

THE NORTH STAR

Home and Healthy Lives Up to Its Name

State-Sponsored Housing First Initiative Ends Chronic Homelessness for Individuals, Yields Substantial Savings in Health Care Costs

The state's premier Housing First program is showing significant results in its first year of operation, placing more than 150 formerly chronically homeless individuals into permanent housing and resulting in considerable reductions in emergency and inpatient health care costs.

As of June 2007, the *Home and Healthy for Good* (HHG) initiative has moved 155 individuals from the street and emergency shelters into housing. So far the retention rate has been 86 percent, comparable to other Housing First efforts taking place across the country.

“We are incredibly pleased with the initial results of *Home and Healthy for Good*,” said MHSA Executive Director Joe Finn. “So far our hypothesis that Housing First is an effective and less costly response to chronic homelessness is proving true. For years, we have helped homeless individuals by providing them with services on the streets and in shelters. But what we're learning is that the stability of housing provides people with a real platform for resolving their health and many other issues.”

HHG was first funded in the FY 07 state budget as a pilot program to measure the effectiveness of a Housing First model for chronically homeless individuals, who typically suffer an unusually high number of health problems. MHSA partnered with nine agencies to secure housing and case management for program participants including Friends of the Homeless (Springfield); Housing Assistance Corporation

(Cape Cod); Massachusetts Veterans, Inc. (Worcester); Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership, Pine Street Inn (Boston); Quincy Interfaith Sheltering Coalition (Quincy, Brockton and Plymouth); Shelter, Inc. (Cambridge); and South Middlesex Opportunity Council (Framingham) in conjunction with Community Healthlink (Worcester).

Preliminary results from the *Home and Healthy for Good* evaluation are tremendously promising. Not only has the

program literally ended homelessness for tenants, but there have been dramatic drops in the costs of services used by tenants, including those associated with emergency room visits, hospital inpatient stays, ambulance rides, respite days, detox bed usage, shelter nights, and incarceration.

While homeless, the monthly cost per person to the Commonwealth for these chronically homeless individuals was \$2,720. After being housed, average monthly costs per person dropped to \$1,802, a savings to the state of \$918 per person per month. Preliminary estimates of total cost savings to the Commonwealth stand at approximately \$11,016 per housed tenant per year.

Dr. Jessie Gaeta, MHSA Physician Advocacy Fellow, noted: “As a physician, I know that it is extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, for a patient to manage his or her illnesses in the chaotic, unstable setting of homelessness. Simply giving a homeless person the key to an apartment can – and should – be the very first step on someone's road to recovery. The most effective prescription I could ever write for my homeless patients is for homes of their own.”



Photo by John Deputy

MHSA PARTNERS RECEIVE ANNUAL AWARDS

On May 16, 2007 more than 200 MHSA members, friends, supporters and public officials gathered at the Omni Parker House hotel for *Home for Good*, the fourth annual awards and fundraising event for the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA). The evening featured a brief video presentation about *Home and Healthy for Good*, the statewide Housing First pilot program headed by MHSA. *Home and Healthy for Good* tenants shared how they experienced

dramatic health improvements upon entering housing, and business and research experts touted the cost-savings of a Housing First approach to chronic homelessness.

MHSA presented three awards during the evening to individuals and organizations who have made significant contributions to ending homelessness in Massachusetts. Senate President **Therese Murray** received the inaugural Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill, Jr. Policy for People Award. The

award honors a public official who, in the tradition of the late Speaker of the House, uses public office as an opportunity to advocate for the rights of the poor, needy, sick and vulnerable. In a moving tribute to his father, Tom O’Neill III spoke about his family’s longstanding commitment to care for those in need. It was a fitting introduction for Senate President Murray, who during her tenure in the Legislature has established herself as a champion of programs that help

EVENTS

(Continued on p. 3)



The Mission

MHSA is a public policy advocacy alliance with the singular mission of ending homelessness in the Commonwealth. Through strategic partnerships formed with government, private philanthropy, business leaders, homeless individuals, and service providers, MHSA works to ensure that homelessness does not become a permanent part of the social landscape.

Staff

Joseph Finn, Executive Director

Sheree Marinilli, Chief Financial and Operations Officer

Tom Brigham, Housing First Coordinator

Michael Cooper, Fiscal Assistant

Erin Donohue, Development and Public Relations Director

Dr. Jessie Gaeta, Physician Advocacy Fellow

Ezra Sykes, Policy and Advocacy

Patrick Walsh, Policy and Advocacy

Janice Whalen, Development/Executive Assistant

Kaye Wild, Program Manager

Contributing to MHSA

Today there is an unprecedented consensus on our shared capacity to end homelessness. State and local governments are taking an interagency approach to the problem, plans to end homelessness are being enacted, and corporate and community partners are joining forces to create systemic change. Action can produce visible outcomes in Massachusetts. *Join us.*

www.mhsa.net

MHSA
P.O. Box 120070
Boston, MA 02112

Roomer: System Needs Fix By Joe Finn, Executive Director

This past March, my family had to move out of our house in order to have some major repairs done. We moved into a national chain of guest suites for about two weeks. It was, given the number of kids we have, definitely an inconvenience to be out of our home. While there, I could not help but reflect on the reality of homelessness and our response to it in Massachusetts.

In the guest suites, for \$112 a night, we had a full-size bedroom with cable television, a full-size living room with a chaise lounge and pull out king-size sofa bed, a full bath with shower, tub and vanity, a kitchenette with dining space, stove-top, microwave, full-size refrigerator, a dishwasher, dishes, dining utensils, and cooking pots and pans.

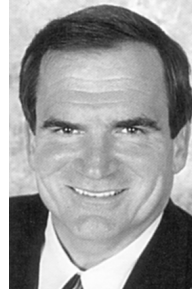
Compare this now with the fact that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts pays about \$150 a night to put a mother and her children in a room meant for one person with a shared bathroom and maybe access to a kitchen.

What's wrong with this picture? Homeless families often stay up to a year in

such programs and many of them have no other problem than their lack of housing. We all recognize that housing affordability is a problem in our Commonwealth that needs to be addressed, but can't we use emergency resources in a much more productive way that results in permanent tenancies for the people we serve?

These are the difficult questions MHSA is asking. And we are not alone in asking such questions. One Family, Inc. and United Way of Massachusetts Bay are also looking at the possibilities that a Housing First strategy might provide toward ending homelessness and the Commonwealth's reliance on costly emergency shelter. It is time to explore the possibilities of a housing-based response to homelessness.

My short stay outside of my home hardly counted as being homeless because, thank God, I had the resources to deal with our situation. But, it did reinforce my belief that it is urgent for our community to seek new solutions to homelessness for those who don't have the same advantages.



Joe Finn

SPENDING PLAN INVESTS IN HOUSING FIRST INITIATIVE

The Legislature doubled funding for the Commonwealth's premier Housing First initiative in its FY 2008 state budget, adding momentum to the effort to end homelessness through permanent residential solutions.

Home and Healthy for Good, Line Item 4406-3010, was funded at \$1.2 million in the state spending plan, approved by the House and Senate on July 2, 2007. The budget then moved on to the governor, who had ten days to review and approve it, or make vetoes or reductions.

"Once again the Legislature has shown its unwavering commitment to homeless people in the Commonwealth," said Joe Finn, executive director of the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA). "*Home and Healthy for Good* represents a major shift in thinking that is taking place across the state and country. We have seen that it is more effective - and less costly - to move chronically homeless individuals into permanent housing rather than let them linger on the streets and in shelters day after day, year after year."

Unlike last year, *Home and Healthy for Good* appeared in both the House and Senate budget proposals. While the House had originally level funded the initiative for FY 2008, the conference committee agreed to go with the \$1.2 million figure found in

the Senate budget proposal.

"I was so pleased to see *Home and Healthy* show up in both House and Senate budgets this year," Finn added. "It's great to see that chambers, political parties and ideologies need not be an issue when coming up with practical solutions for homelessness."

MHSA is currently working with service providers across the state to place chronically homeless individuals in permanent housing. As of July, more than 150 individuals have moved into their own apartments. MHSA is collecting cost and outcome data on the participants of the *Home and Healthy for Good* program, and initial results have shown a cost-savings of more than \$11,000 per person per year.

The FY 2008 state budget also included: a \$564,000-increase in an earmark in the Department of Mental Health budget to provide housing for the homeless mentally ill; level funding for the Tenancy Preservation Program, which helps disabled renters maintain their tenancies; continued funding for a statewide homeless management information system to collect homelessness data; a small funding increase for Line Item 4406-3000, which funds shelters and services for homeless individuals; and level funding for the Special Initiative to House the Homeless Mentally Ill.

BUDGET NEWS

EVENTS ANNUAL FUNDRAISER HITS A HOME RUN

(continued from p. 1) families and individuals move from poverty to self-sufficiency.

"Like Tip O'Neill, Senator Murray is committed to her local constituents, especially the needs of ordinary working families and those who have less. We are honored to have her as the first recipient of this very special award," said MHSAs Executive Director Joe Finn.

The MHSAs Partnership Award, which recognizes the commitment of those in the private sector who work to end homelessness, went to **Jerry Rappaport, Jr.**, president and CEO of New Boston Fund, Inc. Mr. Rappaport is Chairman of the Urban Strategy America (USA) Fund, which creates housing, jobs and needed amenities to stimulate economic development and enhance the quality of life in local communities. Rappaport is also a consistent and generous supporter of Massachusetts non-profits that work to end the homelessness of men, women, and children.



Senate President Therese Murray

"The involvement of the private sector, and leaders like Jerry Rappaport, is essential as we apply a business-oriented approach to ending homelessness in the Commonwealth," said MHSAs Board Member Tom Collins of Cushman & Wakefield.

Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership (MBHP) received the inaugural MHSAs Cornerstone Award, which honors individuals and organizations with a commitment to providing assistance and care for homeless citizens across the Commonwealth. MBHP manages mental health and substance abuse services for more than 300,000 MassHealth members across the Commonwealth, and its leadership of Housing First initiatives has helped to literally end the homelessness of hundreds of chronically homeless individuals.

"MBHP is a true leader in the use of hard data and performance-based contracting to solve seemingly intractable social problems," Finn said.

Pictured, from top to bottom: Joe Finn, MHSAs, with honorees Scott Taberner and George Smart, Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership; Ed Sanders-Bey, Department of Transitional Assistance, and Carlton Watson, The Willis Center; Tom Collins, Cushman & Wakefield, honoree Jerry Rappaport, Jr., and Joe Finn.

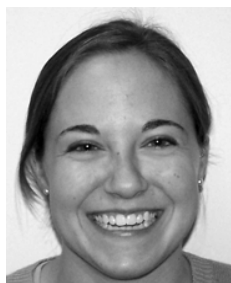


NEW FACES at MHSAs



Janice Whalen

Janice Whalen joined MHSAs in January 2007 after 18 years working at Father Bill's Place in Quincy. She served in a variety of roles at the shelter, beginning as a volunteer and eventually progressing to Marketing Director. As Executive Assistant at MHSAs, Jan brings her development and administrative expertise to her new role.



Christine Boisvert

Christine Boisvert joined the MHSAs team in June as a summer intern from Lesley College. She is studying human services as an undergraduate and plans to attend law school once she graduates. Her interests lie in homelessness policy and ex-offender community reintegration.



Emily Cohen

Emily Cohen joins MHSAs as an Intern for the summer. She is a graduate student at Tufts University where she is working on her master's degree in Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning. Prior to graduate school, Emily worked as the Children and Volunteer Program Coordinator at a family shelter in San Francisco, CA.

Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance
P.O. Box 120070
Boston, MA 02112

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BOSTON, MA
PERMIT NO. 240



www.mhsa.net