



**Collaborative Homelessness Services:  
Comprehensive Approaches from Around the Country**

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## **Collaborative Homelessness Services: Comprehensive Approaches from Around the Country**

### **Summary and Issues to Consider**

The following pages present six case studies and some lessons learned from innovative, collaborative efforts to address the problem of homelessness. Briefly, the case studies are as follows:

- Bay Area Regional Initiative, San Francisco Bay Area, California—An informal set of multi-organization collaborative projects focused on many causes and results of homelessness, coordinated by one agency.
- Unity for the Homeless, New Orleans, Louisiana—A re-granting agency that provides funds and technical assistance to individual nonprofits and collaborative efforts to serve the homeless.
- LifeWorks, Austin, Texas—A large organization resulting from the merger of four youth and family nonprofits, with a focus on preventing and addressing homelessness among youth.
- Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless, Cincinnati, Ohio—A coalition of nonprofit service providers who work together to educate the public, coordinate services and events, and advocate for new policies on homelessness.
- Washtenaw Housing Alliance, Washtenaw County, Michigan—A collaboration among homelessness service providers to build a new facility and infrastructure for homelessness services.
- Community Shelter Board, Franklin County, Ohio—A well-established nonprofit, created by local funders, to pool and re-grant funds, collect data on homelessness, and help agencies measure and improve their financial and programmatic outcomes.

Providers and others concerned about homelessness should find a variety of approaches here that they could replicate or mix-and-match to address their particular community's challenges and goals. While reading this report, they should keep in mind the following issues:

What is your community's overarching goal for addressing the problem of homelessness?

By developing agreement about what the desired goal for the community will be, those involved in the collaboration will be able to stay focused on what is in the best interest of homelessness clients and the community at large as they deal with tough decisions and challenging implementations.

How will you find out the extent and nature of the problem and then monitor your progress in addressing it? Some form of benchmarking and ongoing data collection will greatly enhance the community's understanding of homelessness and the results of services. A coordinated approach to data collection will also help with policy making, fundraising, collaborative case management, and accountability.

How will the collaborative initiative be governed? A diverse board of community representatives, a coalition of service providers, a committee of funders, or some other group of people will need to carry the initiative forward and oversee the results. They may be the primary

coordinators for the effort or decide to delegate logistical, fiduciary, data collection, and program management responsibilities to individual organizations or to a newly created nonprofit.

How will the collaborative initiative raise and manage collective resources? While targeting appropriate funding opportunities can be a challenge, communities have many choices for how to organize resources on behalf of a collaborative. For instance, several nonprofits can write a joint grant proposal, one agency can be charged with raising and managing all funds for collaborative projects, a re-granting agency can be created to co-mingle and redistribute funds, or local funders can work together to design a collaborative approach to funding comprehensive services.

How will you encourage and maintain broad community engagement in the initiative? The overarching community goal should grow out of collaborative efforts among diverse constituents in the homelessness services system. Beyond that first task, however, members of the initiative will want to continually engage community leaders, local funders, clients and their families, and other service providers, leading to ever larger circles of involvement. Ongoing community support and interest in the initiative will help sustain it over the long term and help fundraisers and advocates make a strong case for the value of the initiative to the community. Community outreach will also be necessary for improving the collection of data and the impact that data can have on homelessness. Finally, decisions about governance and resource management can easily result from the involvement of community representatives who may want to serve in an oversight and support role. Broad engagement of people with influence and of people with first-hand knowledge of the issues will increase the likelihood that comprehensive change will occur and lead to solutions.

## **Collaborative Homelessness Services: Comprehensive Approaches from Around the Country**

### **Introduction**

Homelessness is arguably one of the most complex social problems to tackle, because it is often caused by interconnected challenges in the life of the homeless individual or family, such as mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence, and unemployment. Comprehensive approaches bring together a variety of services and resources to assist homeless clients in navigating their way from shelter living to self-sufficiency. This report discusses several innovative, collaborative paths for getting to a comprehensive approach to homelessness.

As the six case studies presented here indicate, comprehensive approaches require collaboration across organizations and services, and are more likely to succeed over the long term if coordinated in some centralized way. This collaboration and coordination can take many forms and vary widely in level of intensity and complexity of structure. While the examples in this report all represent a commitment among participants to use collaboration to change the full system of services for the homeless to reach an overarching community goal, each community has found a different path for doing so.

Using these as potential models, another community may be intrigued by the coalition to advocate for policy changes, the merger of several organizations into one multi-service agency, the informal alliance to build a shared facility, the committee to coordinate collaborative projects across agencies, or the use of one agency to apply for all major grants and then redistribute co-mingled funds to various other organizations. Bits and pieces of all these models may be useful to a new group of homelessness service providers seeking systemic change for comprehensive solutions.

## **Bay Area Regional Initiative<sup>1</sup>**

### **San Francisco Bay Area, California**

In 1997, twenty-eight representatives from nonprofit organizations, federal and local agencies, foundations, and businesses in nine Bay Area counties participated in a homelessness task force which led to the establishment of the Bay Area Regional Initiative. The Regional Initiative enables organizations to develop and sustain cross-agency collaborative projects that integrate efforts to address the problems of homelessness.

### **Overarching Community Goal**

To use community building, systems change, and collaborative projects to pool collective knowledge and resources for a solution to homelessness.

### **Objectives**

The seven major objectives of the Regional Initiative are as follows:

- Improved delivery of support services to homeless people
- Increased incomes of people eligible for public benefits
- Accessible, affordable transportation
- Job training, development, creation and placement
- Expanding community acceptance strategies
- Developing funding to support services linked to permanent housing
- Developing an ongoing, revolving source of funds for housing

### **Collaborative Activities/Programs**

In the first two years, sixteen collaborative projects to address the objectives emerged out of the Regional Initiative. Each project is organized by a lead agency. The following are examples of these projects:

- 1. Health, Housing and Integrated Services Network**—Over twenty agencies participating in interdisciplinary service teams linked to permanent housing facilities.
- 2. Bay Area Regional Employment Collaborative**—At least eight agencies involved in strengthening regional systems for job training, development, creation, and placement for homeless people.
- 3. Community Acceptance Strategies Consortium**—Ten agencies collaborating to engender community acceptance of homeless housing and service programs through integrated legal, educational, and public relations strategies.
- 4. Bay Area Homeless Alliance**—Numerous agencies involved in creating a regional computer network linking homelessness housing and service providers.
- 5. Bay Area Regional Benefits Access Collaborative**—Eight agencies using volunteers and outreach strategies to increase the access of homeless people to SSI and the Earned Income Tax Credit.

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<sup>1</sup> Information drawn from Laura Escobar, Project Director of Emergency Food and Shelter Program at Northern California Council for the Community (NCCC), NCCC Website, Bay Area Housing Alliance Website, “Selection of Projects” document, “Turning Homelessness Around,” January 98, and “Collaborative Plan and Appendix.”

6. **Homeless Youth 101**—At least six agencies partnering to reduce homelessness among youth (ages 12-20) along the Highway 101 corridor and other parts of the region through support services and employment assistance.
7. **The Reducing Homelessness Regional Fund for Special Needs Housing**—Citibank works with agencies to provide loans to nonprofits creating housing opportunities for homeless, formerly homeless, and very low-income people.

### **Staff**

Two organizations—Northern California Council for the Community (NCCC) and HomeBase—make available the staff time necessary to oversee the Initiative. NCCC serves as the fiscal intermediary, grant recipient, contract executor, and check distributor. HomeBase administers policy and program work by coordinating communication across all participants, researching policy developments, and providing technical support to each collaborative. Recently, two foundations began funding a director of development for the Regional Initiative through HomeBase.

### **Governance**

Although the Regional Initiative has no formal board, smaller committees meet regularly to facilitate the success of the Initiative. A Regional Steering Committee of Homelessness and Housing (with representatives from local and federal government, businesses, foundations, unions, and the homeless community) selected the collaborative projects that were funded and continues to oversee these projects and seek policy reforms needed to reach Initiative objectives. The Association of Bay Area Governments convenes a committee of elected officials to enhance the involvement of all local governments in the Initiative. The Northern California Grantmakers Task Force on Homelessness generates matching resources for the Initiative as necessary.

**Is it a 501(c)(3)?** No.

### **Funding Sources**

During the first two years, the majority of funds came from a \$7 million grant from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for innovative ways of reducing homelessness. Now in its third year, the director of development has raised over \$375,000 from private foundations and is currently seeking additional funds from HUD. Individual organizations still handle their own fundraising needs for work outside the collaborative projects. Given that San Francisco spends an estimated \$80 million per year on homelessness, the budget for the Initiative is relatively small for the range of services provided.

### **Toward Systemic Change**

What makes the Regional Initiative unique is that it operates with almost no staff and very little formal infrastructure. The program covers nine counties with extremely diverse demographics, yet all participants in the Initiative recognize the value of collaborating to reduce homelessness. Remarkably, the Regional Initiative attacks homelessness from nearly every vantage point. By encouraging participating agencies to focus on a specific piece of homelessness rather than attempting to provide numerous services, the agencies are able to provide high-quality, unduplicated services.

## **Unity for the Homeless<sup>2</sup>**

### **New Orleans, Louisiana**

In late 1992, representatives from the nonprofit, private, and public sectors became concerned about a rise in homelessness in New Orleans and sought to radically change homelessness service provision. Eight partners (Freeport-McMoRan, Texaco, Entergy, the United Way, the Archdiocese of New Orleans, the State of Louisiana, the City of New Orleans, and the Service Providers and Professionals Association[SPPA], a membership organization of more than 70 homelessness service providers) joined together to create Unity for the Homeless, a re-granting agency that works with the member agencies of SPPA to create local and regional collaboratives to address homelessness.

In 1997, HUD presented Unity for the Homeless and the City of New Orleans a “Best Practices” award for their work with the homeless. Unity has received national acclaim several times for its dedication to collaboration and its innovative re-granting of public funds.

### **Overarching Community Goal**

To increase the community’s organized capacity to resolve the issues of homelessness through open, inclusive, and coordinated decision-making, collaborative efforts, and funding.

### **Objectives**

Unity operates under an ambitious set of objectives:

1. To assist homeless persons to become self-sufficient and regain self-esteem
2. To engage in planning and policy evaluation efforts to maximize the use of existing resources
3. To allow for a systemic approach for tapping significant new funds and encouraging collaborative efforts
4. To advocate for policy changes affecting homelessness

### **Collaborative Activities/Programs**

As a re-granting agency, Unity frees partner agencies from some burdensome fundraising by writing large grants to major funders and redistributing monies to providers. Unity also provides fiscal and programmatic monitoring to ensure compliance and performance and delivers all required reports to funders.

In addition to this role, Unity for the Homeless encourages and assists innovative collaborations among service providers and has so far helped establish nine extensive collaborative projects. For example, they opened a 30,000 square foot building in 1998 that houses up to eighteen families and thirty-six unaccompanied women as well as the administrative offices for the two nonprofit organizations that run the programs. Additionally, Goodwill Industries operates a culinary arts training program in the building’s kitchen. Unity also created a computerized network, called HomeNet, that allows over 25 agencies to engage in collaborative case management and comprehensive data collection and client tracking.

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<sup>2</sup> Information drawn from interview with Unity for the Homeless Program Director Dianne Moore, 1995 Annual Report, 1997 Annual Report, and 1998 Annual Report.

Unity for the Homeless enhances its services to New Orleans through national partnerships. They are one of eight organizations, nationwide, partnering with New York's Homes for the Homeless in the Together in Learning program, a family literacy project designed specifically around the needs of homeless families. Unity's service providers receive technical support and training from Homes for the Homeless to help families raise their level of literacy.

### **Staff**

Unity maintains a staff of eight, including an executive director, marketing director, program director, technical assistance director, special projects coordinator, systems coordinator, and grants administrator. Volunteers offer additional support to Unity by acting as independent surveyors to monitor the progress of Unity's grantees.

### **Governance**

Sixteen board members, two of whom are homeless representatives, oversee Unity. Five of the original eight founders now serve as board members, although they are no longer major sources of financial support for Unity.

**Is it a 501(c)(3)?** Yes.

### **Funding Sources**

Unity's 1998 revenues were \$5,073,134, up significantly from revenues of \$239,290 in its first year, 1993. The majority of funding comes from public programs including Shelter Plus Care, Supportive Housing Program, and CDBG. Note that Unity re-grants a large percentage of its monies – in 1998 it made eighteen grants totaling \$4,536,100.

### **Toward Systemic Change**

Unity serves as a strong example of how a central organization can leverage resources and information to support collaboration among other organizations. Although its re-granting role clearly makes Unity a leader in the community, this role may not be necessary to accomplishing shared projects. Unity also provides the critical service of maintaining much-needed data on the homeless in New Orleans. Understanding the demographics and movement through the system of the homeless population is critical to providing quality services and tracking the benefits of collaborative programs.

## **LifeWorks<sup>3</sup> Austin, Texas**

LifeWorks, a large nonprofit organization, was created in 1998 from a merger of four social service agencies in Austin, Texas: Child and Family Services, Pathways Community Counseling, Teenage Parent Council, and Youth Options. Prior to the merger, the four agencies served similar populations, frequently referred clients back and forth, and found themselves

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<sup>3</sup> Information drawn from interview with Bill McLellan, Executive Director of LifeWorks, and LifeWorks' Web site.

competing for limited resources. Clients were hampered in accessing services due to differences in agency hours, locations, requirements, and intake processes. The agency leaders came to a consensus that “the true value for our community was to be reached through a permanent partnership that maximizes administrative efficiencies, reduces barriers for clients, and responds to a changing economy.”

Since the merger, LifeWorks prides itself on its “wide open door” strategy, whereby a person can enter the system at any point and receive a full array of services. These include a youth emergency shelter and support services for the homeless as well as many other programs not directly related to homelessness. LifeWorks operates thirteen sites, four of which are full service centers for “one-stop shopping.”

### **Overarching Community Goal**

To provide an integrated continuum of services that individuals, youth, and families need to build strong, resilient and healthy lives.

### **Objectives and Activities/Programs**

LifeWorks centers itself around five main objectives, which they seek to achieve with the following programs:

- 1. Preventing a crisis before it happens**—LifeWorks teaches children and teens who face a high risk of pregnancy, substance abuse, homelessness, low self-esteem, and peer pressure how to “build resiliency.”
- 2. Promoting Good Mental Health**—LifeWorks offers therapy to individuals, couples, and families in private and group settings.
- 3. Providing Shelter and Housing Services for Teens**—LifeWorks operates the only emergency shelter for teens in Travis County. LifeWorks also provides transitional living, supportive housing, runaway services, and street outreach to teens.
- 4. Teaching Critical Life Skills**—Programs teach teens to live independently by offering courses on child rearing, study skills, financial management, and health education.
- 5. Teaching Consumer Skills**—LifeWorks provides clients with credit counseling and educational programs on money management.

LifeWorks integrates its services for homeless youth by providing a system of support that moves from emergency shelter, to transitional living, to supportive housing, to “Passages Case Management.” This seamless service would have been extremely complicated and cost-prohibitive without the merger.

LifeWorks serves over 10,000 clients through direct services and another 25,000 through educational presentations or information/referrals. When people contact LifeWorks, 97% receive help immediately over the phone (such as setting up appointments) and 77% begin receiving services within two weeks. A well-maintained database helps LifeWorks monitor the progress of clients to ensure that they are accessing the full array of services available.

## **Staff**

LifeWorks did not lay off any employees before or after the transition. The organization maintains a staff of just under 200 employees with minimal turnover. All four of the previous executive directors retained positions at LifeWorks, and an outside person was hired for the position of Executive Director.

## **Governance**

Twenty persons serve on the board of directors, comprised of four representatives from each of the original agencies and four additional representatives from the community.

**Is it a 510(c)(3)?** Yes.

## **Funding**

LifeWorks received significant funding for the merger process and now stands as the largest grantee of the local United Way, with a 1999-2000 budget of \$7.1 million. LifeWorks receives funding from the government (55%), creditor rebates (13%), fees (12%), United Way (9%), Events (7%), and foundation/corporate grants (4%).

## **Toward Systemic Change**

LifeWorks' approach to a nonprofit merger is notable for its exemplary planning before the merger. The four agencies educated themselves well about the process of a nonprofit merger before committing to any action, thereby mitigating turf issues that often arise among partners.

## **Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless<sup>4</sup> Cincinnati, Ohio**

The Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless began in 1984. Approximately fifty nonprofit organizations belong to the coalition which meets monthly to coordinate plans for direct service provision, educational programs, and outreach to homeless persons. The Coalition also lobbies for homeless person's rights on the local, state, and federal level. One of the original founders of the Homeless Coalition in Cincinnati went on to establish the National Coalition for the Homeless.

## **Overarching Community Goal**

To end homelessness in Cincinnati. This goal is founded on the premise that "everyone has the right to decent, safe, and affordable housing."

## **Collaborative Activities/Programs**

Members of the Homeless Coalition work together to offer services and educate the public about homelessness. The Coalition's flagship program is the publication and distribution of Street Vibes, a newspaper that homeless persons buy for \$.20 per copy and sell for \$1.00 per copy. Additionally, members of the Homeless Coalition organize Cincinnati's annual "Stand-Down for

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<sup>4</sup> Information compiled from interview with Jimmy Heath, Coordinator, and GCCH website.

the Homeless” weekend. During this event, member agencies pass out information, clothing, and food to homeless persons in a centralized location. The Coalition also coordinates a Speaker’s Bureau, through which current and former homeless persons share their stories at churches, schools, and corporations.

Members also successfully advocate for policy changes to help the homeless. These include expanding the operating hours of the health department and of “hot and cold centers,” and overturning an anti-panhandling ordinance. The Coalition has also compiled substantial data on homelessness in the region.

### **Staff**

The Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless maintains two full-time staff members and two Americorps volunteers.

### **Governance**

A steering committee, comprised of three formerly homeless persons and six agency representatives, oversees the Coalition. The group meets quarterly.

**Is it a 501(c)(3)?** No.

### **Funding**

The Coalition operates on less than \$50,000 per year. All of the funding comes from private sources, including individual donors, a Cincinnati Bengals fundraising event, and \$2500 from membership dues.

### **Towards Systemic Change**

The Homeless Coalition demonstrates that a collaboration does not have to be well funded to be effective, nor does it always require a lot of maintenance on the part of members. With a clear focus on the larger community goal and attention to policy as well as services, the Coalition is able to accomplish changes that affect the whole system and that require multiple voices to have impact. Many of the Coalition’s accomplishments would not have been possible if only one agency was trying to do them.

## **Washtenaw Housing Alliance<sup>5</sup>** **Washtenaw County, Michigan**

The Washtenaw Housing Alliance, begun in 1997, consists of thirteen organizations (twelve nonprofits and one neighborhood organization) dedicated to creating additional low-income and transitional housing for the homeless in Washtenaw County, Michigan (located 30 miles west of Detroit). They were motivated to come together when it became clear to the community that the problem of homelessness was not being properly addressed with existing services. Observers

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<sup>5</sup> Information drawn from Barbara Penrod of St. Joseph Mercy Hospital (a Housing Alliance member) and from internal documents.

noted that the conditions in the shelters were deplorable and their locations inconvenient for clients. Also, many of the downtown Ann Arbor business owners complained of the presence of homeless people in the shopping district.

As a result of the work of two community task forces and the Washtenaw Housing Alliance, Washtenaw County and the City of Ann Arbor awarded the Washtenaw Housing Alliance a ten-year contract worth \$3.1 million to purchase land and build a facility in which to centralize homelessness services. The group is currently attempting to purchase land but is having difficulty doing so because neighborhoods are reluctant to put homeless services in their areas.

### **Overarching Community Goal**

To eradicate homelessness in the community through collaboration and partnerships that address root causes of homelessness and through needed systemic changes that will sustain over time.

### **Objectives**

The objective of the Housing Alliance is for “every person who is homeless or at risk of homelessness to be provided with alternatives for shelter, housing, and services, including those who are vulnerable and difficult to serve.” Achieving this objective requires the following:

- Accessibility of basic necessities
- Availability of emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent housing
- Promotion of self-sufficiency through education and employment opportunities, debt reduction, credit assistance, literacy programs, transportation, and childcare
- Support services to keep individuals and families in housing
- Special attention to the needs of youth
- Programs to prevent violence and abuse

### **Collaborative Activities/Programs**

Because the Housing Alliance is a very young partnership, its most significant accomplishment so far was its ability to respond successfully to the City of Ann Arbor’s Request for Proposals to address homelessness in the community. The partners have also collaborated in designing the plan for a new facility. This includes the consolidation of three downtown shelter sites into one location, staffed and operating 24 hours a day, every day, and housing a community kitchen, job training center, emergency shelter, and transitional housing units. A second location will provide permanent homes for 8 to 10 families, a substance abuse recovery program, and a child care program. A third location will offer transitional housing for 50 adults and permanent housing for 8 families.

### **Staff**

Currently, the executive director of one of the Alliance’s partners is working half-time to handle day-to-day operations. There are plans for a full-time director in the near future.

### **Governance**

No formal governing body directs the Alliance at this time, but technical assistance and support are provided by the twelve boards of directors that govern the partner agencies.

**Is it a 501(c)(3)?** Application pending.

## **Funding Sources**

The \$3.1 million grant from the City of Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County represents the majority of funding, although a local hospital has also provided monetary support and a building to be used as a shelter exclusively for women and children. The Housing Alliance is also seeking HUD funds to create additional transitional housing in the county.

## **Toward Systemic Change**

Despite difficulties obtaining land, the Washtenaw Housing Alliance demonstrates that projects of this magnitude require collaboration. The centralized location of homeless services will dramatically change the face of homelessness services in the area.

## **Community Shelter Board<sup>6</sup> Franklin County, Ohio**

The Community Shelter Board (CSB) of Franklin County, Ohio, serves as a re-granting agency to homelessness service providers, distributing co-mingled private and public funds. Local funders established CSB in 1986 in response to the growing problem of homelessness within the community. The intention was to create a more integrated system of services for homeless persons. Community officials note that CSB provides centralized structure to what was previously a decentralized set of community-based services and programs.

CSB initially emphasized a streamlined funding process and general long-term system planning, but now devotes more of its time to monitoring financial solvency, outcomes measurement, and continuous quality improvement in partner agencies, as a response to funder expectations.

## **Overarching Community Goal**

To assist families and individuals in Central Ohio to resolve their housing crisis by coordinating community based efforts, fostering collaboration, and funding services.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of the Community Shelter Board are as follows:

1. “To develop and implement a strategy which will increase community awareness about the causes and solutions to homelessness and ultimately decrease the demand for emergency shelter.”
2. “To provide open access to emergency shelter for all families and individuals experiencing a housing crisis through the combined resources of the Community Shelter Board and its partner agencies.”

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<sup>6</sup> Information drawn from CSB staff Nancy Smith, Research Assistant; Teri Weisebrode Green, Associate Director; and Sarah Colahan, Senior Administrative Assistant; CSB Staff Position Statement on Partner Agency “Accountability;” literature provided by CSB; and 1999 GAO report, “State and Local Efforts to Integrate and Evaluate Homeless Assistance Programs.”

## **Collaborative Activities/Programs**

CSB's program structure is based on its role as an intermediary between funders and service providers. As such, CSB represents the interests of homeless people without representing any one service provider or political group. CSB obtains grants, including the region's Continuum of Care grants from HUD, and redistributes money to fourteen partner agencies. Funders then hold CSB accountable for the fiscal and programmatic activities of its partners.

About two-thirds of funds support adult and family shelter programs, with the remaining one-third spent on homelessness prevention programs, housing resource programs, technical assistance, research, and special services. Service providers apply directly to CSB for annual funds. Not only does CSB reduce the number of applications grantees typically have to submit to various funding sources, but it also offers cash advances to providers who have been awarded other grants but have not yet received the funds.

CSB supports grantees in providing and evaluating services. Besides overseeing shelter programs, housing programs, and a family housing collaborative of nine provider agencies, CSB convenes discussions on timely topics, such as the rise of homelessness in the area during the summer. Last winter, CSB also opened an overflow center to handle additional homeless men in the city.

CSB also oversees the collection of data from Franklin County's emergency shelter system. CSB's database compiles demographic data on the homeless and tracks the use of shelters individually and systemically, allowing the Board to monitor financial resources per bed use. Additionally, CSB gives each client a unique number that allows it to track the movement of clients through the system and to determine an unduplicated count of how many people are using shelters and supportive services.

CSB's annual funding activities provide access to more than 840 emergency shelter beds. During 1998, CSB partners served 8,911 individuals including 2,264 children. All of the shelters supported by CSB offer additional services including showers, meals, health care, material assistance, referrals, supportive services, and crisis assistance. Approximately 40 percent of families in 1998 moved from CSB family shelters to permanent housing.

## **Staff**

Professional staff includes an executive director and nine staff members.

## **Governance**

The Community Shelter Board has a 17 member volunteer Board of Trustees. Each of the original founders of CSB receives a designated number of chairs to whom they appoint board members to a three-year term. CSB often recommends potential board candidates to those in charge of making appointments. Each board member receives one vote.

**Is it a 501(c)(3)?** Yes.

## **Funding Sources**

CSB anticipates 1999 receipts of \$5.7 million to fund 11 agencies. Since 1986, CSB has granted \$34 million to local homelessness agencies. Funding sources include the City of Columbus (29%), United Way of Franklin County (15%), federal grants (12%), and the Mel Schottenstein Birthday Celebration (12%).

## **Toward Systemic Change**

CSB's uniqueness in the nonprofit sector comes in large part from its ability to allocate co-mingled public and private funds, but also from its ability to employ new ways to ensure the effectiveness of homelessness service providers. CSB not only stresses the need for financial accountability among grantees but takes on the important responsibility of collecting uniform data on the entire emergency shelter system. The data is used for planning, needs assessment, and policy development. For example, CSB's database determined that 15% of the city's homeless men used 56% of the shelter system's resources. As a neutral intermediary between funders and service providers, CSB is in the best position to collect and organize this type of sensitive data. After thirteen years of work, CSB demonstrates that sustained coordination within the homelessness system can yield long-term positive results.

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## **Lessons Learned**

These varied case studies suggest a variety of lessons learned about how to collaborate successfully to change the way services are provided to the homeless. Some of these lessons apply to any innovation in homelessness services; others are more specific to a particular approach, such as managing collective resources or engaging in a merger.

## **Key Considerations for Homelessness Collaborations**

Develop and work from an overarching community goal. While any collaboration should be guided by a shared vision, a comprehensive approach to homelessness needs multiple players operating from a shared understanding of what is in the best interest of homeless clients and the community at large. Each of the case studies drew on such a goal to clarify objectives and involve diverse constituents, so that even when partners wanted to pursue different strategies or even when the road ahead seemed difficult, the community goal would keep everyone focused on the results, regardless of the challenges.

Decide on a degree of infrastructure that is consistent with desired goals. Whether a community creates an independent nonprofit agency, a formal board, or a simple gathering point for collaborative projects, the structure needs to be appropriate for carrying forward the expected comprehensive changes. If the community can rely on partnerships among existing resources and services, the costs of creating new infrastructure may not be necessary. However, if current efforts need greater coordination and oversight, investing in a new framework may be worthwhile.

Include a plan to collect data. Although only some of the case studies did this, those that have a central database find it extremely helpful for case management, program design, cross-agency

collaboration, outcomes measurement for funders, public education, and system refinement. CSB's data collection system frees agency staff from extensive record keeping, and because it includes uniform historical information on all clients served since 1991, it is an invaluable indicator of trends in homelessness to inform policy making.

Prepare for the challenges of local politics and multiple agendas. Homelessness can be a contentious issue. The Washtenaw Housing Alliance was quickly reminded of this when efforts to purchase land for a homelessness facility repeatedly faced a "Not In My Backyard" attitude from local residents. Awareness campaigns, speakers' bureaus, political lobbying, and open town meetings will all help community members understand what homelessness services seek to accomplish. Also, comprehensive data on clients and outcomes will help advocates respond to questions and community misgivings. Finally, a collaboratively developed and clearly articulated community goal for homelessness will give everyone a common starting point and ongoing motivation when addressing tough issues.

Involve clients in decision making and evaluation. This has many benefits, as the Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition has discovered. Representatives of the homeless should be given the opportunity to clarify how existing services do and do not meet their needs and how changes will impact their well-being. As changes are implemented, these clients can help providers improve access in the new environment, and their feedback can be an effective means of evaluation. Involving clients also helps collaboratives navigate political hurdles by emphasizing that new approaches are made in partnership with those served.

Build new relationships. Comprehensive approaches necessarily involve service providers, funders, clients, and policy makers. But they also require new players who have not traditionally been included in discussions about homelessness. Business leaders helped build the reputation and resource base of CSB and of Unity. Cincinnati's rapport with churches and schools have enhanced their advocacy activities. Diverse collaborative partners for particular programs can improve their effectiveness, such as community development corporations for new housing or local businesses for new employment opportunities.

Capitalize on the value of collaboration to leverage funding. Several of those interviewed for these case studies contend that funders have grown less interested in homelessness issues recently, but that they remain committed to innovative collaborations to address complex problems. While funding opportunities alone should not dictate the decision to collaborate or the structure of new approaches, communities that seek to improve their homelessness services will likely find more grants for collaborative approaches than for improvements in discrete programs.

### **Key Considerations for Managing Collective Resources**

One of the key decisions that a community faces in designing a comprehensive approach to homelessness is how resources will be managed. The case studies described here demonstrate the use of one large grant to support collaborative projects and the use of a re-granting agency to apply for, co-mingle, and redistribute grant dollars. Decisions regarding where to apply for funds and what the funds will be used for can be made by a task force of community members, a coalition of providers, or an individual agency's staff/board. Ideally, decisions about how to

fund a comprehensive approach would involve funders working with each other, in collaboration with providers, on behalf of the overarching community goal. (This was how the Community Shelter Board began its work.) However, in lieu of getting full funder alignment about how to resource solutions to homelessness, communities can turn to other forms of centralized funds development. The following are some issues to consider when planning how funds will be raised, used, and managed.

Be clear about the purpose of centralized fundraising and continuing responsibilities to raise money at individual agencies. If funds are raised collectively to build a new facility or to support collaboration, agencies will still need to do much of their own development work for their programs. In contrast, if a community creates a re-granting agency, much of the previous fundraising conducted at individual organizations may no longer be necessary. In this situation, agencies may consider sharing the costs of development staff. However, if the re-grantor expects to be only one of several funding sources for agency programs, or if it only funds collaborative projects, agencies may still need to conduct independent funding efforts for their programs.

Help providers meet expectations of accountability. Whoever is granted the funds is accountable to funders to ensure that the money is used responsibly and that the funded services are effective. This oversight role must be taken seriously, but needn't be contentious with service providers. A re-grantor can provide access to a shared database for data collection, training on how to conduct performance evaluations, and regular meetings among service providers to share progress in a supportive atmosphere. Unity relies on its relationship with the Service Providers and Professionals Association to smooth concerns about accountability, and they have worked together to host seminars on budget management for agencies that have experienced substantial growth due to Unity's presence as a new funder in the community.

Use collective resources to encourage collaboration. Although coordinating funds is a helpful strategy for improving homelessness services, funders and providers should not stop there. Shared funds should enable agencies to develop collaborative projects focused on a comprehensive goal. For example, grants, facilitation, data collection, and community connections are all strengths that a re-granting agency brings to efforts to collaborate, and these strengths should not be squandered.

Design a re-granting agency that maintains a neutral position in the community. If a community decides that it wants to pursue the creation of a separate organization that will apply for, manage, co-mingle, and redistribute grant dollars to other homelessness agencies, such re-grantors must interact effectively with government, foundations, businesses, and nonprofit service providers and help each sector interact with the others. To accomplish this, the re-grantor cannot be seen as favoring any one group or being influenced by old stereotypes and schisms. CSB has sought this neutrality by establishing itself as an independent nonprofit (even though much of its funds are from public sources), avoiding providing direct services, and not allowing grantees to serve as CSB trustees.

## **Key Considerations for Engaging in a Merger**

If a group of service providers decide that a merger is in the best interest of the homelessness system and the community, LifeWorks offers several lessons learned about how to make a merger as smooth and successful as possible.

Get expert advice. Before beginning the merger process, the four agencies that became LifeWorks used a worksheet authored by accountants at Arthur Andersen to determine the feasibility of the potential merger. They also attended a course offered by Peter Drucker on nonprofit mergers. After completing these steps, all four executive directors were working with a set of common tools and terminology.

Construct the new board of directors carefully. By appointing four members from each of the prior boards of directors to join the new board, LifeWorks acted equitably and efficiently. However, the new size and impact of LifeWorks suggests that the board is now in need of more board members with more prominent leadership roles and name recognition in the community.

Be patient. Mergers take time, as does informing the public of the breadth and depth of services available after the merger. If the groundwork is laid, the merger will be successful, even if the transition feels interminable.

## **Conclusion**

For most communities, the task of creating a comprehensive approach to homelessness is still ahead of them. While an inclusive planning process, focused on an overarching community goal, will help each community undertake this effort, the decisions for what to do will be unique for each location. The case studies and lessons presented here may give communities a starting point for discussion and action. Eventually, more communities will be able to add their approaches to this list, demonstrating other innovative collaborations, the sum of which may truly have the hope of ending homelessness.

## **Contacts**

### **Bay Area Regional Initiative**

50 California St.  
Suite 200  
San Francisco, CA 94111  
(415) 772-4380

### **Unity for the Homeless**

2475 Canal Street  
Suite 300  
New Orleans, LA 70119  
(504) 821-4496  
[www.gnofn.org/~unity/city.htm](http://www.gnofn.org/~unity/city.htm)

### **Lifeworks**

2525 Wallingwood Dr.  
Suite 600  
Austin, TX 78746  
(512) 327-8018  
[www.lifeworksweb.org](http://www.lifeworksweb.org)

### **Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless**

1506 Elm Street  
Cincinnati, OH 45210  
(513) 421-7803  
[www.cincy.com/users/gcch](http://www.cincy.com/users/gcch)

### **Washtenaw Housing Alliance**

C/O Barbara Penrod  
St. Joseph Mercy Hospital  
P.O. Box 995  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106  
(734) 712-3456

### **Community Shelter Board**

67 Jefferson Avenue  
Columbus, OH 43215  
(614) 221-9195  
[HN4967@handsnet.org](mailto:HN4967@handsnet.org)