

Pathways Out of Homelessness

Funders are finding success in supporting differing pathways out of homelessness. As recently shared in a Philanthropy Southwest convening, one approach provides permanent supportive housing to the most needy among a community's chronically homeless population, while another moves people from panhandling to employment.

Permanent, Supportive Housing Saves Lives & Money

Marc Stevenson, Director of Tenant Services with Father Joe's Village in San Diego, CA, described Project 25, a unique approach to provide chronically homeless and frequent users of public resources with stable and secure housing, combined with a comprehensive set of health and social services. Taking a 'collective impact' approach that brought together a wide swath of agencies and resources, Project 25 used a 'Pay for Success Model' of funding, with government agencies agreeing to pay funders back if efforts were successful.

The project – which was quite successful – began in 2011 with an analysis of the individuals who showed up most frequently on all of the support service lists in San Diego County – local hospitals, jail, EMS/911, behavioral health services, and the like. “This review identified 71 people,” said Stevenson. “They were the ‘worst of the worst.’ Thirteen percent of them died on the streets while we were looking for them. And all of them had some form of mental illness, a serious physical disability and/or a diagnosable substance abuse disorder, and many had all three.” On average, said Stevenson, these individuals had 41 visits to the ER and spent 45 days in the hospital over a 12 month period, at an average cost of \$120,841 per person, per year.

Within the first two years, Project 25 had reduced this annual cost by 70%, with the median expense per user for permanent housing, intensive care management, and medical and psychiatric care being less than \$12,000 per person, per year.

The blend of public and private funding continues to support and expand this 'housing first' approach. Initially, 28 individuals enrolled in the program and were housed in the first year. Today, 33 participants remain housed in their own apartments, have health insurance and receive preventative health care through a community clinic versus regularly accessing emergency care. Learn more in the [full report on Project 25](#).

From Panhandling to Employed

[The Curbside Chronicle](#) is a so-called “street paper” that is helping low-income individuals experiencing homelessness in Oklahoma City to get back on their feet. “It is a hand up,” said co-founder Whitley O'Connor, “not a hand out.”

For a college project, O'Connor researched social enterprise models to move people out of homelessness and came across the concept of street papers. He discovered there are 126 such publications around the world and 39 in the United States. While there are differences in the

business and reporting models used by these publications, O'Connor's focus in creating the first and only street paper in Oklahoma was to give panhandlers a path toward employment.

Before beginning work, vendors for The Curbside Chronicle go through an application, interview, and training process, and agree to a strict code of conduct. They each receive 15 free magazines to begin with and sell each paper for the suggested donation of \$2. After their first 15 free, vendors purchase magazines for \$0.75 an issue and continue to sell them for the suggested donation of \$2. Vendors keep 100% of their profits from sales and act as small business owners when they purchase more magazines to restock their inventory. "This vendor fee creates ownership and responsibility," said O'Connor.

Because vendors operate as independent business owners, this model tends to work better for many of the individuals versus working as full-time salaried employees. "If they need to take a day or part of a day off to tend to mental health needs, for example, they won't lose their job. They can fit the work around their own unique needs."

The Curbside Chronicle blends reporting by professional reporters and homeless vendors covering a range of topics, from homeless issues to local, state, national, and global news. "Most readers aren't interested in having all of the content be heavy, tough news," said O'Connor. "This approach provides content people are interested in and helps to drive education."

This business approach provides for a sustainable financial and social change model, said O'Connor, both making a profit and helping people to live self-sufficient lives of dignity.