

## CASE STUDIES

### OTHER CITIES' APPROACHES TO HOMELESSNESS

A number of cities have begun to realize that addressing the problems of homelessness is an essential component for downtown revitalization. Homeless individuals typically dwell in downtown areas where resources such as food and support services are most available. They often spend a great deal of time on the street and are perceived by downtown business owners as problems and deterrents to the downtown's economic recovery. Partnerships between business organizations and service providers in numerous cities have begun to coordinate their existing efforts to address, in a balanced way, the needs of people who are homeless and the general public's interest in promoting the public health, safety, and welfare of the downtown area. These partnerships require that the different interests and competencies of businesses and service providers come together to address a community concern, a relationship that must be based on respect, trust, and leadership.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) encourages the coordination of homeless services through a "Continuum of Care" for the homeless. The Continuum is based on the idea the homeless persons need access to three types of housing linked to comprehensive services:

- 1) emergency shelter (includes safe havens, respite centers, drop-in centers)
- 2) transitional housing
- 3) permanent housing (includes long-term supportive housing)

The availability of permanent supportive housing is a key factor in this Continuum. Developing this type of housing in neighborhoods throughout the city enables individuals combating homelessness to take advantage

of the formal and informal resources available in those communities.

#### QUOTES

"Homelessness, poverty, and mental illness are of society, not outside it. How we choose to help homeless people, people with mental illness and those living in poverty will help to determine the long-term vitality of our cities as communities." – International Downtown Association, 2000 (pg. 5)

"Everyone with an interest in the problem has a legitimate set of goals that need to be respected and reflected in the program response. Success does not require each interest group to embrace the goals of the others. If the programs create outcomes desired by each of the partners, then those outcomes need not be identical." – International Downtown Association, 2000 (pg. 5)

"Although the general public sometimes construes the actions of street homeless people as a threat, with rare exceptions, their concerns seem to relate more to a sense of decline in the quality of life, rather than any actual danger posed." – U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1993

#### CASE STUDIES

##### Mobile, Alabama

Mobile has approximately 700 people afflicted with homelessness on any given night in the city. Business leaders recognized that heightened awareness and community involvement could effectively address the needs of homeless individuals as well as contribute toward the revitalization of the downtown. A coalition

was formed between business leaders, social service providers, and other community stakeholders to address the issue. Currently it is spearheading an effort to develop a daytime center that will provide social and health services to the homeless population, as well as provide telephones, lockers, showers, and a protected outdoor area for socializing during the day.

##### Portland, Oregon

The city of Portland has approximately 1500 to 2000 homeless individuals in the core of the county. A partnership between Portland's business association and a local mental health outreach provider has helped develop the Royal Palm Project, funded through a one-time grant from HUD. This project is a safe haven with minimal demands which includes a drop-in center, shelter beds, and single-occupancy rooms. The partnership has also been involved in reversing the negative perceptions of public safety in the downtown area, including the development of community policing to change the role of law enforcement toward having a more positive attitude toward the homeless.

#### Sources:

International Downtown Association. *Addressing homelessness: Successful downtown partnerships*. Report, (August 2000).

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. *Priority: Home! The Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness*. Washington, D.C. May 1993 Weinstein, B. L., Clower, T. L. (2004).

## GLOSSARY

### PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

#### WHAT IS IT?

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is a type of affordable housing that implies links to essential services such as health, mental health, employment, and other support services.

Housing must be permanent and not contingent upon participation in services. "Requirements of current housing and shelters do not accommodate chronically homeless individuals who are 'treatment resistant' or in early stages of change."

Monthly rents for housing must be from \$0 to \$160 per month. Housing must be affordable for individuals on SSI income.

The 10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness in Nashville recommends developing 3 pilot projects of PSH based on best practice models used in other cities.

#### SERVICES

Transportation barriers must be considered. Access to public transportation and essential support services must be within walking distance of housing.

Housing IS healthcare – many health problems of the homeless are directly related to lack of housing.

Homeless persons have difficulty knowing what services and benefits are available and how to access them.

Coordination of support services to the homeless is essential. This can be accomplished by creating a Centralized Outreach Coordination Center (OCC), a single entity to coordinate services and outreach efforts across agencies.

Other support services that can be located in or near PSH include:

- a non-traditional community court that deals with disputes within the homeless community. This can help keep homeless persons from entering or reentering the criminal justice system.
- a bank on site, often a single representative to provide basic savings, checking, and loan services.
- a housing locator and listing service for affordable units, whether online or on location.
- substance abuse and mental health services, which are high priorities.

Service providers must understand the PSH model they are a part of.

Currently, there are no support services available on weekends.

#### DESIGN

PSH can take the form of a variety of housing types: scattered-site, modular, congregate living, or single room units. Low-density, de-concentrated sites are preferred. There should be fewer than 20 units per development.

PSH often takes the form of buildings with housing situated above shops or public facilities. Placing shared facilities at the ground level provides a transition between the housing and the urban life beyond.

PSH must not look institutional. It must blend in with the surrounding housing/buildings to prevent labeling. If residents of PSH are labeled as "different", it will be much more difficult for them to integrate into the community.

Public (communal) spaces for socialization reduce isolation. Interviews with homeless persons revealed they were adamant that the design of housing reflect the importance of community.

Examples of affordable housing design

#### 1. University of Arkansas Community Design Center

- Single-room units are prefab, portable, sturdy
- Costs less than \$5000 per unit
- Customizable space
- Security features
- Recognizes the importance of personal possessions to those who have no permanent living space
- Rent (\$9 per night) will pay back construction cost in 3 years

#### 2. Studio apartment prototype

- The design was guided by research of an environmental psychologist who studied existing facilities
- 235 square feet
- Fully equipped with kitchen, bathroom, dining, living, and bedroom
- Each unit receives natural light and is open to other spaces (including outdoor patios)

Design Elements of Homeless Shelters – applicable to the Union Rescue Mission or PSH

- The entry sequence is a facility's buffer from the community. An outdoor courtyard (often gated) and a large reception area indoors serve this purpose.
- Security – a single station where a staff member can monitor the courtyard and reception area, as well as field questions about hours, services, programs, etc.
- Bag check or lockers for belongings
- For situations where families are being served, child care is important.
- Day Room – a place to wait for services, meet with social workers, and socialize with others. This provides an alternative to the streets and sidewalks.
- Lots of natural light, which humanizes space.

## GLOSSARY

### PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING (CONTINUED)

#### RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Demonstration studies show that PSH was very successful at stabilizing tenants in housing with retention rates at about 85% after 2 or more years.
- A study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania Center for Mental Health Policy and Services Research showed an annual savings of \$16,282 per person by reducing the use of public services (both public health and shelter) when comparing those in supportive housing to those not in supportive housing.
- Research shows the housing first programs that address such problems while the individual or family is in permanent housing can have better long-term success than programs that attempt to treat or mitigate these problems in a transitional setting before permanent housing placement.
- It is dramatically more expensive to spend a night in a psychiatric institution than supportive housing (10–20 times more).

#### RESOURCES

The Corporation for Supportive Housing was established in 1991 to aid nonprofit developers in creating PSH projects. [www.csh.org](http://www.csh.org)

#### RESEARCH FINDINGS

- The city of Haarlem in The Netherlands installed alley gates and new lighting to reduce crime. As a result, 87% of the residents felt safer, and there was a burglary decrease of 57%.

- Research in Washington D.C. found that the presence of public housing units was not significantly related to changes in neighborhood risk of burglary, robbery, or assault. The percentage of lots zoned for commercial use was a significant predictor of increased risk of high robbery rates.
- Ease of circulation and a higher proportion of nonresidential land use appear linked to higher street crimes and more burglary.
- Buildings with fewer apartments per entryway, fewer stories, and better views of the outside have residents with lower levels of fear and rates of victimization.

#### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Where are the current permanent affordable housing units in Nashville located? 807 are currently targeted to homeless individuals.

What are the current support services provided at the Rescue Mission and within a 5 minute walking distance of the Mission?

Do most of the area's offenders reside in the neighborhood, or do they come into the neighborhood from other areas to prey on the homeless?

What are the community (area) assets?

#### STRATEGIES FOR EVALUATION THE AREA

The Plan for the Eastside in Vancouver listed their evaluation methods for the area, both qualitative and quantitative:

- A preliminary assessment of community demographics, understanding of capacity building, and perceptions of crime and victimization.
- A lit review on all related themes.
- Participant observation in many of the community meetings, celebrations and workshops.
- Annual key respondent interviews with individuals selected from project components, community groups, and government agencies involved in the process.
- Annual community perceptions surveys with respondents selected via a simple "person on the street" method.
- Participant profiles that explored the relationship between individual capacity building and community capacity building.
- Analysis of data collected from all sources through the lens of the theory of change, including a gender analysis.
- Regular reporting including a baseline crime and victimization report, quarterly reports, annual interim evaluation reports, the community profiles, and the final evaluation report.
- "The project was planned in an evolutionary way in response to community concerns."
- Clearly define project and community goals.
- Target groups: low income residents, community stakeholders, families (including unemployed youth-at-risk), community as a whole, residents as a whole.