

United Power

FOR ACTION AND JUSTICE

LESSONS LEARNED

# Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness

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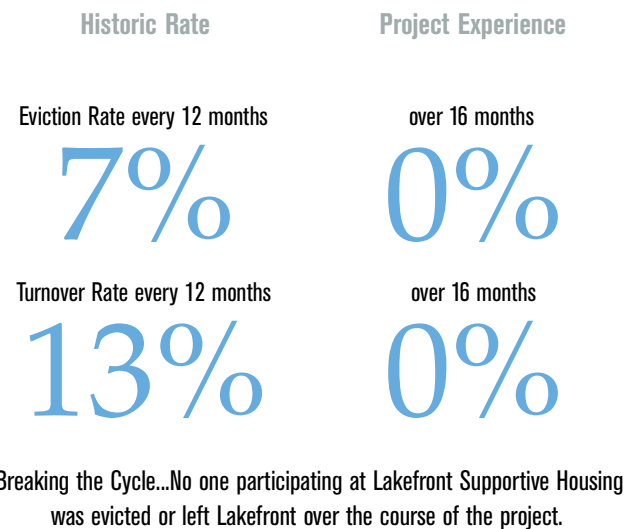
*A summary of findings from evaluation  
research completed June 25, 2003,  
conducted for United Power by:*

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# We've established the means to end chronic homelessness. It's now a question of priorities and political will.

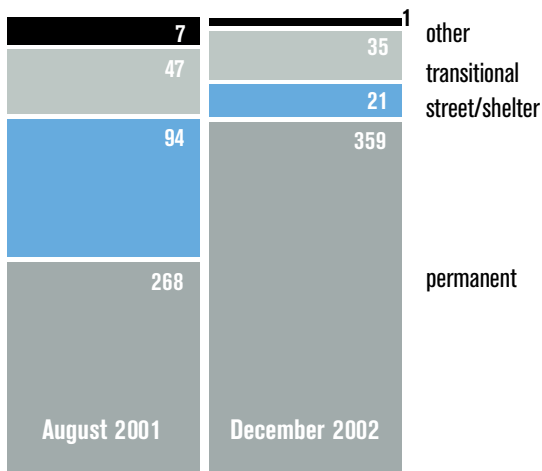
This is a story of two groups of determined people with intersecting interests. Group one: a dozen leaders within United Power for Action and Justice who set out to prove their conviction, that homelessness is one symptom of a complex of issues that destabilizes individuals and communities. Group two: persons who are homeless and struggle daily to "fit in" to a landscape that is, more and more, structured to shut them out.

In 2000, a cluster of leaders within United Power organized member institutions in the north and northwest suburbs of Chicago, and initiated a relationship with Congressman John Porter (R-10, retired 2002), Chair of the U.S. House of Representatives Labor - Health and Human Services (HHS) - Education Appropriations subcommittee. With Congressman Porter's help, the group obtained \$1.9 million in HHS grants to prove the efficacy of "supportive housing"



**Homeless persons are valiant people. They face up to difficulties that "established" individuals cannot imagine.**

United Power leader on project sponsoring team



Breaking the Cycle...By December 2002, 34 percent more people were living in permanent housing, 80 percent of them having moved from the street or a shelter.

Hands-on learning opportunities included job training for construction trades.

Dual achiever: supportive housing resident and case worker.



(supportive services *combined with* permanent housing) to break the cycle of homelessness. This report documents lessons learned through demonstration projects fielded in the City of Chicago and Oak Park, August 2001 – December 2002.<sup>1</sup> A total of 2, 712 individuals were served by ten agencies<sup>2</sup> in the course of the project. Over half of the individuals served were female, African-American, between the ages of 36 and 65, with an education level between the ninth and twelfth grades, and residing in shelters at the outset of the project.

**LESSON 1: SUPPORTIVE SERVICES BREAK THE CYCLE OF HOMELESSNESS.**

It's true: supportive services have proven effective – and cost-efficient<sup>3</sup> – in stabilizing the lives of homeless persons and the lives of individuals at risk of becoming homeless.

> Among 416 persons<sup>4</sup> who took advantage of the supportive services offered, there was a 78 percent decrease in the number living in emergency shelters or on the streets and a 34 percent increase in those living in permanent housing.

The work is painstaking and highly individualized, but truly effective.

Caseworker reflecting on project experience

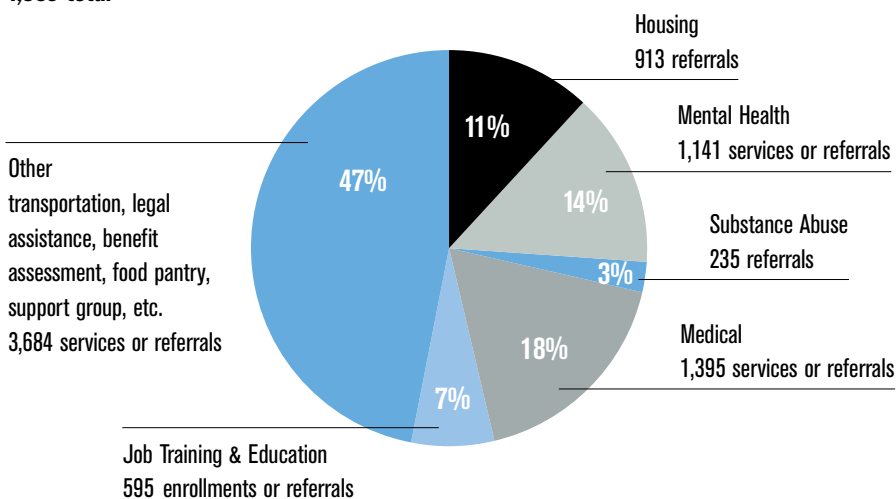
- > At Lakefront Supportive Housing, none of the participating residents left Lakefront or were evicted, despite well-established turnover and eviction rates (13 and 7 percent respectively) for all residents of their specific buildings.
- > Within Deborah's Place residential program for women with addiction issues, 67 percent of the individuals who entered the project without permanent housing made a successful move to permanent housing during the project period.

# Supportive services must be recognized as an integral component of any system of housing stability, and be made available on a sustained basis.

One is struck by the wide range of needs that must be met to stabilize – and to maintain the stability of – the lives of these individuals.

Project researcher commenting on findings

Mix of Supportive Services & Referrals  
7,963 total



Breaking the Cycle...A broad mix of services were made available – and accessed – throughout the course of the project, through on-site case workers.

**LESSON 2: SUPPORTIVE SERVICES BOOST TREATMENT RATES AS MUCH AS 450 PERCENT.**

People who took advantage of the supportive services offered to them were up to four and a half times more likely to pursue treatment for mental illness and substance abuse than were those without the support of on-site counseling and intensive case management.

- > At Lakefront Supportive Housing, 59 percent of participating residents followed through with their treatment, compared with 13 percent of non-participating residents.
- > Within Deborah's Place residential program for women with addiction issues, 75 percent maintained substance abuse and/or mental health treatment for at least 60 days.
- > Everyone served by Beacon Therapeutic and by Thresholds — 100 percent — entered treatment.

**LESSON 3: LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING PERPETUATES HOMELESSNESS.**

Motivated and qualified individuals are stuck in shelters or on the streets due to a scarcity of affordable, appropriate housing options. For example, homeless families seeking permanent housing through Beacon Therapeutic could seldom afford any available housing, even those with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Social Security benefits. After declaring a nine-

month moratorium on taking applications in 2002, Lakefront Supportive Housing received 631 applications for 137 vacancies in the first three weeks of 2003.

**LESSON 4: STABLE EMPLOYMENT IS DIFFICULT, BUT POSSIBLE WITH CONSISTENT SUPPORT OVER TIME.**

With the help of job counseling and training, project participants proved themselves capable of obtaining employment. But maintaining employment requires ongoing, attentive follow-up in addition to a stable residential environment. Sixty percent of those who participated in employment programs succeeded in obtaining employment.

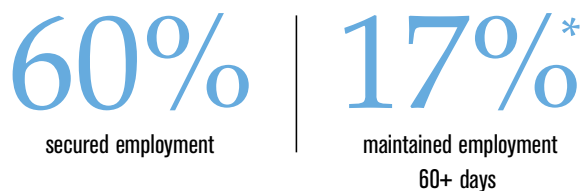
Sixty-one days later, across nine of the 10 participating agencies, only 17 percent remained employed.<sup>5</sup> Nine of the 10 agencies, given their constraints, were able to provide little or no follow-up. The tenth agency, Lakefront Supportive Housing, which provides ongoing follow-up, reported a much higher job maintenance rate.<sup>6</sup>

**Shelters are a temporary fix...  
Lack of places to refer people to for  
housing is a basic challenge.**

Project caseworker on Chicago's West Side

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**Job Counseling & Training: A Good Start**



Breaking the cycle...Most who sought job counseling and training were successful in obtaining employment, but fewer than 1 in 5 kept their jobs for more than 60 days.<sup>5</sup>

\*excluding Lakefront Supportive Housing<sup>6</sup>

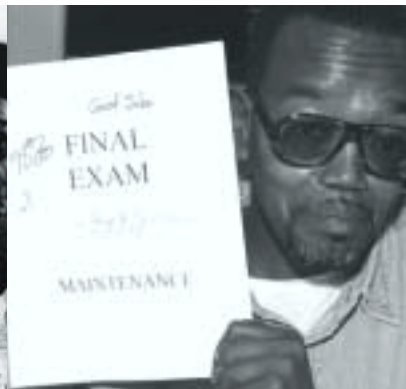
# On the basis of human dignity alone we each have a responsibility to help break the cycle of homelessness. Will you help us?



For every individual housed, many more wait for months, even years.



Home at last, safe and sound. A place to share and celebrate.



Skills and the confidence they bring – the start of a successful job search.



A room with a view. A life with new possibilities.

## LESSON 5: STABLE FUNDING IS CRUCIAL.

No matter how well chosen or managed the offerings may be, supportive services will not be effective unless secured by stable funding in order to ensure their availability over time. Everyone involved in the project, staff included, spoke to the need for continued contact and support – to help people remain housed, maintain treatment appointments, work through conflicts with other residents, even to plan their days. As one staff member summed up the challenge: “One year isn’t long enough for engagement [with clients].”

Here I am, as old as I am, and I’ve got a second chance to learn how to write, to learn how to read.

Excerpt from audio journal composed by 75-year-old project participant

## Recommended next steps: let's get started.

The availability of affordable and appropriate housing is fundamental to the success of any community in its efforts to break the cycle of homelessness. Yet, as this project shows, housing alone is not sufficient. A stable supply of continuous, supportive services is needed to anchor the lives of individuals who are homeless so they can make a successful transition to permanent housing, and remain housed.

**FACT:** One-on-one intensive counseling and continuous support services are both critical and urgent for individuals with mental health and substance abuse issues.

**ACTION NEEDED:** Increase funding for intensive services offered by mental health and substance abuse providers to people who are homeless, in conjunction with on-site case management.

**FACT:** There is a clear lack of supportive and affordable housing in our cities and towns.

**ACTION NEEDED:** Increase resources at all levels to expand the supply of supportive and affordable permanent housing.

**FACT:** Supportive housing is a solution to homelessness. It helps people exit homelessness and increases stability in their lives.

**ACTION NEEDED:** Create a new federal program, within Health and Human Services, to fund supportive services to be provided in conjunction with affordable housing where people who have been homeless can live and thrive.

It's a steep, uphill climb for persons who are homeless every day. Supportive housing makes the difference. Please join us in putting the power of supportive services and appropriate, affordable housing to work, to break the cycle of homelessness.

**About United Power...** Founded in 1997, United Power for Action and Justice is Cook County's "organization of organizations." United Power is comprised of more than 350 dues-paying congregations, community organizations, unions, ethnic associations and health care providers committed to working across their differences for the common good. In addition to its work to break the cycle of homelessness, United Power's major achievements include Ezra Community Homes for working families, the Gilead Outreach and Referral Center and state-wide FamilyCare health insurance for KidCare parents.

To join the United Power campaign for supportive housing, please contact:

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THANKS to  
Chicago Health Outreach  
([www.heartland-alliance.org/health.asp](http://www.heartland-alliance.org/health.asp)) for their oversight of this project, their leadership with the interagency collaborations, and their administrative support.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Both this report and the complete research report are available in pdf format at [www.luc.edu/curl/pubs](http://www.luc.edu/curl/pubs).

<sup>2</sup> Beacon Therapeutic; Chicago House ([www.chicagohouse.org](http://www.chicagohouse.org)); Deborah's Place - Addiction Program and Prevention Program ([www.deborahsplace.org](http://www.deborahsplace.org));

Excellent Way; Franciscan Outreach ([www.franoutreach.org](http://www.franoutreach.org)); Lakefront Supportive Housing - Employment Program ([www.lakefront.org](http://www.lakefront.org)); Community Counseling Centers of Chicago ([www.c4chicago.org](http://www.c4chicago.org)) on-site crisis counseling collaboration with Lakefront Supportive Housing; Matthew House; Thresholds - South Bridge and Southwest ([www.thresholds.org](http://www.thresholds.org)); West Suburban Public Action to Deliver Shelter - Winter Shelter ([www.leave-a-legacyopr.org/PADS.html](http://www.leave-a-legacyopr.org/PADS.html)).

<sup>3</sup> While this project focuses on efficacy, rather than efficiency, supportive services have been established as more cost-effective than shelter use, hospitalization, length of stay per hospitalization and time incarcerated among people who are homeless and mentally ill (Culhane, Metraux, & Hadley, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> This is a subset of the total of 2,712 individuals served for whom pre- and post- data are available.

<sup>5</sup> Employment program staff pursued contact with all individuals who secured jobs at intervals of 15 days, 30 days, 60 days, 90 days, and 180 days. Staff made phone calls, sent letters, visited Lakefront Supportive Housing residence buildings and/or contacted case managers in order to contact the clients.

<sup>6</sup> Lakefront Supportive Housing's Employment Program 90-day maintenance rate was 71%. This maintenance rate is significantly better than those otherwise experienced at Lakefront Supportive Housing as a whole: 35 percent in 2000 and 40 percent in 2001. A possible explanation of this higher rate is the higher number of participants with recent employment experience in the Lakefront Supportive Housing Employment Demonstration project.

**Some of the girls have seen my apartment...  
Now they're saying, "If you can  
do this, I can, too. Who do I talk to?"**

**Woman who, with the help of supportive services,  
moved into permanent housing**

To learn more about homelessness and supportive housing solutions, we encourage you to consult these resources.

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

National Alliance to End Homelessness (2001). *A plan: Not a dream, how to end homelessness in ten years*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

Regional Roundtable on Homelessness (2002). *Facing homelessness: A study of homelessness in Chicago & the suburbs*. Chicago, IL: Author.

Rosenbaum, S., & Zuvekas, A. (2000). Healthcare use by homeless persons: implications for public policy. *Health Services Research*, 34, 1303-1305.

Shlay, A.B., & Rossi, P.H. (1992). Social science research and contemporary studies of homelessness. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18, 129-160.

The United States Conference of Mayors (2000). *A status report on hunger and homelessness in America's cities: A 25-city survey*. Washington, DC: Author.

Also, please refer to these websites:

Corporation for Supportive Housing: [www.csh.org](http://www.csh.org)  
National Alliance to End Homelessness: [www.naeh.org](http://www.naeh.org)

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