

Minnesota business and homelessness

➤➤➤ *Impacts and solutions*

In 1982 several downtown St. Paul business owners complained to their St. Paul City Council member that homeless people were becoming a problem – they were loitering, obstructing pedestrian traffic, and generally making potential customers feel inclined to just pass by an establishment. Forming an unlikely partnership with a Catholic priest at Assumption Church, the Council member called local nonprofit representatives together to ask what might be done to address this problem. Representatives from the Wilder Foundation attended a meeting held at Assumption Church to begin the discussion to learn more about and respond to homelessness.

Several meetings followed in the summer of that year, culminating in a decision to carry out a research project that would involve interviewing homeless people throughout St. Paul. In the spring of 1984 parallel surveys were carried out in Minneapolis and St. Paul describing in some detail for the first time who was homeless and attempting to learn what could be done to respond effectively to this problem.

Fast forward 24 years and we find ourselves dealing with a similar but much larger problem. Compared to the few hundred people identified as homeless in the Twin Cities in 1984, today there are over 4,000 homeless people on a single night in the Twin Cities alone (including nearly 2,000 children), and over 9,200 statewide.

Over this time the landscape has changed dramatically and there are federal, state, and local initiatives (or “business plans”) that focus on ending chronic homelessness through the development of permanent supportive housing programs and other initiatives. But the questions and concerns of the business community persist, and research points to potential solutions that business leaders can be and ought to be a part of. These solutions, described at the end of this report, include evidence-based strategies for preventing homelessness, moving newly homeless people quickly back into more stable and productive environments, and helping long-term homeless people transition into supportive settings that protect their own and others’ safety and also address their health, social, and employment needs.

Inside

Picture of homelessness	2
Strong evidence for solutions	2
Why should business invest in solutions?	5
How can businesses respond?	8

The picture of homelessness today

The current estimate of 9,200 people homeless on a given night in Minnesota is slightly down from levels seen in 2003. The trend suggests that perhaps the current solutions identified in the plans for ending long-term homelessness are beginning to hit their mark. But while the numbers have begun to decline, it is troubling to see an increase in the overall level of distress among those who remain, including mental illness, chronic health problems, traumatic brain injury, and other disabilities.

- Most notable is the increase in the percentage of people with serious or persistent mental health problems, which has climbed steadily over the past 12 years to its current level of 52% of homeless adults.
- As highlighted by business leaders in the Itasca Project’s “Mind the Gap” report, the most current research also shows that disturbing racial disparities persist in homelessness: African Americans make up nearly half of the homeless adults in the metro area, and American Indians represent nearly 20% of the homeless in greater Minnesota. This is in stark contrast to their representation in the overall adult Minnesota population, where African Americans represent 3 percent and American Indians 1 percent of all adults.
- The number of ex-offenders among the homeless – as among the populace as a whole – has also been steadily increasing in recent years. Today 47% of all homeless adults have been incarcerated at some time in their lives, and nearly 1 in 5 has been in prison or jail within the last two years.
- Veterans also make up their fair share of this population. The latest study found more than 700 veterans on any given night, including 17 who had served in Iraq or Afghanistan.
- Troubling to many is the fact that children make up such a large component of the homeless population. Nearly half (47%) of all those identified in the 2006 survey were children, youth, and young adults age 21 or younger. Of children with their parents, half were age 5 or younger. Even more troubling, perhaps, is the fact that we are now increasingly finding homeless young adults who began their experience of homelessness as children during the last decade.

Strong evidence for solutions

Recent research, and data from other states, shows clear evidence that homelessness does not have to be a permanent condition and that homeless people can go on to pay for and manage their own housing, hold regular jobs, and contribute to their communities. Here in Minnesota, many people who have experienced even long-term homelessness are now successfully maintaining homes in various supportive housing programs across the state.

We are increasingly finding homeless young adults who began their experience of homelessness as children.

Twenty-eight percent of homeless adults in 2006 were working. Many more could be, but lack of transportation and housing, and problems with physical and mental health, must be addressed first.

In fact, many separate centers of energy and expertise are now converging on solutions to homelessness.

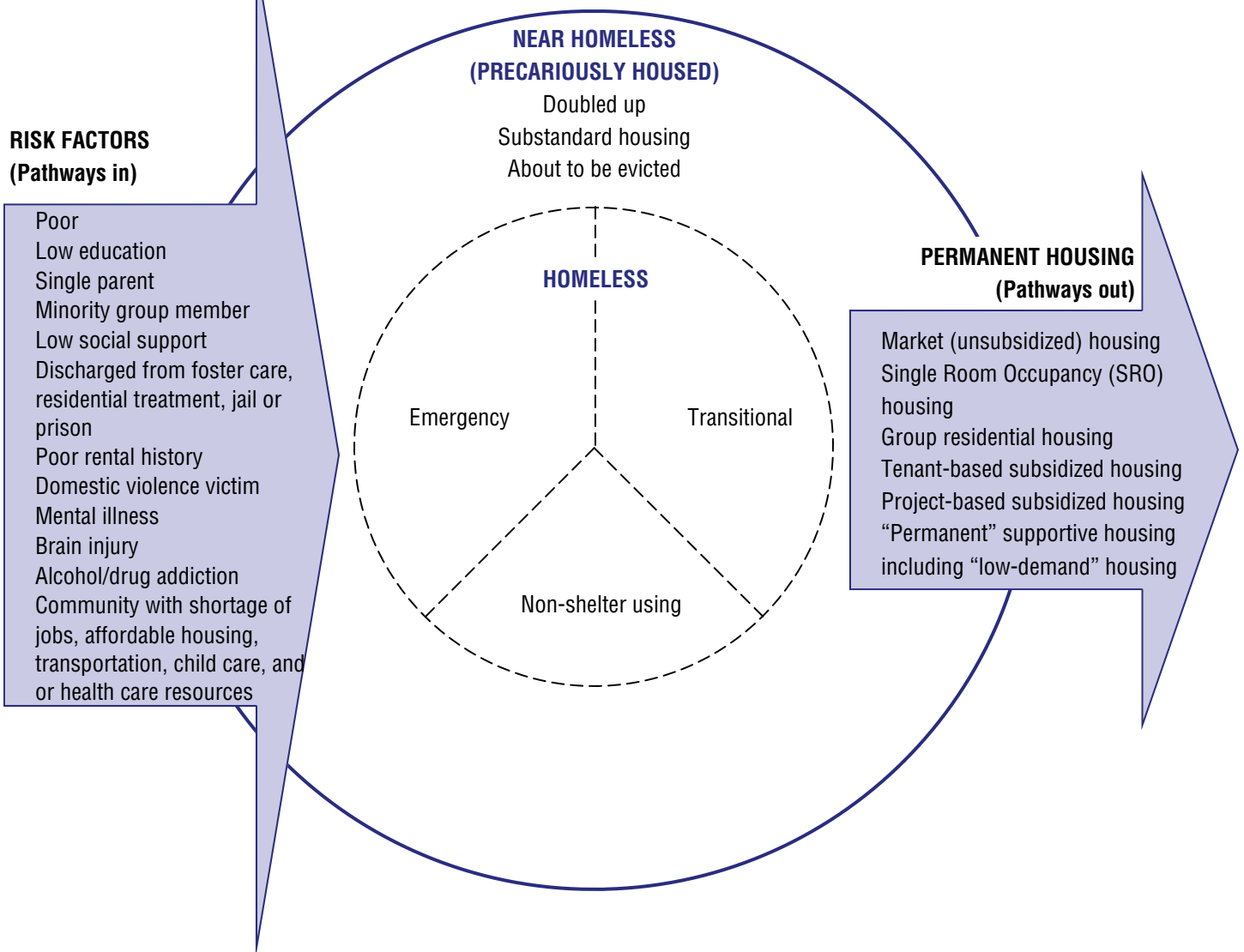
Because long-term homelessness is especially harmful for individuals and communities, as well as costly in public services, solutions include a strong focus on housing plus services, a combination consistently shown to help individuals and reduce social costs for communities. However, this approach by itself does not slow the entry of other people into homelessness. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to ending homelessness also includes strategies that have been found to help newly-homeless single adults, families, and youth secure stable housing again as quickly as possible, and strategies to reduce the chances of homelessness among those most at risk. This group includes youth who become legally adults (18) while they are wards of the state because of child protection or delinquency; women, children, and youth fleeing abusive homes; adults or older youth being released from jail or treatment; and working poor families whose incomes have risen more slowly than their housing (and other) costs.

The diagram on page 4 illustrates the pathways in and out of homelessness and helps show the many places where interventions may be effective. As shown in the diagram, a variety of kinds of affordable, subsidized, and supported housing are needed for currently homeless people to regain homes. However, homelessness cannot be ended unless we also act to stop the flow of new people into homelessness or respond rapidly when homelessness occurs. There are many different causes, some within the individual and some that are community or systemic conditions. Therefore a number of different kinds of prevention approaches are important. Since not all crises can be foreseen or averted, it will continue to be necessary to have resources available to meet the needs of people who are newly homeless, and help them regain stable housing as quickly as possible. Potential solutions for each of these stages are identified along the bottom of the diagram.

Community energy to address homelessness, and the understanding of how to do it, are both as strong as they have ever been to make a real difference. But the strategic, financial, and social resources to make this happen cannot be found entirely within the nonprofit and government sectors. And while some business leaders have begun to identify their place in the development of solutions, many more are needed in the public-private partnership to end homelessness.

There is energy and knowledge to address homelessness. What we need are public-private partnerships.

PATHWAYS IN AND OUT OF HOMELESSNESS



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION POINTS

Prevention of homelessness

Strengthen safety net: Affordable housing, EITC, rent subsidies, TANF, GA, job training, transportation, health care, child care

Discharge planning: Help find housing for those leaving foster care, residential treatment, jail or prison

Mental/chemical health treatment: More available, more affordable, culturally relevant

For those precariously housed:

Emergency rent, utilities, landlord/bank mediation

Rapid response to recent homelessness

Immediate triage: Identify needs, connect with resources
 Placement in permanent or transitional housing with supports
 Availability of affordable or subsidized housing
 Availability of community "safety net" services

Ending long-term homelessness

Outreach
 Treatment
 Variety of subsidized and supported housing opportunities, including "low-demand" housing
 Availability of community "safety net" services

Source: Adapted from Wilder Research (2007): Homelessness in the Omaha/Council Bluffs metro area: Assessment of current needs and services, and options for action.

Why should the business community invest in solutions to homelessness?

■ Public safety

Over the last 15 years we have prosecuted and incarcerated people at ever-increasing rates, resulting in the highest-ever jail and prison population in Minnesota. One stark fact in the midst of all of this is that 9 out of 10 will be released. Since 1997 the number of homeless adults with recent incarceration has nearly doubled. One guaranteed formula for recidivism and the deterioration of community is to release former offenders into environments of homelessness and joblessness. Studies show that we improve public safety and community wellbeing when we address the problems of those who are being released from incarceration, and seek to identify housing opportunities and work opportunities that allow them to see an alternative to a lifetime career of crime.

■ Our children are our future

On any given night in Minnesota there are more than 600 youth 17 or younger who are homeless and on their own, and more than 2,000 children experiencing homelessness with their parents. Research shows that these youth and children are at higher risk of repeating grades in school, becoming truant, failing in school, and becoming homeless adults. The cost to the community is enormous and includes the cost of out-of-home placements, juvenile corrections, child protection services, lost future workforce, and lost tax base to the community.

In addition, the cost of fixing the damage after people have sought refuge in shelters and on the streets is significantly greater than the cost of addressing basic housing needs for low-income families. Children who have experienced homelessness are more likely than their housed peers to suffer developmental delays, emotional problems, social isolation, school problems, and poor physical health.¹

A California demonstration program targeted mentally-ill inmates released from emergency rooms, jails, and other facilities and helped them secure housing and support services. It found significantly less use of hospitals and jails, and less homelessness, as well as more employment, netting savings of \$7.3 million in the first two years – more than half of the state's initial investment.²

The Family Housing Fund found that the cost of supportive housing for a chronically homeless family is less than half the cost of public services required if they remain homeless.³

¹ Hart-Shegos, E. (1999). *Homelessness and its effects on children*. Minneapolis, MN: Family Housing Fund.

² Mayberg, S.W. (2001). *Effectiveness of integrated services for homeless adults with serious mental illness*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Mental Health. Downloaded August 24, 2006, from www.dmh.cahwnet.gov/About_DMH/docs/press/Homeless-Mentally-Ill-Leg_rpt.pdf

³ Hart-Shegos, E., Majestic, S., and Jacox, C. (2000). *Financial implications of public interventions on behalf of a chronically homeless family*. Minneapolis, MN: Family Housing Fund.

Philadelphia is considered to have one of the most successful models of outreach to unsheltered homeless people. With a 24/7 dispatch system, outreach workers build trust with people in the streets, respond to calls from business owners or citizens who observe people in need, and work closely with the police to reduce unnecessary arrests. In its first few years of operation, Philadelphia has seen a 50% reduction in street homelessness.

A review of evaluation studies shows that the costs of long-term supportive housing are no higher than those for emergency shelter and related public services.⁴ For residents with mental illness or chemical dependency, the savings in public services (emergency hospitalization, mental health, detox, and criminal justice) more than cover the costs.⁵

■ Street homelessness

As in 1982, business leaders in city downtowns from St. Paul and Minneapolis to Bloomington, Duluth, and Rochester, as well as smaller cities such as Willmar and Walker now raise the same questions when confronted with street homelessness: How does it affect pedestrian traffic to my store? How does it impact the downtown sense of community? How can we make a change?

From a business perspective, it is hard attract happy customers if they find the shopping environment discomforting. Business leaders have much to gain in addressing the problem of street homelessness through outreach, employment, day shelters and hot meal programs, as well as low demand housing programs. Cities that have effectively responded to street homelessness are seeing improvements in the livability of downtown communities.⁶

■ Return on investment

The studies examining the costs of homelessness and the benefits of various responses are beginning to come in. At Wilder Research, Paul Anton has added to this body of work by looking at the potential return on investment that can be realized when effective responses are available for the needs of a person who has experienced long-term homelessness.

The evidence shows that stabilized housing can go a long way toward reducing future negative impacts including costs associated with courts, police, detox centers, and even health care expenses.⁷ In the area of healthcare utilization, for example, stable housing has been shown to decrease the use of expensive emergency room services and increase the use of existing health benefit programs intended for low-income people.

Studies have also shown that permanent supportive housing residents are more likely to get and keep jobs.⁸ While providing housing to the homeless is not a solution by itself, it is a means of making other existing services much more effective and cost-efficient.

⁴ Wong, Y.I., Park, J.M. and Nemon, H. (2006). Homeless service delivery in the context of Continuum of Care. *Administration in Social Work*, 30(1), 67-94. Available on the web at http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1038&context=spp_papers

⁵ Culhane, D.P., Metraux, S., and Hadley, T. (2002). Public service reductions associated with placement of homeless persons with severe mental illness in supportive housing. *Housing Policy Debate*, 13(1), 107-163.

⁶ Weinstein, B.L., and Clower, T.L. (2004). *Improving services to Dallas' homeless: A key to downtown revitalization*. Denton, TX: University of North Texas, Center for Economic Development and Research. Downloaded November 19, 2007, from <http://www.unt.edu/cedr/homelessreport2004.pdf>

⁷ Anton, Paul. (2007). *Return-on-investment analysis of supportive housing*. Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research.

⁸ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (1995). *National evaluation of the supportive housing demonstration program*. Washington, DC: Author. Downloaded April 13, 2006, from www.huduser.org/publications/suppsvcs/shdp.html

■ Assure the supply and stability of employees

Across the nation, a shortage of affordable housing limits many employers' ability to fill entry-level job openings. At the national level, nearly a third of lower-wage households paid more than half their monthly income for housing – much more than the 30 percent of income that is considered affordable. The growing gap between incomes and housing costs also contributes to higher job turnover and lower productivity, by making it hard for workers to live close to their jobs, and increasing time and costs for transportation and child care. After a decade of relatively stable rates, housing affordability worsened significantly just from 2003 to 2005, and worsened most for families with children.⁶ The subprime mortgage crisis has placed even more families – both owners and renters – at risk of homelessness.

Most employers would be shocked to learn how many of their current lower-paid employees are homeless or at risk of it.

It is a serious loss – and a waste of the investment in recruitment and training – to lose employees because they lost their housing. Turnover costs for hourly employees can cost the employer half the annual wage or more.⁷ Housing costs continue to increase faster than incomes, while labor market shortages are predicted for as soon as 2010. A shared public-private investment in workforce housing and housing subsidies – targeted at the lowest-wage employees, especially renters – are proven ways to assure the availability of the needed workforce that will also help reduce the flow of new people into homelessness.

Between 2002 and 2004, a survey of manufacturing workers in business-sponsored training programs in Minnesota found that 1 in 6 had been homeless in just the previous six months, or had to move in with someone else because they had nowhere else to live. In other industry sectors with lower average wages, the rates were even higher.⁸

⁶ US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research. (2007). *Affordable housing needs 2005: Report to Congress*. Washington, DC: Author. Downloaded November 8, 2007, from www.huduser.org/Publications/pdf/AffHsgNeeds.pdf

⁷ Sasha Corporation. (n.d.) *Compilation of Turnover Cost Studies*. Cincinnati, OH: Author. Downloaded January 30, 2008, from <http://www.sashacorp.com/turnframe.html>

⁸ Wilder Research. (2003). *Training low-income workers for self-sufficiency: Year 2 progress report on the Families Forward initiative for low-income working parents*. Saint Paul, MN: Author. Also unpublished data from 2004 from the same study. Reports available on the web at www.wilder.org/report.html?id=706

How can businesses respond?

Just as there are many ways in which homelessness is bad for business, there are also many ways for businesses to be part of the solution. A few examples are described here, chosen because businesses are already finding them of value. These address prevention of homelessness, rapid re-housing for those newly homeless, and stable solutions for long-term and street homelessness. We close with a coalition approach where businesses are part of a public-private, comprehensive approach.

1. Improve opportunities for stable housing for low-income families

There are immediate, short-term solutions for many employees' housing problems. These can be customized to employers' needs based on size, location, or whether the immediate need is recruitment or retention. Typically, services are organized and delivered by a nonprofit partner. For example, the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund has developed a wide range of expertise in helping design and provide such "employer-assisted housing" in more rural parts of the state. The primary motivation for employers to participate in such programs is not relieving homelessness. Instead, it is to help with employee recruitment and retention. Nonetheless, if these programs are targeted to low-wage, entry-level workers they will have dual effects: not only helping to ensure job access and stability for entry-level workers, but also helping to prevent homelessness among a group for whom there is a growing gap between wages and housing costs. In Hennepin County, the state-funded Family Homelessness Prevention and Affordability Program (FHPAP) has helped a large number of families avoid homelessness, at a per-family cost that is only one-tenth to one-eighth of the cost of emergency shelter. Similarly, Dakota County has calculated that the cost of preventing homelessness is only about one-eighth of the cost of providing emergency shelter and services after homelessness has occurred.

What it looks like:

- This may include an employee benefit program or a micro-lending pool, either of which can help with rental deposits, revolving loans, or other financial assistance for home ownership or rental.
- Employers may bring in community resources to give lunchtime brownbags for employees on community supports that are available for homeownership and stable renting, financial literacy, money management, and avoiding foreclosure or eviction.
- Some employers partner with local nonprofits and/or landlords to rehab workforce housing near the workplace.
- Some have formed coalitions with other area businesses, government agencies, and nonprofits, to help with the development of new housing to ensure a full range of housing opportunities is available in the community, and provide technical assistance to help housing developers navigate the complexities of financing and compliance.

Likely outcomes:

- Better ability to recruit for open positions
- More reliable attendance and productivity (because employees can afford to live closer to work)
- Higher employee loyalty and lower turnover
- Improved economic development in the community (from a larger and/or more stable workforce housing pool)
- Fewer low-income individuals and families become homeless due to a lack of affordable housing; more remain housed and employed, and emergency social and health services remain available for those with greater needs

EXAMPLE IN ACTION: *Community-wide action to construct a continuum of needed housing*

- Who:** Northfield, MN community members, led by local contractors, supported by the faith community, and coordinated by the Northfield Community Action Center
- What:** Local contractors recognized the need for affordable and supportive housing and asked “What can we do?” After examining the need, they involved the entire contracting community (general contractors and smaller sub-contractors) to donate and/or discount labor. Local architects discounted and donated design work, lumberyards and some manufacturers donated and/or discounted materials, and the city Housing Redevelopment Authority contributed nine acres of land. Local churches pledged 2 percent of their collections for three years to fund the remaining costs. Units that were constructed include some targeted at currently homeless persons, while others in the mixed income development help prevent homelessness by meeting community needs for affordable housing. Thirteen of the units are guaranteed to be affordable for the long term because they are part of a Community Land Trust, and two others are Habitat for Humanity homes.
- Why:** Businesses and churches undertook the project because of their concern about the needs of the community, and a recognition that everyone’s well-being in the community was bound together. Plus, it was fun.
- Results:** Newly constructed housing includes three townhomes for homeless families, three units for homeless individuals (plus a fourth for a resident monitor), and remaining housing includes both single family homes and duplexes, about half at market rate and about half of which are affordable.
- Lessons learned:** Participants believe that what made the project so successful was strong leadership, and a process that was broadly shared, fun, and rewarding.
- Contact:** Jim Blaha
Executive Director, Northfield Community Action Center
Phone: 507-664-3550
Email: blaha.jim@northfieldcac.org

2. Support rapid re-housing for those newly homeless or leaving institutional settings

It may not be possible to prevent all crisis-caused homelessness, but several kinds of business contributions can help make sure such episodes do not result in long-term homelessness, and do not disrupt the employment or education of those who experience them. Either directly or through a nonprofit intermediary, businesses can donate funds, in-kind goods, or volunteers to supportive housing programs.

What it looks like:

- Donate furniture or other household goods (display, excess, or returned merchandise if you are a merchant; replaced equipment if you are a hotel or other service provider).
- Encourage employees and retirees to volunteer to set up or move household items for individuals or families moving into new housing.
- Sponsor a room or unit in a supportive housing program and help get it fully furnished.
- Make a financial contribution toward the operating costs of a supportive housing program, to help pay for the ongoing services that allow residents to become and remain stable.

Likely outcomes:

- Rapid re-housing can help prevent loss of employment, or help laid-off workers obtain new employment.
- Rapid re-housing reduces disruptions to children's education and helps children maintain stable relationships that promote self-confidence, motivation, and ability to work well with others.
- Some supportive housing programs work with people returning to the community from treatment or correctional programs. These programs help residents maintain the mental or chemical health developed in their treatment programs; help ex-offenders maintain positive behavior patterns; help develop job skills, place residents in jobs, and support their successful adjustment to the workplace; and help connect residents to other community sources of longer-term support.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION: *Financial and in-kind donations*

Who: Large state-wide retailer

What: Among its contributions to a variety of non-profits in the community, this large corporation donates furniture and household items to a program that assists homeless people in getting set up with their housing needs. The corporation also encourages employees and retirees to volunteer with homeless assistance programs, by listing volunteer opportunities in the community and by encouraging and facilitating their volunteer involvement.

Why: The corporation wants to become involved in the community in the ways that their customers want them to be involved. “There are the values to the community, and also the benefits of team-building, when employees go out to volunteer. We also align our volunteer efforts with what we fund, so that we can multiply our impact.” Other benefits are “building a stronger community, for both our guests and our team members. That is important. [These are] the traditional reasons why, as a business, you are involved in supporting the community.”

Results: Based on what they hear from the programs they help, they believe they are having a positive effect, but they do not yet have hard measurements in place.

3. Support outreach to homeless people on the streets to help get them into housing with services

Some of the most spectacular reductions in street homelessness in large cities have been in places where public-private partnerships have designed and implemented a comprehensive array of services. This approach enables communities to identify, assess, and serve homeless people on the streets who have previously resisted services. Individual components (such as special housing programs for chronic inebriates where sobriety is not required for entry) can also be part of such a response – for example, in Minneapolis, the Anishinaabe Wakiagun has shown great success in persuading American Indians who have been homeless for a long time to leave the streets and encampments and use the shelter offered. The St. Paul Police Homeless Outreach Project (P-HOP) is piloting a partnership with police to respond to incidents with services to address root causes instead of a cycle of arrests, short-term jail time, and return to the streets. They are working with landlords to get chronically homeless men and women into long-term housing instead.

What it looks like:

- Downtown businesses, nonprofit and government service and funding entities form a public-private partnership.
- Services vary from city to city but typically include: Outreach workers who build trusting relationships with unsheltered homeless persons; one-stop service centers where persons can be connected to the combination of housing plus services they need and are ready to accept; follow-up services to help them maintain progress, including job training and placement when appropriate.
- Services that work with treatment center patients and jail inmates at the time of release to ensure that they have housing and the services needed to retain it.
- In some cities, outreach workers are available on call to respond to incidents that may be drawn to their attention by business people, police, or other community members.

Likely outcomes:

- Help stop the “revolving door” of arrests for loitering or other “livability” offenses, for which the person arrested typically returns to the same behaviors following release.
- Previously unsheltered and untreated homeless persons gain access to shelter and, when ready, are more likely to enter and benefit from treatment.
- Intermediary organizations with experience working with challenging populations are able to provide life skills and job readiness training and coaching to help inexperienced workers become employable in the competitive labor market.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION: *Job training and employment*

- Who:** Co-founder of a bakery with multiple locations, Philadelphia, PA
- What:** One of several partners (private businesses and non-profits), her bakery provides job training to homeless adults and teens who will be working in an upscale internet café, to open in March in the Philadelphia library. Training covers everything, including the proper care and handling of food product, displays and the presentation of food product, and customer relations.
- Why:** Because of the “interdependence between people, communities, entities, with nothing existing by itself,” and because “that collaboration is where entities with particular strengths join with entities with different strengths to have an impact on the community, ...collaboration is stronger than doing something alone, ...and it will reach further into the community.” In addition, it will provide an outlet for her business, which is a financial benefit.
- Lessons learned:** “The really most important piece is that it is the right set of people or entities collaborating. Each of those entities has to be brought into the effort, having a key person in each organization involved. ...There also has to be a person whose vision is leading us, so in those moments when things get caught up, that person’s energy motivates you and keeps things moving along.”
- Contact:** Wendy Born
Co-founder, Metropolitan Bakery, Philadelphia, PA
Email: wsborn@gmail.com
Website: www.centercityphila.org/programs/homeless.aspx

4. Be part of the larger coalition

There is great power in coordinated action, especially when it combines the strengths and expertise of government, nonprofits, and the private for-profit sector. Implementation of such partnerships requires business membership, leadership, and financial commitment, but, as cited above under Street Homelessness, it can help to plan and deliver the most effective solutions.

All regions now have “Continuum of Care” organizations formed in response to federal and state funding opportunities. Many also have active coalitions working on initiatives to end homelessness, or Project Homeless Connect planning committees (or all three), that would welcome active involvement from the local business community. For contact information see the last page of this report.

What it looks like:

- A comprehensive approach that includes prevention (including affordable housing), rapid response to new homelessness (including transition planning for adults and youth exiting facilities), and solutions to long-term homelessness (including supportive housing).
- Leadership includes representatives of government agencies; nonprofit organizations familiar with the homeless population, their needs, and effective services; philanthropy; and business representatives and other community leaders.
- Retired professionals and business executives have formed councils to offer pro bono consulting services to organizations serving the homeless. Needed services include attorneys, interior designers, dentists, financial consultants, information technologists, and others.
- In addition to a range of direct services for homeless people, a comprehensive response may also include an education initiative designed to help employees of a company better understand the circumstances and needs of homeless persons.

Likely outcomes:

- Fewer gaps and overlaps among services.
- Cities with coalitions and comprehensive plans that have been operating for several years report significant drops in homelessness. These cities include Miami, San Francisco, Denver, and Philadelphia.
- Increased willingness of company employees to volunteer and contribute to programs to help end homelessness, resulting in better services and a community that supports effective policies.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION: *Project leadership*

Who: Bob Chisholm, Architect, Miami, FL

What: Starting with pro bono review of facility design and construction, his involvement grew to include leading the design component of the initiative. Ultimately, he became the chair of the board, which includes more than 60 community business leaders, bringing together their expertise to serve the organization in meeting the needs of the homeless population. He has worked to build and maintain the strong private/public partnership aspect of the initiative, which is seen as key, with a focus on housing, jobs, and services, providing homeless persons with dignity and hope.

Why: Initially asked to participate because the local initiative needed expertise to help review proposed designs for facilities to be built, he accepted, and stays involved, because “my life is my work, and my work is my life” – and because he values the involvement of private business in the community, as well as everyone’s personal role to help each other.

Results: The community initiative has helped to lower the numbers from 8,000 homeless in 1995 to 1,300 currently. Personally, in addition to a sense of accomplishment, he has gained new skills, adding “I think that being involved in this has enhanced [his personal and professional] reputation.”

Contact: Bob Chisholm
Architect and Urban Planner, Chisholm Architects
Email: bob@chisholmarchitects.com
Website: <http://www.miamidade.gov/homeless/>

In addition to leadership, comprehensive community approaches need stable, on-going funding. Public sources (such as taxes and land trusts), private philanthropy, and private donations from individuals and businesses are all vitally important.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION: *Financial contribution*

Who: Co-owner, Mercedes dealership, Miami FL

What: Financial support, time (serves on public-private board which coordinates work to end homelessness), and support for employees to volunteer and contribute. “You give as much time, talent, and treasure as you can. The level of financial support is substantial. It varies. There are people who give more, people who give less... They need people who will come and cook and do other things. But money is the key. If you do not have the financial backing from your community, you cannot succeed.”

Why: To strengthen the community and help people who are in need. It also improves the business climate. “Some people see it more from their business perspective. But I see it from the perspective of a mom. There are people who have no family, who have nobody, no support system, who have had problems from the start.”

Results: Fewer homeless people in Miami, and satisfaction from knowing it makes a difference. “The fact I have been able to serve on the board of trustees leaves me feeling that I am the one who benefits from it. It changes you, seeing that it is people just like you or I, people just down on their luck.”

Contact: Paula Brockway
Co-owner, Mercedes Benz of Coral Gables and Mercedes Benz of Cutler Bay (formerly Bill Ussery Motors)
Email: pbrockway@bellsouth.net
Website: <http://www.miamidade.gov/homeless/>

Wilder Research

www.wilderresearch.org

451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, MN 55104
651-280-2700 FAX 651-280-3700

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Wilder Research conducted this study on behalf of Heading Home Minnesota, the state’s business plan to end long-term homelessness. For more information about Heading Home Minnesota, contact Leah Gardner at 651-556-4512 or lgardner@fieldstonealliance.org. For more information about this report, contact Ellen Shelton at Wilder Research, 651-280-2689 or ecs@wilder.org.

Author: Ellen Shelton, Greg Owen
APRIL 2008