

RETURNING HOME

ENDING THE CYCLE OF HOMELESSNESS
AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT
THROUGH SUPPORTIVE HOUSING



JUNE 2011

EMERGING EVIDENCE AND LESSONS LEARNED

RETURNING HOME INITIATIVE

Thousands of people across the country are trapped in a cycle of homelessness and criminal justice involvement. This subset of men and women often has chronic health conditions, including mental illness, substance use and other persistent health challenges. Communities spend billions of dollars on services that bounce people between shelters, hospitals, jails and prisons—with limited positive human outcomes.

In 2006, CSH launched the *Returning Home Initiative* based on the premise that supportive housing can break the cycle between homelessness and criminal justice involvement for thousands of people. We developed an approach designed to improve the lives of tenants, make more efficient use of public resources, and generate cost offsets in crisis systems like jails and shelters.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

CSH's innovative supportive housing model links permanent, affordable housing with tailored, coordinated services. People in these programs can access health, mental health, substance use and vocational services, along with benefits advocacy and other supports they need to succeed.

SYSTEMS CHANGE

CSH helps communities to align and coordinate public and private resources and policies to create supportive housing, improve its reach to justice-involved people, and reduce recidivism and the use of costly emergency services.

To test our intervention, CSH engaged several jurisdictions across the country to design and implement supportive housing initiatives that integrate the systems and resources of criminal justice, behavioral health, and housing agencies. The goal was to place people into supportive housing and end the cycle of homelessness and incarceration. CSH partnered with a number of leading researchers, including the Urban Institute, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, the University of Minnesota and Columbia University to evaluate and measure the impact of these supportive housing interventions and document the systemic and programmatic lessons we have learned. Outlined on the following pages are summary highlights from the first stage of our *Returning Home Initiative*.



EMERGING EVIDENCE

CSH's *Returning Home Initiative* was predicated on previous evidence that supportive housing has a positive impact on costs and systems-use among tenants, which includes the following:

- An evaluation in Seattle showed a 45% reduction in jail bookings and 42% reduction in the number of jail days, which contributed to the cost-savings of over \$4 million in publicly funded services in the first year.
- A study of 100 chronically homeless individuals in Denver found that supportive housing led to a 76% reduction in the number of days spent in jail. Supportive housing resulted in total cost offsets of \$31,545 per person over a two-year period.
- In Los Angeles, a study by Economic Roundtable found a 95% reduction in costs to the county jail for people in supportive housing compared to similar individuals who were still homeless (and 67% savings for mental health jail services).

Our signature program in the *Returning Home Initiative*, Frequent Users System Engagement (FUSE), is showing real promise.

- A 39% reduction in the number of days in county jail for participants in the Hennepin County FUSE program.
- A 50% reduction in the number of days in jail for participants in the New York FUSE program, compared to a comparison group.
- A 43% reduction in the number of nights spent in shelter by participants in Hennepin County over the course of 22 months.
- Preliminary findings from New York show that after 12 months, only 16% of the program group had any shelter admission compared to 98% of the comparison group.
- Preliminary findings from New York show lower rates of alcohol and drug abuse—specifically injection drug use—among people in the program. In addition, the proportion of people with earnings and/or entitlements is much higher for people in the program.

Preliminary findings from pilot programs in Chicago and Ohio have not documented impacts on recidivism to date. These findings may have to do with the limited follow-up period, differences between the program and comparison groups at baseline (Ohio) and the lack of the housing subsidies to serve everyone in the program group (Chicago). CSH and our research partners will continue to evaluate these efforts to determine if reductions in crisis system-use can be documented and to analyze the program design and implementation.



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LESSONS LEARNED

PROGRAM DESIGN AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Implementation and early evaluation results highlight valuable lessons about program design and service delivery.

- **In-reach and immediate connection to housing is critically important.** Given the timing issues of release, the availability of housing, and the proper communication and coordination among multiple agencies, placing people into housing immediately upon release is a sizeable challenge. Comprehensive in-reach efforts are valuable and must be complemented by consistent protocols and close coordination as someone prepares to leave an institution.
- **Coordination with the court system and probation/parole is critical to maintaining a strong connection with clients even if they are re-arrested and re-incarcerated.** Judges, District Attorneys, defense counsel, and probation and parole officers should be engaged and, wherever possible, included as part of the support team. Ideally, parole/probation officers will be identified and assigned to work with the target population, creating closer relationships and better communication among service providers, individuals and parole/probation. A common vision between community corrections, housing and support service providers of the target population and design of the intervention is critical to success.
- **Robust services are necessary to keep people housed.** This target population requires a flexible and robust services package to provide timely and appropriate support. Services should be most intense at the beginning of the program to engage individuals, place them in housing and help them transition to life in the community. In Ohio, providers are finding that the criminological histories and the high rate of substance abuse disorders among this tenant population are challenging traditional methods of service delivery. So CSH began providing them more training on evidence-based practices from the criminal justice world. While it seems self-evident, success relies not only on making the correct links to support services, but also on ensuring that those services are high-quality.

- **Accurate and comprehensive assessment of clients prior to release is critically important to match the right intervention to the right population.** Assessments should include the criminogenic risks factors as identified by the corrections system; as well as mental health and substance use assessment, and an understanding of the housing and community stability issues of people exiting incarceration.
- **Getting people into supportive housing immediately after release was more difficult than anticipated in Ohio and Chicago.** While many participants were attached to housing immediately or shortly after release from prison, others waited many months and sometimes longer for housing to be located for them. In the early phases of the Ohio pilot, it was difficult to create a uniform process across 13 different institutions, which led to many challenges with the referral and intake process in the institution as well as with immediate placement into supportive housing upon release. In Chicago, locating appropriate housing subsidies was much more difficult than initially anticipated because of implementation delays, budget cuts and competing housing priorities. Of the 59 people in the program group, only 22 were housed and only 12 of those were in supportive housing.



PROGRAM REFORM AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

The CSH *Returning Home Initiative* identified a number of critical lessons about creating necessary systems changes and policy reforms.

- **Cultivating champions within the corrections system is critically important.** When someone in a high-level position in the corrections system shows interest in supportive housing as a solution for this population, other key leaders are likely to follow suit. This is important given the often-held belief that housing is not under the purview of the corrections system.
- **Using data to inform a policy and programmatic response can be a powerful way to generate political will.** Matching data across systems to see the extent to which the “frequent users” of the corrections, homeless and mental health systems overlap can be a powerful motivator for system change and collaboration.
- **Collective problem-solving and troubleshooting is necessary to identify systems barriers to effective housing placement and reduced recidivism.** A process should be in place so providers, corrections staff, shelters and Public Housing Authorities can communicate on an ongoing basis about individual cases.
- **Negotiations with housing authorities can result in expanded eligibility criteria.** It is often difficult to obtain housing subsidies for formerly incarcerated people because housing authorities limit eligibility based on criminal history far more than federal regulations require. Some communities have been able to loosen these restrictions through dialogue and negotiations with housing authority staff and boards.
- **Having a staff person dedicated to systems change efforts keeps the work moving forward.** This person is charged with facilitating, coordinating, reminding, organizing and bringing in new players as necessary to ensure progress.
- **Peer-to-peer visits can facilitate information exchange between communities.** Taking leaders, advocates and practitioners to communities that have implemented a successful program or policy innovation can inform and inspire new communities to do the same.



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SUCCESS STORIES

CSH's *Returning Home Initiative* is helping people who had been trapped in a cycle of homelessness and incarceration. Here are just two of their stories.

SHIRLEY'S SUCCESS

Shirley needed a place to live that was far away from the Long Island neighborhood that kept her in trouble—but what she found was much more than a home. After years of bouncing between prison and shelters, Shirley accepted an offer to enter supportive housing and began a journey she hadn't expected. Her casual interest in cooking led her to a Culinary Arts program, where she attended daily, excelled, and graduated with honors. That wasn't enough for Shirley. After completing her coursework she decided to take additional classes and a workshop in business opportunities. Shirley wants to use her new love and expertise in cooking to start her own catering business. "Without the support of my new community, I'd never have been able to build a new life around my passion."

"I knew I wanted to do something different, I just didn't know how. They gave me a new beginning."



KEVIN'S JOURNEY

For more than 20 years, Kevin struggled with mental illness, chronic homelessness and repeated bouts in county jail. In fact, he was in court facing new charges when he was introduced to a program in Chicago that was part of CSH's *Returning Home Initiative*. Despite the fact that he was scheduled to go to trial in just days, Kevin was assigned a case manager to help him navigate the challenges he would face in coming months. Kevin was unable to avoid a prison, but stayed in touch with his case manager while serving his sentence. On the day of his release, Kevin's case manager met him at the gates of the prison as promised and drove him two and a half hours to his new home—an apartment in supportive housing with access to health and mental health services.

Kevin has been working regularly with his case manager to make unprecedented and steady gains in stability around both his behavioral health challenges and housing. He has remained in his apartment now for over a year—the longest he has stayed in any home throughout his adult life.



SHAPING THE FUTURE

Looking ahead, CSH will build on the lessons learned and the emerging evidence to end the cycle of homelessness and incarceration for thousands more people. To that end, CSH will:

- **Sustain and institutionalize existing programs.** We will continue to work with agencies and organizations to improve the programs and models in place as part of our existing pilots. Changes will focus on identifying and enrolling eligible individuals, securing housing, providing supportive services and coordinating across the systems that serve this population. Ultimately, we hope to secure long-term funding commitments for these programs and scale them up to serve all those eligible.
- **Expand the model to new jurisdictions.** We will work with the criminal justice/corrections, housing and behavioral health systems in new communities interested in implementing a similar pilot program. We plan to design, develop and implement new initiatives in communities across the country, engaging national partners like the National Association of Counties and others to broaden our reach.
- **Document the effectiveness of supportive housing for this population.** Our ongoing evaluations will examine longer-term outcomes to provide more detail about the effectiveness of these programs. Measured outcomes include recidivism, homelessness and use of public systems, including jails and prisons, shelters and public behavioral health systems. In addition, the qualitative components of these evaluations will give us a better understanding of the implementation challenges and how they were addressed, so we can provide important lessons to the field.



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About CSH

For 20 years, CSH has been the leader in the national supportive housing movement. It is a catalyst for housing connected with services to prevent and end homelessness. CSH develops innovative program models, provides research-backed tools and training, offers development expertise, makes loans and grants, and collaborates on public policy and systems reform to make it easier to create and operate high-quality supportive housing. CSH's goal is to help communities create 150,000 units of supportive housing nationwide by 2012.

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