



# WellSky Managed Services help Austin ECHO reach its goal of ending youth homelessness

In January of 2017, the Austin/Travis County's Continuum of Care (CoC) in Texas was one of ten communities selected out of 130 applicants for the Housing & Urban Development (HUD) Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP). The CoC was awarded \$5.2 million to accelerate the community's progress in preventing and ending youth and young adult homelessness.

Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO), the lead agency for the CoC, suddenly had a massive new program on their hands. The YHDP program involves many quality of life measures that can lead to homelessness — including education, job skills, mental health, safety, coping mechanisms, relationships — and addressing those factors in novel ways. It would require establishing new goals and metrics, collecting data that was quite different from standard HUD requirements, preparing

partners to run the new programs according to a different set of standards, and submitting numerous reports to HUD and other stakeholders.

## A natural extension of the IT team

ECHO quickly realized that adapting their Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) for the YHDP would take a unique combination of strategic thinking, technological know-how, and a deep understanding of homelessness. It was more work than the agency's internal IT team would be able to handle on top of their existing duties. After some consideration, ECHO recognized that WellSky might be able to supplement their expertise and help make their program a success.

ECHO had worked with WellSky for several years and runs on the company's HMIS software, which is used by 60% of the nation's CoCs. Melissa Wheeler, ECHO's HMIS Director, began working with WellSky's Implementation Consultant, Jody Miller. Jody has worked in homelessness and technology for 17

## Community Services

### Case Study: Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO)



years and was able to look over the outcome specifications, present decision points to the HMIS team, and build out the project as those decisions were made.

Through a WellSky Managed Services Agreement, Jody was able to act as an extension of the ECHO team. WellSky offered a valuable blend of experience in homelessness issues, diverse IT capabilities, and a complete understanding of the HMIS.

### Strategic and creative collaboration

One of the first challenges ECHO faced was the open-ended nature of the project. The YHDP grant came with many reporting requirements, but not a lot of direction.

As part of the YHDP project, ECHO would be collecting data not typically tracked in the homelessness field, such as how many meaningful relationships a homeless youth had upon entry into the program, during the program, and at exit. The team wasn't sure how to quantify such a benchmark.

"Jody's creativity helped us collect info in ways we hadn't imagined," Melissa explained. "Jody built innovative assessment forms in the system that allowed providers at a wide range of shelters and provider agencies to collect all the new data in a standardized way that would lead to meaningful statistics."

### Advanced report building

Once ECHO and WellSky had effectively collaborated on the design for collecting the data, Jody built the reports ECHO would need to communicate results to a wide range of stakeholders: HUD, CoC executives, provider agencies, and more.

WellSky recently introduced a new data visualization tool, Qlik Sense, to their HMIS system. Jody continues to help ECHO translate their reporting requirements into Qlik Sense.

### About WellSky Managed Services

Your agency does valuable work in the community, and you can't let managing an information system slow you down. Add WellSky Managed Services to your current software subscription, and let our solution experts help you get the most from your system. We act as an extension of your internal team and can customize a set of services to:

- Manage day-to-day system administration
- Streamline system workflows to increase efficiency
- Optimize compliance with government agencies and private funders
- Gain actionable insights through comprehensive reporting
- Empower your staff and end users with training resources

### User training and best practices

One of the biggest hurdles to such an ambitious project is training all of the different people involved: counselors, shelter staff, CoC members, and more. Jody created a complete training manual that supported the initial rollout. As staff turnover occurs, this will be a valuable guide, delineating each step of the workflow for new users to ensure consistent data entry in the future.

### Conclusion

The YHDP pilot program went live in 2018, with encouraging initial results. The new assessments have been well-received by providers, and there have been few errors or other problems. Data is flowing smoothly to ECHO, and they are already gaining valuable insights and forwarding the necessary reports to HUD.

"We've had a really good relationship with WellSky since the Bowman days," Melissa says. "We enjoy working with them and we never could have launched the YDHP without them."



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