

THE NORTH STAR

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"Initiating Solutions to End Homelessness"

February 2008

Commonwealth's "Best Practice" in Housing First: *Home & Healthy for Good*



The Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA) submitted an updated report on the state's premier Housing First program, *Home & Healthy for Good*, to the Massachusetts Legislature in December 2007. This innovative initiative continues to show that a Housing First intervention improves the lives of formerly chronically homeless individuals and saves the state money.

In just over one year of operation, *Home & Healthy for Good* has moved **235 chronically homeless people** directly from the streets and shelter into permanent supportive housing. Significant savings in emergency room, inpatient health care, and other costs continue to be reported as the program enters its second year.

While homeless, the annual cost per person to the Commonwealth for these chronically homeless individuals was \$32,640. After being housed, the average cost per person dropped to \$23,268, an annual savings to the state of \$9,372

per tenant, which includes the cost of the program. Most of these savings are a result of a drastic decrease in costly inpatient medical care.

"The Massachusetts Commission to End Homelessness has identified *Home & Healthy for Good* as a 'best practice' in ending homelessness," said MHSA Executive Director Joe Finn. "Without a doubt, the successes we've seen in *Home & Healthy for Good* have helped to bring about a shift in the way the state addresses homelessness. There is a much greater emphasis on permanent, housing-based solutions – and their cost-effectiveness – than ever before."

Fourteen homeless service providers across the state collaborate with MHSA to provide housing and services to *Home & Healthy for Good* tenants. Housing may be scattered-site apartments or congregate-based. Intensive in-home services are provided by case managers or in some cases medical clinicians. The residential stability rate of participants stands at 86 percent, far higher than traditional Continuum of Care programs.

MHSA Physician Advocate Jessie Gaeta, M.D. noted: "The partner agencies involved in *Home & Healthy for Good* are revolutionizing the way homelessness is addressed in our state and we are proud to work with them. Every day, they assist very vulnerable, disabled individuals on the pathway to healthier, happier, more self-sufficient lives. I am excited to see how the next phase of *Home & Healthy for Good* will bring us even closer to ending the homelessness of our poorest neighbors in Massachusetts."

For more information on *Home & Healthy for Good*, visit www.mhsa.net.

Massachusetts Commission Unveils Five-Year Plan to End Homelessness

In early January, the Massachusetts Commission to End Homelessness released its long-awaited recommendations for tackling homelessness in the Commonwealth. The commission, chaired by **Tina Brooks**, Undersecretary for the Department of Housing and Community Development, and **Representative Byron Rushing**, was made up of an array of state and local officials from the executive, legislative and judicial branches as well as service providers and advocates. MHSA Executive Director **Joe Finn** was appointed by **Governor Deval Patrick** to serve on the commission and was given the added responsibility of chairing the commission's "Individuals Working Group."

The report's wide-scale recommendations apply to both homeless individuals and families and MHSA played a critical role in developing the recommendations concerning individual homelessness. Throughout the report, the theme of "targeting the right resources to the right people at the right time" is

emphasized. For homeless individuals, this is reflected in a tiered approach that describes different levels of need among four specific subpopulations: transitionally homeless individuals; people discharged from state institutions into homelessness; long-term homeless shelter stayers with moderate service needs; and long-term homeless street dwellers with intensive service needs. The report places a strong emphasis on prioritizing the needs of long-term homeless persons through an expansion of permanent supportive housing.

For these recommendations to be successful, the report stresses, there must be maximum funding flexibility. This flexibility, combined with a uniform needs assessment that will happen at new regional service coordinating entities, and greater collaboration among all community providers, help make up the core of the commission report. The plan advocates for a shift in the use of shelters away from their

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Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance
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Save the Date!
MHSA's Annual
Spring Event:
Home for Good
May 21, 2008
Omni Parker House Hotel, Boston





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.

Joe Finn, Executive Director

Tom Brigham, Housing First Coordinator

Erin Donohue, Development and Communications Director

Dr. Jessie Gaeta, Physician Advocate

Alex Gray, Legislative Liaison

Nicole Silva, Development and Communications Assistant

Patrick Walsh, Policy and Advocacy Director

Janice Whalen, Executive and Development Assistant

Kaye Wild, Director of Programs

Tom Yotts, Director of Finance and Administration

Contributing to MHSA

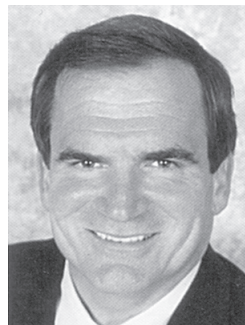
Today there is an unprecedented consensus on our shared capacity to end homelessness. State and local governments are taking an interagency approach to the problem, plans to end homelessness are being enacted, and corporate and community partners are joining forces to create systemic change. Action is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

www.mhsa.net

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KEYS TO CHANGE By Joe Finn, Executive Director

The Reverend Kathy McAdams, who works closely with Boston's street population, recently shared some good news with me. A person she knew who had been homeless for many years approached her after her group's weekly liturgy on the Boston Common. With a flourish, he presented her the key to his new apartment. "This is the first key I've had in nine years," he proudly stated. He was ecstatic that his life had taken this direction and that he was finally free from the ravages of homelessness. Through the years, the Reverend McAdams had helped him sort through a host of health and other problems that kept him out of mainstream homeless programs. She worked hard to get him housed, and finally it happened because permanent supportive housing was made available to him. It is stories like this that keep me focused on creating housing opportunities for the poor and disabled who crowd our shelters and streets. I also know – in my heart – that this person would not have been housed without the shift toward Housing First strategies that MHSA has initiated in the Commonwealth.



Signs of hope abound. The annual Boston

homeless census reported the lowest number of unaccompanied adults in shelters in a decade. The results show a 40 percent drop in the number of street homeless. *Home & Healthy for Good*, the statewide Housing First initiative for chronically homeless individuals overseen by MHSA, reports a housing retention rate of over 85 percent and all indicators point to a steady increase in this rate across

the state. The Massachusetts Commission to End Homelessness has made housing the chronically homeless a top priority. Together, we have made incredible strides in forwarding the message of ending homelessness this past year.

As hopeful as we are, we recognize the battle is far from over. Much work lies ahead in convincing the state, local municipalities, philanthropy and the private sector that we all have a stake in ending homelessness. That work is possible, and will continue to be successful, because of your generous support and partnership in our efforts. Together we are creating the conditions in which many more people who once were hopeless now have hope – and they too will proudly display their new keys to their new lives.

Harm Reduction Workshop

In October 2007, MHSA held a workshop entitled "Successfully Housing People with Substance Use Issues." The training was offered to case managers and staff members of agencies that provide supportive housing to chronically homeless individuals. More

than 60 people from 20 different agencies were in attendance. Mark Kinzly, a Research Associate at Yale University School of Medicine and School of Public Health, presented the workshop. Mr. Kinzly has been working in the field of Harm Reduction and Public Health for seventeen years.

PLAN: Commission's Good Start to Ending Homelessness

Continued from Page 1...

role as de facto, and often long-term, housing and back to their original purpose as temporary, emergency facilities to be used in times of crisis. It also calls for an **annual increase of 200 Single Person Occupancy (SPO) units** over the next five years dedicated to chronically homeless individuals. These **1,000 units** will be brought online through a combination of new production and use of existing housing units, and will include wrap-around supportive and case management services. The plan also emphasizes the importance of employment services and asset



development to help individuals on the road to self-sufficiency.

Finn commented, "We are optimistic. The commission's recommendations are a good start as we pave the way toward ending homelessness in Massachusetts. We look forward to working closely with the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Homelessness and Housing as they begin to implement the plan."

To view the entire commission report, visit: www.mhsa.net and click on "Legislative & Advocacy Alerts" under News & Events.

EVENT UPDATE: MHSA Young Professionals, Homeless Memorial Service and Black Nativity

Young BU Law Alumni Help Formerly Homeless Tenants Settle In

On December 8, 2007, MHSA partnered with the Boston University Law School Young Alumni Council (BULYAC) to bring holiday cheer to formerly homeless individuals housed through *Home & Healthy for Good*. BULYAC raised \$1100 to purchase household items for eight newly housed tenants, ranging from linens and cookware to slippers and blankets. Armed with overflowing baskets and holiday wreaths, volunteers fanned out across the city to make deliveries to tenants. Said Matt McCloskey, one of the effort's leaders: "It was incredibly rewarding for us not only to provide the tenants with some basic necessities, but to see that people who struggled for so long on the streets are finally in homes of their own. We are proud to have lent our support to this project." The BU project was one of the first born out of MHSA's outreach to young professionals and by all accounts was a great success.



Eighteenth Annual Interfaith Memorial Service for Homeless People

Government officials, homeless advocates, members of faith communities, homeless people and other concerned individuals gathered at Church on the Hill (Swedenborgian) to observe National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day on Friday, December 21, 2007.

Held on the longest night of the year, the interfaith service allowed the community to mourn those who have spent many long nights on the streets and ultimately suffered from the country's failure to end homelessness. The names of known homeless individuals who have died in Massachusetts during the year were read aloud as candles were lit in their memory. Rosie's Place Jazz Choir, Newton South High School Musical Group and Jeff Olivet provided musical accompaniment.

State Representative Byron Rushing (pictured, above right), Kip Tiernan, founder of Rosie's Place, Julia Kehoe, Commissioner of the Department of Transitional Assistance, religious leaders and others from throughout the Commonwealth offered reflection and prayer.

At 4:15 p.m., faith leaders and community members gathered to light luminaries on the Boston Common while churches in Boston solemnly honored those who have passed by tolling their bells.



Eleventh Annual Black Nativity Benefit Event for MHSA

Each year at the start of the holiday season, MHSA sells tickets to Langston Hughes' inspiring gospel song-play, *Black Nativity*. A mixture of scripture, verse, music and dance that tells the Christmas story, *Black Nativity* continues to be a joyous and uplifting experience. The **MHSA Benefit Event** this year was held on Friday, December 7, 2007 at the Tremont Temple, Boston. More than 200 MHSA members, friends and supporters sang, danced and clapped along on this evening of festive holiday celebration. Special thanks to Pam Feingold and the community of Lynnfield who brought their enthusiasm and once again made it a special evening to remember!

For more information on the MHSA Young Professionals' Group, an organization offering education, advocacy, social and networking opportunities to young professionals, contact Erin Donohue at edonohue@mhsa.net.

NEW FACES AT MHSA



Caitlin Golden, Social Action Ministries Intern. Caitlin is reviewing MHSA's work with faith communities. A 2007 graduate of the University of Virginia, Caitlin is working toward her master's degree in Theological Studies at Harvard Divinity.



Nicole Silva, Development and Communications Assistant. Nicole joined MHSA following her internship at AARP Massachusetts and working at the Title I Dissemination Project, Inc. She earned her bachelor's degree from Quinnipiac University and her master's degree from Boston University.



Alex Gray, Legislative Liaison. Before joining MHSA, Alex coordinated services for homeless guests in Sacramento, CA through the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. Alex is a 2006 graduate of Boston College.



Tom Yotts, Director of Finance and Administration. Prior to joining MHSA, Tom was employed by the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department for 25 years in various financial roles. Tom is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and earned his MBA from Boston University.