

Tear Sheet

How Funders Can Help End Homelessness: Focus on Permanent Supportive Housing

Key Issues

The recent and ongoing foreclosure crisis has brought homelessness to the forefront of public attention. Many foundations serve the homeless in their communities through their support of emergency shelters, food banks, and other programs. Although these services meet crucial immediate needs, there may be more effective ways to *reduce* homelessness.

Permanent supportive housing programs, one approach to ending homelessness, help people live more stable, productive lives. Foundations are in a unique position to support and bring attention to this approach.

As a solution for homelessness, permanent supportive housing is a humane, cost-effective approach that offers two additional benefits: It literally provides a home base from which individuals and families can rebuild lives and skills. In addition, the program's support services greatly reduce the likelihood of a return to homelessness.

Terms

- **Permanent supportive housing** has no time limit for people at or below 30% to 50% of area median income. Tenants pay up to 30% of their income toward the cost of housing, and the rest is covered by a subsidy. Support services, such as case management, mental health care, job training, and substance abuse counseling, are often located on-site.
- **Cost of homelessness** includes the cost of emergency room visits, shelter use, case management, police calls, jail time, and so on—a significant expense for taxpayers. Recent studies confirm that permanent supportive housing reduces these costs significantly.

Examples

Project H.O.M.E. (www.projecthome.org)—The Butler Family Fund's support helped Project H.O.M.E. translate its experience providing housing, education, employment assistance, and a range of other services to the homeless into effective policy advocacy at the city, state, and federal levels. Learn more about the Fund's strategic approach to giving in this area at www.butlerfamilyfund.org/homelessness.php.

Legion Woods (www.columbushouse.org/programs)—a permanent supportive housing site in Connecticut with 20 one-bedroom apartments for formerly homeless adults, many of whom are veterans. Columbus House, funded by the Melville Charitable Trust, provides on-site case management services.

Osteopathic Heritage Foundations in Columbus, OH, helped rural communities design plans to end homelessness. See

www.osteopathicheritage.org/UserUploads/UserDocuments/pdfs/RHISCO_Full_Report.pdf.

Tips

Changing how your organization thinks and funds in the field of homelessness can be daunting, but it is also a real opportunity to make a difference. Consider the following tips:

- Do not be afraid to fund advocacy and education. Those types of funding promote an understanding of homelessness, build public will, and change local, state, and national policies. Consider grants to advocacy organizations that push for effective policy, such as the National Alliance to End Homelessness or the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty.
- Consider the many ways to advocate to end homelessness (and to advocate for other issues you care about) without making a grant. Talk with and educate your elected officials and local grantmakers, consider publishing an op-ed, or take other steps.
- There may not be service providers in your community that offer permanent housing. Use your power as a funder to convene providers and think about more effective ways of working with the homeless.

What Members Are Saying

“Ending homelessness is about empowerment. It’s about finding ways to help people help themselves. It is about applying diligent and thoughtful guidance that enables each individual and each family to become self-reliant and independent.”

—Robert Hohler, Melville Charitable Trust, Boston, MA

“Our work to align ourselves behind strategic advocacy has produced visible, positive results in nationwide efforts to end homelessness.”

—Martha Toll, Butler Family Fund, Washington, DC

Additional Resources

- Funders Together to End Homelessness, www.funderstogether.org
A national group of foundations and corporations committed to ending homelessness and a great place to connect with other funders in this area of grantmaking
- *Impacts of Housing Supports: Persons With Mental Illness and Ex-Offenders*, www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/09-11-1901.pdf
- National Alliance to End Homelessness, www.naeh.org
A great source for best practices to end homelessness
- *Rearranging the Deck Chairs or Reallocating the Lifeboats?: Homelessness Assistance and Its Alternatives*, http://works.bepress.com/dennis_culhane/51

DISCLAIMER: Funders Together to End Homelessness and the Association of Small Foundations cannot be held liable for the information provided in this tear sheet. We strongly encourage you to consult your attorney to ensure compliance with federal and state laws.