoC. We all agreed that a coordination of services was needed. The question was where the funding would come from. Luckily, some resources were available within the county and throughout the state to help with the coordination of services. The problems we have encountered have been more related to finding enough affordable housing due to the limited supply. So while we had a model everyone agreed on, not having the resources on the back-end made it a challenge.

*Kate:* Speaking of financing, how is the program funded?

*Ann:* We’re financed by social service block grant funding and the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA).

*Kate:* I know you’re only less than five months in, but can you tell me a little bit about what the outcomes have looked like so far?

*Ann:* Yes, it’s still early, but we are doing a significant amount of data collection to measure our progress. In the time period between February 18 and May 31, we had 873 households, which were comprised of 1091 total individuals, come through our single-step intake. Of these, as of May 31, 53 households had been housed in somewhat permanent housing by our various social service partners. An additional 118 households had been offered shelter. We have also seen success working with several organizations within the county who have helped refer clients who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness directly to us as well as accepting referrals for services.

*Kate:* Sounds like the program has already made a big impact. Is there any advice you can offer for other counties interested in starting their own Single Point of Entry program?

*Ann:* In my opinion, it can work. We aren’t unique in Atlantic County. A lot of counties have good service provision, but the coordination is hard. Too many people have to go to Agency A to get one piece of what they need, Agency B for another, and by the time they get to Agency C they give up. If the agencies had coordinated, this type of failure wouldn’t happen. It’s a building block. If you combine resources, you can have a greater impact. People are wasting valuable time going all over the place to get information and to get the resources they need. A Single Point of Entry system reduces the frustration for the individual, and in effect, for the system overall. Also, I’d advise that data collection is very valuable. Data can drive the allocation of resources and policies.

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