

A Dozen Lessons Learned

- 1 Homelessness has been permitted to become 'unimportant' again, to slide lower-and-lower on the public agenda. A disturbing acceptance has set in. Apathy. A look-the-other-way capitulation to 'inevitability.'
- 2 Stable housing is the answer. Its cost the problem. A 'Housing First' mentality requires unprecedented determination and creative cooperation throughout the entire community.
- 3 The problems of people experiencing homelessness, beyond their housing status, are not different from those of other low-income people.
- 4 'Ending homelessness' has a better chance when we don't isolate the condition from mainstream services — when we stop treating it as a social disease exiled to an island of its own.
- 5 Employment — getting a job and keeping it — is a turning-point factor in ending and preventing homelessness as a way-of-life.
- 6 Badly needed: information — data that we can rely on (how many, where, what age, what background).
- 7 We have an abundance of analysis. What's needed now is ACTION — leadership, a strategy with no clutter, no cobwebs, no bureaucratic barbed wire.
- 8 Accountability for all stakeholders must be built into the solution.
- 9 The media is needed to make this issue 'important again'.
- 10 All people, whatever their problems, can deal more effectively with life if they have the stability of affordable housing.
- 11 Philadelphia has the resources to end this disgrace.
- 12 What's needed is the resolve. Blended with The Mayor's Neighborhood Transformation Initiative, the opportunity to end homelessness has never been brighter.

"Increasingly, it has become clear that efforts to remedy homelessness cannot be fully effective if they are isolated from a broader, community-based strategy."

Priority Home

"As many children's problems are plausibly explained by instability, policy should aim to prevent homelessness... and facilitate rapid transition to permanent housing."

*Marybeth Shinn and
Jim Baumohl*



Who We Listened To — and why

- A Los Angeles group, Beyond Shelter, developed the 'Housing First' approach for homeless families over a decade ago. The pattern of services usually provided in transitional housing – initially intensive and phased downward over time – are supplied **AFTER** people have secured their own place. The goal is to link the people to community-based and mainstream services. After five years, 85% are still in their own place.
- A New York group, Pathways to Housing, established a 'Housing First' program for street-dwelling homeless individuals with severe psychiatric problems and often drug/alcohol addictions. Individuals are assisted in obtaining their own apartments. The program handles the rent payments, and they are required to check in with a staff person twice a month. All other choices about their lives are up to them. Success rate over three year's time: 88%.
- In Colorado, Minnesota and Massachusetts transitional housing units 'convert' to permanent housing. Families and individuals are not required to move after a transitional program is completed. This strengthens stability for the family and directs financial resources toward more permanent structures.
- In Minneapolis, the Hennepin county welfare office works with private service agencies in the Rapid Exit program to quickly move families out of shelters and into permanent housing within weeks. The agencies provide ongoing support and assistance to build stability.
- In Columbus, the Community Shelter Board was founded to coordinate community-wide, comprehensive planning to develop solutions to homelessness. They knew that information was an essential planning tool and established a data system. Today, all of their policy decisions are founded on hard information about the dimensions and needs of the homeless population.
- In New York City, the Doe Fund's Ready, Willing & Able employment-based shelter program has attracted national attention with its success in assisting homeless men secure housing and personal stability through employment. Success rate three years after completing the program: 85%.

Minneapolis

Columbus

Seattle

New York City

Detroit

Los Angeles

New Orleans

Boston

Phoenix

Houston

Atlanta

St. Louis

Cleveland

Washington

Miami

Chicago

San Francisco

Philadelphia



Who We Listened to — and why (continued)

- Some states — Massachusetts, Illinois, Minnesota, California — have invested in homelessness prevention programs along with commitments to develop and support affordable housing.
- Early decisions by the founders of [Elim Transitional Services](#) in Minneapolis avoided creation of separate systems. They chose not to provide services duplicating those in mainstream systems. They chose also to assist individuals and families to relocate quickly into permanent housing in communities. Their view: “Housing is permanent. Services are transitional.”
- [Beyond Shelter](#) in Los Angeles, [CommonBond Communities](#) in St. Paul, and [HELP](#) in Brooklyn have each developed ‘service enriched’ housing models which are often more ‘community enriching’. They provide ongoing community-based information and resources to deal with day-to-day problems.
- The national organization, [Corporation for Supportive Housing](#), promotes development of housing-plus-services for the population termed ‘chronically homeless’ who are estimated to be about 20% of the homeless population. Through technical assistance, they aid programs and jurisdictions to develop supportive housing.
- The collective wisdom of a policy retreat on ending family homelessness in California was recorded by San Francisco’s [HomeBase](#). Included: ‘settlement houses’ where all people can get one-stop, community-based services. Each community center should provide comprehensive services, doing as much as they can to help neighborhood people. “*These center must truly provide access to services, not just a place where people get information and referrals.*”

Particularly notable is that most of the success stories encountered in other cities have a ‘Housing First’ foundation. Programs that work do not require that the organization dealing with homeless persons/families also must provide the complex array of resources and services needed. *When the first priority is ‘permanent’ shelter, the results are nearly always positive.*

