

**The HomeWork Initiative:
Connecting Chronically Homeless People with
Housing and Employment**

~ Lessons from a Collaboration ~

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The HomeWork Initiative: Connecting Chronically Homeless People with Housing and Employment ~ Lessons from a Collaboration ~

HomeWork makes it a very good setting. If you have a problem, they respond; they provide people with what they need. They found me a place to live, in a good location, with a great landlord. Now I'm working as a cashier. It's not bad!

I'm just fortunate. I'm lucky to have gotten where I am, from where I came from.

Joseph, HomeWork Participant

Executive Summary

Over the past three and a half years, with funding from two federal agencies, a team of organizations in Boston has developed a new, high-impact approach to ending chronic homelessness. The lessons that this interagency collaborative team have learned suggest powerful ways that Boston and the nation can sustainably build on their success.

In December, 2005, 840 people in Boston were chronically homeless.¹ Mostly single adults coping with a long-term mental health or physical disability, chronically homeless people are often homeless for extended periods, or repeatedly over a period of years.

Society's current response to chronically homeless people does not work, ethically or practically. In addition to the inherent ordeal of living without a home, chronically homeless people suffer a high incidence of illness, depression, malnutrition as well as elevated risks for mortality. The costs of health care and emergency services delivered to chronically homeless people run anywhere from \$25,000 to \$100,000 per year, per person, conservatively estimated.²

The HomeWork Initiative faces these moral and practical challenges head on. Supported by a joint US Department of Labor and US Department of Housing and Urban Development grant, and led by a team of housing, employment, disability, substance abuse and mental health agencies from Boston's public and private sectors, this innovative initiative is both reducing chronic homelessness in Boston, and pointing the way toward major transformations in the way communities and funding agencies respond to this critical national issue.

¹ City of Boston, December 8, 2005 point-in-time census of homeless

² The Interagency Council on Homelessness; Jurisdictional Leadership in Ending Chronic Homelessness. Presentation to the New Cities Project, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness; Washington, D.C., June 2005

Three ideas drive the HomeWork Initiative:

1. In order to change their situation in a lasting way, people who are chronically homeless need both housing *and* employment – not one or the other.
2. With the right supports, people who are chronically homeless are capable of securing and maintaining both housing and employment, and overcoming the barriers and difficulties that have prevented them from doing so in the past.
3. Strategic, long-term multi-agency collaboration and robust, coordinated support of each participant are essential ingredients in ensuring this success.

The HomeWork initiative's primary goal is to provide services to 40 chronically homeless adults, securing employment for all, and housing for half. Thirteen local agencies have joined forces to develop a program.³ Together, these partner agencies ensure that the initiative: provides housing, offers employment counseling, ensures access to jobs across a broad spectrum of marketplace competitiveness, provides extensive mental health counseling and support, offers substance abuse treatment as needed, and creates a “wrap-around” network of supports and services for participants.

By October 2006, three years into its work, the HomeWork Initiative had met or exceeded its original goals, setting a new, high standard for housing and employment initiatives in Boston:

- HomeWork successfully helped 33 chronically homeless people to access housing, exceeding by 65% its original, five-year goal of 20 people.
- In 2005, through the Department of Neighborhood Development of the City of Boston, HomeWork secured enough vouchers to house up to 40 people by the end of its first five years of work. If, as is anticipated, this process is completed in Years Four and Five, HomeWork will have exceeded its original goal by 100%.
- HomeWork helped 30 people secure competitive employment, progressing toward its five year goal of 40 people employed.
- Retaining 100% of those who enroll in its housing program, HomeWork achieved the highest rate of participant retention of any “shelter plus care” HUD-funded program in the City of Boston.⁴

Lessons learned thus far include that

- Employment has enormous impact on the life of a chronically homeless person.
- Housing and employment are equally important to participant success
- Collaboration by multiple agencies can lead to dramatic changes in outcomes
- High expectations – of participants, staff, and agencies – get better results
- Long-term commitments work best for chronically homeless people
- A commitment never to give up on participants defies norms, and increases impact
- There are no quick fixes: ending chronic homelessness is a long-term effort

³ See appendices for the names and contact information of participating agencies.

⁴ This rate of retention applies only to living participants. One participant died in this period; the resultant end of his participation in the program is not factored into the retention rate.

The report concludes with recommendations on sustainability and expansion. In the next two years, the Initiative must document its impact more thoroughly, demonstrate that real savings accrue in the form of new wages and taxes or reduced reliance on emergency and public safety services, and engage the public and many potential new funders in this sustainability and expansion effort.

HomeWork's Theory of Change

If the nation is to develop a new, strategic approach to ending chronic homelessness, we must first achieve demonstrably different results in a small, test case. The HomeWork Initiative is precisely that – a test case for a theory of change. The hypothesis being tested in Boston is that three approaches, applied together, will a) result in measurably better outcomes for participants, b) save money, and c) pave the way for an expansion of this approach and a revitalizing set of changes in the way housing, employment, and human services are provided. The three strategic approaches are:

- ❑ **A Focus on Housing and Jobs, Simultaneously.** In order to change their situation in a lasting way, people who are chronically homeless need access to both housing *and* employment – not one or the other.
- ❑ **Active, Frequent, Hands-on Participant Support.** With the right supports, people who are chronically homeless are capable of securing and maintaining both housing and employment, and overcoming the barriers and difficulties that have prevented them from doing so in the past.
- ❑ **Intensive Interagency Collaboration.** Strategic, long-term multi-agency collaboration and robust, coordinated support of each participant are essential ingredients in ensuring this success.

Understanding the Challenge

Chronic homelessness is a very specific problem that affects a relatively small number of people for a long period of time. Estimates vary, but roughly 10% of homeless people in the US are chronically homeless. Unlike the great majority of homeless people, who become homeless during a crisis in their lives that they resolve in a relatively short period of time, chronically homeless people undergo a protracted experience that can span years, even decades.⁵

Chronically homeless people face multiple barriers. People who experience chronic homelessness tend to be older than others who are homeless. They often struggle with

⁵ Under federal guidelines, a chronically homeless person is defined as an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more OR has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. A homeless person is sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation and/or in an emergency homeless shelter. A disabling condition is defined as a diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability.

mental or physical disabilities, and many engage in substance abuse. The majority of chronically homeless people have ongoing health problems, and lack an active network of family, community, or other social support. Few are employed, and most cope with extreme poverty.

Existing programs, working alone, have limited impact. A wide range of agencies in Boston work with people who are episodically or transitionally homeless, often successfully. However, few agencies in Boston or the nation have demonstrated success in helping chronically homeless people secure and keep housing and establish stability. In general, existing agencies are not set up to respond effectively to the wide range of social, emotional, mental health, health, housing and employment needs of chronically homeless people. The situation demands a new, collaborative approach.

The costs of chronic homelessness are high, both morally and fiscally. In human terms, people who are chronically homeless are among our most vulnerable adults, subject to isolation, poverty, illness and early death. They often live lives of extreme suffering and loneliness. Socially, everyone pays a high price for society's ineffectuality in the face of these grim realities.

Fiscally, chronic homelessness triggers extraordinary public expenditures for hospitalizations, emergency care, police interventions, and incarcerations, while reducing participation in the economy and tax revenue. Over a four year period in Boston, 119 chronically homeless individuals made 18,384 trips to the emergency room, and underwent 871 medical hospitalizations. An eighteen-month study in San Diego found that annual costs for medical and emergency care for chronically homeless people ranged from a mean of \$27,000 to more than \$100,000 per person. Data from two different samplings in King County WA show service utilization costs of between \$49,000 and \$54,000 annually, among homeless people.⁶

We first met John in a shelter a year and a half ago. Through the Justice Resource Institute, he got his housing – a studio apartment that he loves. Working with Community Work Services (CWS), he got training, took a job there for a while, and then “graduated” and started looking in the job market. It was hard: the job search went slowly, he got depressed, and we set up a part-time job back at CWS while he got back on his feet and keep looking for work. A few months ago he landed his first job in the competitive market in five years. He is so proud! And with good reason: this is not easy for him.

Sarah Sanchez, HomeWork Coordinator

⁶ The Interagency Council on Homelessness; Jurisdictional Leadership in Ending Chronic Homelessness. Presentation to the New Cities Project, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness; Washington, D.C., June 2006; includes research data from Boston Health Care for the Homeless

The Collaborative Origins of the Initiative

The HomeWork Initiative got started because of two different collaborations, one at the federal level, and one in Boston.

In June 2003, the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development entered into a very unusual joint venture. They jointly released the Ending Chronic Homelessness Through Employment and Housing Request for Proposals. This joint release was the result of an emerging policy trend stressing the importance of working more effectively with chronically homeless individuals. This federal team effort had the effect of bringing together a diversity of players at the local level.

The RFP stipulated that the only allowable applicant for the DOL portion of the grant, and therefore for the entire Initiative, was the local Workforce Investment Board (WIB). In Boston, the Private Industry Council (PIC) is the local WIB. After briefly considering the RFP, the PIC decided *not* to apply for this hybrid grant: Staff felt especially out of their depth in the critical areas of homelessness and housing.

However, in the Boston service community there was a keen demand for this kind of approach, and for the funding to support it. Local leaders in housing, mental health and employment began pressing the PIC to apply for this grant. In response, Dennis Rogers of the PIC convened an initial meeting of a half dozen interested agencies.⁷

We shied away from this work at first, because of how far it took us from our areas of expertise. We were surprised and delighted when community and state agency leaders stepped in and urged us to join them in accepting this challenge. Now the HomeWork model is foreshadowing the future for all the PIC's work. Each of our ventures requires collaboration across multiple sectors, with partners who can use our expertise and resources, and who offer, in return, expertise that we lack. The point is that HomeWork offers opportunities to do with a team what no single agency could do as well, or on as large a scale, if it were to act on its own. And it is good to stretch, to work to develop new skills, new capacities and new partnerships.

Dennis Rogers, Private Industry Council

In the first example of what would become the HomeWork Initiative's signature approach to collaboration, this team of motivated agencies prevailed on the PIC to undertake this effort, on the condition that all those around the table would share the work of preparing the proposal. One agency wrote the grant, another collected the letters of support, a third crafted the evaluation strategy, and within a month and a half, the grant was submitted.

⁷ The agencies attending the first meeting included: Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), AIDS Housing Corporation, Career Advancement Resources (CAR), City of Boston's Emergency Shelter Commission, Commonwealth Corporation, Community Work Services (CWS), Project Place (PP), and the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC)

Year One: Laying the Foundation

Late in September, 2003, Boston was notified that it would be receiving a five-year joint grant: \$201,564 per year from HUD to the City of Boston's Department of Neighborhood Development and \$622,912 per year from DoL's Office of Disability Employment Policy to the Boston Private Industry Council. The team of Boston agency leaders had committed itself to securing both housing and employment for 20 chronically homeless people, and securing employment help for 20 more people, reaching a total of 40 people with multiple, complex service needs. They had agreed to a set of goals that were, by comparison with comparable programs in Boston and around the country, unusually ambitious.

Perhaps more significant than the ambition of the program goals, however, was the high expectation for collaboration that the partners had written into the grant. Most of the partners were used to doing their agency's work in a well-defined way that brought them into regular contact with a small number of familiar agencies and organizations. While virtually all of the agencies had track records of collaboration and partnership with other agencies, the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health and the Justice Resource Institute were the only agencies with an extended history of work in both housing *and* employment for people with disabilities. For its part, the PIC felt especially out of its depth, since it had never played a leading role in a housing-related project, and had limited experience in the world of services for people with disabilities.

HomeWork Initiative Partners and Roles PLEASE CHECK FOR COMPLETENESS AND ACCURACY								
Agency Partner	Housing	Employment	Mental Health	Substance Abuse	Intermediary Coordination	Evaluation	Financing &/or Administration	Fundraising & Fiscal Agency
Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD)	X							
Boston Department of Neighborhood Development (DND)	X						X	
Boston Private Industry Council (PIC)					X		X	X
Career Advancement Resources (CAR)		X	X					
Commonwealth Corporation (CommCorp)						X		
Community Work Services (CWS)		X	X					
JobNet		X			X			
Justice Resource Institute (JRI)	X	X	X	X				
Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH)	X		X		X		X	
Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership (MBHP)	X						X	
New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans (NESHV)	X	X	X					
Project Place (PP)	X	X	X	X				
US Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy (DOL-ODEP)		X					X	
US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)	X						X	
Victory Programs (VPI)		X	X	X				

The teams first task was to find a common language. The partners quickly discovered that “case management,” “housing,” “employment,” “disability,” and the all-important phrase “chronic homelessness” meant very different things to each of them, and not insignificantly, to the federal grantmaking agencies. Sorting this out was a stop-and-start process, with some significant setbacks. In one instance, the team began identifying prospective clients – and actually brought a number of people through initial intake interviews – before they realized that the people did not qualify as “chronically homeless” under a narrow application of the federal definition.

The partners therefore made a deliberate decision to craft a set of common definitions and devoted a considerable amount of time to that process. In the words of one agency leader, *“When we realized that our common language had begun to hold common meaning to us all, we knew we were on to something new, and it excited us.”*

At the same time that they were working out the meaning of their terms, the partners were experiencing a form of culture shock as they tried to work together. Each of the organizations approached the Initiative in their familiar, established way, and this led to some substantial differences. Some employment-focused agency staff, with extensive experience in handling a large volume of people looking for work, felt that a job search ‘should’ result in a new job within 30 days, followed by an effective closing of the file.

People who had extensive experience working with homeless people with disabilities had a different set of expectations of HomeWork Initiative participants, and envisioned a longer and more gradual process toward lasting employment. Indeed, the employment-focused agencies brought many different approaches and traditions to the table. These approaches ranged broadly, from sheltered or supported work experiences for people in institutional settings, to entrepreneurial businesses run by participants and supported by the agency, to “competitive” jobs in “the real world.”

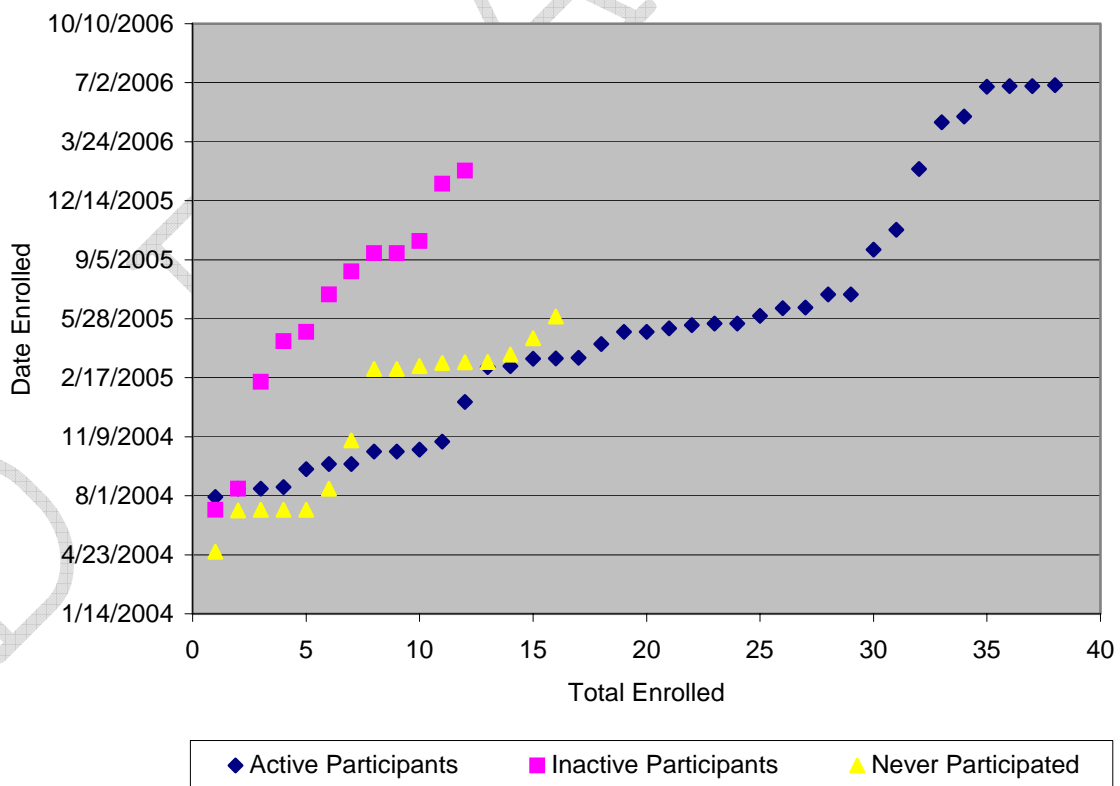
A similar diversity of approaches and traditions drove the housing discussions. Although a central emphasis on employment was essential to the integrity of the Initiative, and the only way to test its hypothesis, this was not an easy orientation for some to accept. At the outset of the Initiative, many people saw securing housing as the primary purpose of their work. This led to the admission into the program of a few individuals who clearly needed housing, but whose commitment to seeking employment was not carefully explored at the outset. It also triggered debates among the collaborating agencies as they explored, and gradually came to consensus on, the dual nature of their focus on housing *and* employment. Gradually, as the advocates for a primary focus on housing began to see the benefits of the employment services in the lives of participants, a shared view of the dual, balanced nature of the Initiative began to form.

*Project Place helps people gain competitive employment – we have high standards for sobriety and work performance. When we got involved with HomeWork, our staff was nervous that we would be asked to lower our expectations of our clients. In fact, we did end up bending our rules in some cases, to enable a person who was struggling with substance abuse to stay on when we might otherwise have asked them to leave. And we did that with the support of other agencies in HomeWork. In the end, our other clients were genuinely supportive of our HomeWork participants – they saw them as overcoming even greater obstacles in their lives. It turns out it is **not** a lower standard – it’s a different approach. Collaborations work best when they remind us that we are a part of something larger. HomeWork does that.*

Suzanne Kenney, Project Place

All of these mission-driven and philosophical challenges were made concrete by the first major tasks for the partner agencies, which were to establish common terms, craft eligibility guidelines, develop an intake process, and form a case management structure within which all the participating agencies, with their varying cultures and experiences, could work.

Homework Initiative Enrollment Data, 2004 - 2006



With all of this effort to define the Initiative's mission, negotiate terms, and craft new working relationships, the Initiative got off to a gradual start: after a year of work, the HomeWork Initiative had enrolled fifteen people for housing and employment services; five other individuals were in the midst of an extended intake process. From the point of view of the federal funding agencies, this looked like a slow beginning, or worse, a potential lack of follow-through on the grant and its conditions. From the point of view of those doing the work, this gradual start-up, accompanied by intensive meetings and planning work, was evidence that they had successfully launched a complicated, multi-agency collaboration, conducted a large volume of successful interagency negotiation and team-building, and laid a strong foundation for the future strength and impact of the Initiative.

The first year of the HomeWork Initiative was challenging for us – it was hard to tell what the return on the investment was. After three years, we are thrilled with the track record of the Initiative. Looking back, we can now see that the Boston team's early and intensive commitment to planning and interagency collaboration, while unconventional, laid a strong foundation for its substantial, ongoing successes.

Gary Shaheen
CHETA

Year Two: Building Interagency Capacity and Achieving Early Results

In the second year of the Initiative, several developments contributed to the rapid acceleration of HomeWork.

The Boston PIC realized the on-going need to expand and maintain an integrated multi-agency service model required a dedicated Project Manager. This position was created and filled in the final quarter of year one. The Project manager began playing a vital role as the person who maintained high levels of communication between leaders in each participating agency, organized an interagency team of middle managers to collaboratively guide the project, addressed areas of contention, resolved conflict, and provided opportunities for people to work together more collaboratively and with higher levels of mutuality.

In addition, the Initiative team redefined the core role of Service Coordinator. This redefined role was an expansion of the job that had been done on a part-time basis by a senior JobNet staff person. JobNet, the local One Stop Career Center, actively and consistently began to serve as the principal case manager for the HomeWork Initiative, convening meetings between agency program staff and HomeWork participants and generally ensuring high levels of communication and coordination in direct service delivery.

As a result of these hires, and the effective ongoing work of the many partners, the HomeWork team refined and implemented their core policies and procedures in a way that enabled them to fully enroll the program. Through regular meetings of the middle managers from the participating agencies – known as the Service Delivery meetings – the team resolved the remaining eligibility issues, finalized intake procedures in alignment with those of existing agencies, and developed a strong case management practice.

The HomeWork team’s development of its case management practice bears special examination. They began with something they first called an Individual Service Plan, and later renamed an Integrated Service Plan (ISP). Over the course of Year Two, the ISP evolved into a living, breathing agreement that is forged – and re-forged – by the staff of partner agencies, in direct partnership with the participant, throughout the life of his or her involvement with the Initiative. Designed to give regular voice to the aspirations and life goals of the participant, both immediately and over the long term, each ISP:

- Specifies the activities and short-term objectives a participant hopes to achieve
- Spells out the roles and responsibilities of individual agencies and partners
- Is specifically crafted to an individual person
- Is informed by a wide variety of perspectives and insights, from the participant and the professionals on his or her team
- Is always subject to revision and update, changing in response to new developments.

The Integrated Service Plan process revolves around ISP meetings, which bring together all of the partner agencies involved with a participant and the participant him- or herself, so that they can plan and, update and adapt together. Significantly, each ISP meeting also includes the participant. Including the participant was a departure in practice for many of the partner agencies when they began this work. With the participant in the room, the shared and reciprocal nature of the work is made concrete. The explicit agreement is that *“If we agree to this plan, it will work because each of us honors the agreement, participant and partner agency staff alike.”* In this way, participants experience a powerful and repeated affirmation of their responsibility for and control over this process, and their lives. They also get challenged to be accountable. Partner agency staffers benefit from the ISP process because their complex work is rendered more concrete, sequential, and coordinated: everyone knows what has been discussed and agreed, and people have discrete tasks to accomplish between one meeting and the next.

ISP meetings also serve as a principal means of intervention. They offer a place to engage with participants who are having serious emotional trouble or a mental health crisis, who are unhappy with the program, who have begun to abuse substances, or who are having trouble at work or in their residence.

The HomeWork Initiative puts real supports in place. For my clients in other programs, the situation is more fragile. In HomeWork, the jobs that people get and the relationships they build at work are meaningful, and they help people recover. Together, the job, the housing, and the support system form an integrated foundation for people who are not used to having one. That combination is pretty hard to beat.

Maureen Skeeahan, Justice Resource Institute

Interestingly, participants can actively resist – and resent – Integrated Service Plan meetings. While these gatherings are often experienced by participants as a valued support and comfort, or a wake-up call to renewed engagement and effort, they can also be considered an annoying interruption, an unnecessary formality, or an intrusion that involves a lot of people. One participant put it succinctly, *“I have always been a person who did things and got things accomplished on my own. You can give a person a bar of soap and a cloth, but you don’t have to bathe them!”*

Since such critiques come from the same participants who feel that the Initiative has been of great value in their lives, and who have made great strides toward independence and self-sufficiency, it is prudent to see this chafing as part of the creative and necessary friction of the Initiative. Here is the view of Sarah Sanchez, the JobNet Service Coordinator and the person with the greatest familiarity with the ISP process since she convenes and facilitates all of them: *“People do best when they commit to the ISP. The more involved a participant is in the ISP and with the collaborating agencies, the more they see the conferring that goes on between staff who are acting as their advocates, the more they feel a part of the effort, and the better they thrive.”*

Year Three: Having Major Impact

In its third year, the Initiative posted a series of striking achievements, affecting all participating individuals and partner agencies of the Initiative.

Participant Outcomes

After securing housing for each of the people receiving the 20 original housing vouchers, the program began to generate offers from participating partners for additional housing slots. By the beginning of the fourth year of the Initiative, the prospect of as many as twenty additional slots had been offered to the program, and 12 of these were in various stages of the pipeline for use by program participants. This resounding endorsement by the housing agencies responsible for allocating housing vouchers is an extraordinary development. In all, 32 people have secured housing through HomeWork, 60% more than the original goal of 20.

Five years ago, David's fiancée died. Since they had been living together in the apartment of a nursing home at which she had been a staff person, he became homeless at the same time. As he says, "It was like getting hit by a car and then run over by a train." A year and a half after beginning his work with the HomeWork Initiative, he has moved from a large urban shelter to a veteran's home, begun working steadily as the coordinator of a computer resource center in the shelter in which he used to live, and is now in the process of securing his first independent housing arrangement in years.

After three years, 67% of HomeWork participants were working part-time, working full-time, in training, or looking for work.⁸ Nine of these people have been working steadily for a year or longer. Multiple sources suggest that roughly 20% of all homeless persons in the US are working; while little good data on the employment rate of chronically homeless people is available, it is a safe assumption that their employment rate is substantially lower than that of the homeless population as a whole, perhaps as low as 10%. *HomeWork participants therefore have a rate of employment, training and job-seeking that would appear to be several times greater than the norm.*

95 % of HomeWork participants are contributing to the costs of their rental unit, thereby reducing the overall expenditure of public dollars on their housing, and freeing up funds for others to receive through subsidies. 50% contribute through their social security and disability benefits, and nearly half – 45% – contribute to their housing costs through wages.⁹ Making money provides a psychological boost to participants, who are taking major strides towards reduced dependence on others. Participants' increasing financial self-sufficiency demonstrates fiscal responsibility, vindicates HomeWork's dual focus on housing *and* jobs, and paves the way for program expansion.

HomeWork Participant Data, November 2006 (for active participants)	
Total Participants:	41 Active, 10 Inactive & 22 Recruited but never active)
Gender :	Men: 35 Women: 6
Age:	Twenty – Twenty Nine: 5 Thirty – Thirty Nine: 5 Forty – Forty Nine: 16 Fifty – Fifty Nine: 11 Sixty – Sixty Nine: 4
Education:	10 did not finish high school, 15 HS/GED, 11 some college, 2 AA degrees, 2 BA degrees, 1 unknown
Substance Abuse:	Yes: 30 No: 11
Race:	14 African American, 2 Haitian, 2 Latinos, 22 Caucasians, 1 African
Receiving SSI or SSDI:	Yes: 19 No: 21 One receives Veterans Benefits
Military:	Yes: 12 No: 29
Referred by:	CWS-2, DMH-15, NESHV-9, PP-6, Shelter-4, VPI-2, ABCD-1
Have Housing:	Yes: 34 Not yet: 7

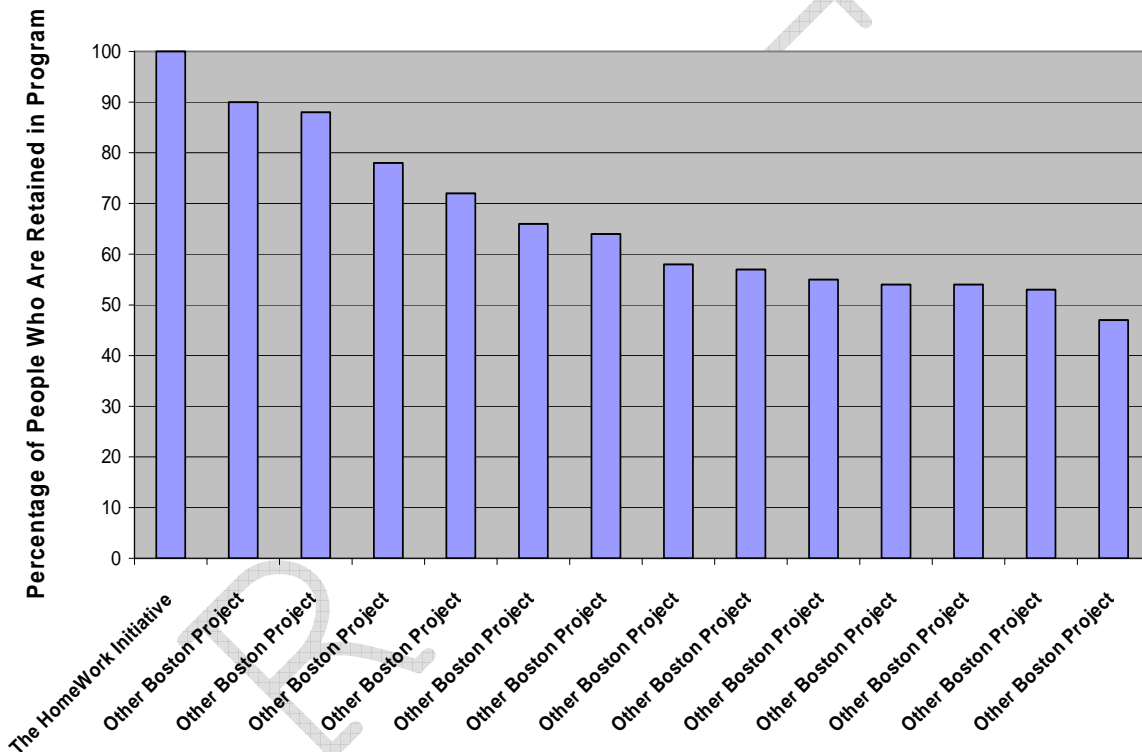
⁸ The majority is working part-time. Some observe a limit of 15 hours per week in order to continue to receive SSI benefits; others are seeking more hours; still others are challenged by the increased social and psychological pressures of employment and choose part-time work in order to cope successfully.

⁹ Department of Neighborhood Development, City of Boston, December, 2006.

In perhaps its most singular achievement, the HomeWork Initiative has established an exceptionally high retention rate among those participants who have received housing. In its three and a half years of operation, *no one* who has received housing through the HomeWork Initiative has subsequently become homeless again, and all participants have retained their housing.

This 100% rate of retention compares favorably with housing programs for homeless people anywhere in the nation. It is an extraordinary accomplishment.¹⁰

Comparison of Retention Rates Among Boston's "Shelter Plus Care" Housing Voucher Programs, from 2003 to 2005



Anecdotally, the staff of partner agencies believe participants in the HomeWork Initiative are experiencing reduced levels of trauma, crisis and related interactions with institutional service providers. Although the Initiative is not set up to track and analyze the number, degree of seriousness, and frequency of participants' interaction with law enforcement, hospitals, emergency, trauma and related services and institutions, Initiative staff believe the frequency and intensity of these events has been significantly reduced in the lives of HomeWork participants.

¹⁰ Department of Neighborhood Development, City of Boston, November, 2006. One participant died while a resident in the program.

Years Four and Five: Consolidating Gains, Planning for Sustainability

Looking forward to Years Four and Five of the grant, the partners plan to continue their progress beyond the original goals and to set in motion a process that will enable them to carry the work forward in the post-grant period.

Homework Initiative's Program Goals

Year Four	Year Five
80% employment of 40 participants	100% employment of 40 participants
Continued 100% retention in housing	Continued 100% retention in housing
Housing 35 people, 175% of target of 20	Housing 40 people, 200% of target of 20
35 housing vouchers in use, an increase of 75% over the original goal of 20	40 housing vouchers in use, an increase of 100% over the original goal of 20
Increased public visibility, recognition, and stakeholder endorsement of HomeWork Initiative	Strong public and private sector investment in the continuation, expansion, and dissemination of the HomeWork Initiative

In addition, the Initiative partners have begun to implement a diverse set of strategies for focusing on the future:

- ❑ Expand citywide outreach to leaders in housing, homelessness, health care and prevention, with public convenings, conferences, and other events
- ❑ Document achievements in powerpoint presentations and graphics
- ❑ Begin sustainability conversations among partners, donors, and potential funders
- ❑ Market the HomeWork model aggressively, in Boston, regionally, nationally
- ❑ Diversify funding sources by bringing in new public agencies that have not yet played an active role, and by encouraging the improved deployment and alignment of existing public financing resources
- ❑ Focus on the potential for current partners to develop roles as technical assistants and trainers to other agencies which are being encouraged to step into this work.
- ❑ Work with City of Boston's Department of Neighborhood Development to add HomeWork-style supports to additional "Shelter Plus Care" units in the city

Achievements of the Initiative

Tap Expertise of Multiple Agencies There are many experts involved in this Initiative. One of HomeWork's major achievements has been to recruit, engage and deploy them well.

- The City of Boston's Department of Neighborhood Development (DND) has been the project's housing funding agency, managing the grant from HUD, reporting on its progress, and securing additional subsidies as the project's capacity grew.
- JobNet is the center for program coordination, based on its expertise in adult employment and workforce development, combined with its unusual and successful partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health to

provide employment services to people who have mental health based barriers to employment.

- Community Work Services' (CWS) century of experience in helping people develop skills and enter the workforce, and special expertise in helping people with disabilities make it an ideal employment partner.
- Career Advancement Resources (CAR), an employment program of Bay Cove Mental Health Service that specializes in supporting people with mental health and other disabilities to seek and gain employment, has worked with many HomeWork participants in these first three years.
- Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), one of the city's oldest community development agencies, has been a partner by providing housing support for several of the HomeWork participants.
- New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans (NESHV) is the regions largest veteran shelter program. It has been an active partner, providing interim housing for eligible participants, offering employment opportunities, and participating in interagency collaboration.
- Project Place (PP) has extensive expertise in the creation and development of entrepreneurial businesses run by trainees and employees who are overcoming homelessness and other issues.
- Victory Programs Incorporated (VPI) has an extensive track record with people who are HIV positive and people who abuse substances, and have provided employment and outpatient services as well as inpatient treatment when needed; VPI has also shared its in-depth knowledge about substance abuse and harm reduction with the larger team.
- Justice Resource Institute (JRI), building on its a ten-year history of working with chronically homeless people and people with disabilities, modeled how to respect the complexity of the work, how to think through relationships to clients, and how act as an advocate for each individual.
- The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) supplemented its role as the provider of 15 of the original 20 housing vouchers by addressing the mental health challenges faced by the HomeWork participants, and built on its history of extensive involvement with chronically homeless people to help agencies cut through red tape and get things done.
- Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership (MBHP) manages the actual use of housing vouchers. MBHP staff make sure that participants eligibility is well-documented, inspect and approve rental properties, and negotiate rents with landlords. Importantly, they maintain close ties to both landlords and HomeWork agencies, to mediate disputes and to keep the agencies apprised of any news they may gather about important changes in the life of a participant.
- The Private Industry Council (PIC) serves as the grantee for the DOL-ODEP award, and as the manager of the overall collaboration. Its staff oversee the interagency planning and program development work, work closely with each individual participant to support their work through ISPs and one-on-one interactions, and coordinate with DOL, the local and federal evaluators, and all agency partners to ensure that all program goals are met.
- Commonwealth Corporation (CommCorp), a statewide organization with broad interests in economic and human development, has responsibility for annual

program evaluations that document the progress of the project and highlight its challenges.

There is a lesson here for us: people really want to work together. Most people like to share their knowledge. Through HomeWork, we are able to let professionals from a true diversity of fields share their expertise.

Sarah Sanchez, HomeWork Service Coordinator

Create Key Intermediary Roles Three people serve as staff for the HomeWork Initiative, as distinct from the many staff of partner agencies who participate in and contribute to the program. Each HomeWork staff person has made a set of essential contributions as a broker, facilitator and intermediary.

HomeWork Coordinator: *Sarah Sanchez* manages the multiple complex relationships between the participants and the programs, on a day-to-day basis. She convenes Integrated Service Plan, or ISP, meetings. Based in the JobNet office, she has extensive knowledge of employment options for participants, but she is equally versed in the issues that confront housing and mental health counseling agencies, which repeatedly report how much they enjoy working with her, and how valuable her support is.

Project Director: *Dwaign Tyndal* is responsible for ensuring that the Initiative runs smoothly, and achieves its goals. He sets the tone for the Initiative, articulating a vision of participant success and interagency collaboration that sets a high standard of expectations and performance for all. He also takes full responsibility for problems. As he puts it, “When something goes wrong, that is mine.” Dwaign facilitates relationships between the partner agency supervisors, line staff, and participants, addresses conflicts as soon as they arise, and helps people to work through the normal frustrations of this complex and demanding work.

Workforce Board Lead: *Dennis Rogers* of the PIC is the lead contact for the Initiative with DOL. He manages the Initiative’s relationship with the Initiative local evaluator, Commonwealth Corporation, the national evaluator, Westat and with the city and state agencies that play significant roles in supporting the Initiative. He plays two additional key roles in the Initiative. First, he runs interference for the local players, protecting the integrity of the Initiative’s unusual approach and addressing the concerns of the federal agency staff regarding HomeWork’s less traditional approaches. Second, Dennis acts as “insister” on core principles. When housing and disability rights advocates working on the Initiative were dismissive of some of the employment goals and commitments of the Initiative, Dennis stood firm, and persuasively insisted that the employment imperative of the model be tested fully, and the principles behind it honored. When some of the Initiative’s employment staff balked at the length of time, intensive labor and repeated

failures that make up a long-term approach to helping a chronically homeless person become a worker, Dennis challenged them to embrace the approach, and to learn to cope with the stresses that it creates, as a part of a shared philosophical commitment to making the Initiative a success.

Create and Share an Intensified, Sustained, and Long-term Focus on the Participant

Communication about individual participants assumed a high level of importance. Since any given participant may have between three and seven agency staff who play an active role in some aspect of his or her life, it is essential that these players be in close, frequent contact. Such a high level of interaction, focused on a relatively small set of participants, leads to planning that is detailed, informed and maximally constructive. It also provides a way to help participants deal with the pressures and demands of being a worker, a person with housing, and a person managing recovery from difficult circumstances.

Once HomeWork makes a connection, we keep it. We are in this effort for the long haul – not just JobNet, but all the partner agencies. Our participants sometimes want that level of support and help, and they sometimes resent it, but they always know it is there. We are solid. And I think that is why our participants are so successful.

Sharon Tulchinsky, JobNet

Increase Impact through Teamwork Having a team of people who are engaged in supporting housing, employment and mental health pays tremendous benefits. When a participant began to have difficulty at work, the employment support staff asked her what was wrong and she complained that she had been having trouble sleeping. She explained that loud noises at night were keeping her awake. A check back with the housing support team member made it clear that there were not any particular loud noises, and on further discussion, the loud noises proved to be voices that she had begun to hear, after no longer taking her medication. With counseling and support she began her medications, stopped hearing voices, started getting sleep again, and began having better and more productive days at work.

It really helps to understand that the goals we have are collective, or shared ones, and that we succeed or fail together. It is not good enough to be an employment agency, to help a person find a job with supports, and then to wear that accomplishment like a badge. If that person's housing situation is failing, that is a reflection on all of us.

Laurie Lyman, Community Work Services

Develop a Common Language “Case management” “employment” and “chronic homelessness” mean different things to different agencies and disciplines. For the first year and a half, the challenge was working out a language that is coherent, that is aligned

with the prevailing norms of the largest and most established systems, like DMH and HUD, and that still infuses the work with a particular HomeWork ethos. Underneath this complexity, there was another major effort needed: people needed to learn why having a common language was so important. Finding the common language was more than sorting out semantics or agreeing on a set of protocols or policies for the program, it was a way to develop common ground on a new way of doing business.

Build Trust It is essential for the effectiveness of a multi-partner venture that the working process builds trust and mutuality between the partners; it is also a hard thing to pull off. As with most genuine collaborations, in the HomeWork initiative, several of the partners are also competitors for funding, for clientele, and for position and stature in their fields. Those that are not in the same field are less likely to be competitors, but they are also less likely to have experiences and perspectives in common with one another, a further barrier to trust.

As a large state agency, DMH can have a reputation as impersonal and bureaucratic. Some advocates think of it as unresponsive to the needs of individuals. But I knew Brian Osborne at DMH, and I knew him to be open to dialogue, eager to make new alliances, and reliable as a partner. Once other people in the HomeWork initiative began to experience DMH not as an agency, but as Brian, their perspective changed, and we began to get some momentum. If we distance ourselves from big agencies and complex systems, we lose. But if we make an effort to connect ourselves with the people in those systems who are eager to do this work, there's nothing we can't do.

Dwain Tyndal, Project Coordinator

Let Go of Old Habits Several partner agencies have had to make adjustments in the way they think about and conduct their work. For instance, one employment agency began its involvement with this Initiative with a long history of trying to secure clients a job within 30 days of intake; they needed to adjust their expectations and their timeline in order to make plans that honored the complex set of needs of people who have been chronically homeless, and approached the entire enterprise more practically. Similarly, it took months for some of the housing agencies and advocates for people with disabilities to take the Initiative's commitment to employment seriously. As experienced housing experts, they were concerned that a focus on employment might delay successful housing arrangements. As disability rights advocates, they felt that "insisting" on an employment focus was raising expectations of participants unrealistically high, potentially jeopardizing their ability to secure housing. By eventually agreeing to place a strong emphasis on the mutual needs for housing and for employment, these leaders helped to shape the entire effort, while also making changes in their own practices.

Manage Funder Anxiety About a Non-Traditional Approach The HomeWork venture is decidedly non-traditional: it embraces a commitment to supporting two major life changes for some of society's most vulnerable people, it has unusually high expectations of its participants and its partner agencies, and it embraces a collaborative, team-building, process-driven approach. None of these qualities can be easy for federal

funding agencies, but the last – the emphasis on taking the time necessary to hammer out differences and achieve a shared vision and practice – has been especially nettlesome to the funding agencies, who have been understandably worried about the numbers of people served and the results being achieved with their investment. It has fallen to the PIC to manage this problem in a way that is respectful of the commitments that the local agencies have made to the federal agencies without undermining the integrity of the program's development and implementation. The outcomes of the past several years have borne out the PIC's belief that this process, however painstaking and difficult, was the right one to pursue.

Nurture New and Emerging System Behaviors Three years is early in the life of any project to look for its impact on systems – the networks of federal, state and local agencies and financing streams that support all publicly funding programs. HomeWork partners have begun to assess the Initiative's impact on the systems in which they are players. Several promising trends have emerged that warrant mention:

- Federal funding agencies are sitting up and taking notice. HomeWork is one of five ventures across the country funded through the Ending Chronic Homelessness Through Employment and Housing grantee project, a joint venture of HUD and DOL.

The next wave of federal funding for housing is very likely to concentrate an unprecedented proportion of the funding on services for chronically homeless people. These sources, from HUD in particular, may substantially increase the funding available to support creative initiatives in Boston and across the country.

Gina Schaak, Department of Neighborhood Development

- Local housing system decision-makers are beginning to make their own judgments about the value of the HomeWork approach. HomeWork's participating agencies have done such a good job that the City of Boston's Department of Neighborhood Development, the housing funding agency, has pledged up to 20 additional housing vouchers. If all goes well in Year Four and Five, the Initiative will exceed its original housing goal by 100%.
- As a city, Boston has become powerfully positioned as a national leader in effective approaches to ending chronic homelessness. HomeWork is one of several new initiatives that represent innovation in homelessness prevention. HomeWork is also an active participant in the Boston Homelessness Prevention Clearinghouse, and recently presented to an audience of over a hundred people at an event hosted by the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership.
- Boston is also positioned to obtain new funds through existing federal systems. The expected coming shift in federal policy will likely create a surge of additional

funding for chronic homelessness prevention, through which HUD will allocate an unprecedented number of vouchers for this purpose. If the lessons of the HomeWork Initiative can be applied to these funds, no city in the country will have a stronger claim to the role of effective steward of those resources.

Lessons Learned

HomeWork works because no one is invisible. Clients are more “visible” and better known than in other comparable programs – it is impossible to get lost. By virtue of the participant’s contract to engage in both housing and employment efforts, the Initiative’s close interagency teamwork, and core project staffing that links all parties, staff are consistently aware of and engaged in responding to participant activity and needs. It is also very hard for a participant to pull the wool over the eyes of partner agency staff. The Executive Director of JobNet described her feeling about the participants:

We know you! You can't kid us: we're like family. With so many people meeting about you every few months, and more often if necessary, it is a virtual certainty that someone – or maybe two or three people – will notice if there is a difference between what you are telling us is going on in your life, and what is actually going on...

Rosemary Alexander, JobNet

Employment has enormous impact on the life of a chronically homeless person.

There is much research documenting the salutary effort of earning a paycheck on the psychological well being of the person who is working. But making money is about more than client self-esteem – it fuels the success of the housing portion of the HomeWork Initiative.

Housing and employment are equally important. Placing an equal emphasis on employment, and building employment into the Initiative from the outset, has several effects. It “ups the ante” by requiring a much higher level of engagement and commitment from the participant than would participation in a program that featured only one of these two emphases. It demands of all participating agencies that they commit to a dual objective; this often constitutes a “stretch” for agencies which have traditionally had a more targeted focus. The focus on both work and home also appears to create a synthesizing effect: people with a stable home have an easier time being a worker, and workers getting a regular wage are pleased and proud to be able to pay a portion of their rent and reduce the voucher payment.

It's all about teamwork and trust between the collaborating agencies. Working together, we are doing things that people never dreamed we could achieve. Someone once said that there is no limit to what you can get done if you don't care who gets the credit. The partners share the credit generously in the HomeWork Initiative, and it works!

Dwaign Tyndal, Project Coordinator

A team approach is needed, and so is a coach. HomeWork relies on a team approach that draws on a wide range of agencies and skills. No single agency possesses the combination of expertise and capacity to provide the complex weave of financing, interagency collaboration, housing support, employment training and referral, mental health, substance abuse, and related services that make up the HomeWork Initiative. A team is essential. Members of the team are often new to one another as individuals, and new to one another's agencies and to the practice of interagency collaboration, as professionals. HomeWork relies on the critical role of the Project Director to provide partner agency staff with the support, facilitation, team-building and conflict resolution efforts. This coaching/facilitating role promotes high levels of communication and builds trust between diverse agencies and personalities.

People working in these social service systems need opportunities to witness people like the HomeWork participants succeeding. Too many of us do not believe that our clients can succeed. This will change when people have more exposure to the successful participants in HomeWork.

Brian Osborne, DMH

High expectations get better results. The HomeWork Initiative is driven by high expectations. Participants begin by making an unusually ambitious commitment to finding and keeping a job *and* to honoring the necessary commitments to secure and retain new housing – a tremendous undertaking for a person with a history of chronic difficulties in both housing and employment. Each of the staff people who support the participants is making a commitment to the same high standards and to the unusual Initiative outcomes. Staff commit to more than program results and individual outcomes; there is also an expectation that agencies will craft *a new way of doing their work*. Agencies and their staff are expected to work in ways that challenge existing practices and institutional cultures: to collaborate closely with people and agencies that are often new or unfamiliar, and to resolve substantial areas of disagreement and misalignment in a way that results in better outcomes for participants.

Think of your job as something bigger, something that extends beyond your agency, or even your job description. Make it your job to be pro-active. That's the message to partners in the HomeWork Initiative, and it's the one we should be sharing widely with others.

Mike Flannery, Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership

Long-term commitments work best. Chronically homeless people need constancy and long-term connectedness to make the long, slow climb to greater self-sufficiency. While many social services place a priority on rapid-fire intake, swift processing and short-term resolution to problems, HomeWork takes the opposite view. The best interests of most of its participants are served by deliberation, constancy, and ongoing, hands-on contact. Ideally, in the words of Malcolm Gladwell, chronic "...homelessness policy *should* create dependency: you want people who have been outside the system to come inside and rebuild their lives...[.]"¹¹

Not giving up has a powerful impact. One of the distinctive features of the HomeWork Initiative is that it refuses to give up on anyone. Often, when people stop taking their medication, leave a job, violate a substance abuse policy in their residence, or otherwise run afoul of the supports and systems that have been put in place on their behalf, they can expect to be suspended or dropped from a program, refused additional service, evicted or even institutionalized.¹² In the HomeWork approach, such failures are understood as a part of the "two steps forward, one step back" nature of recovery from the major setbacks that can contribute to homelessness. Agencies find a way to maintain contact and effective supports for every participant, no matter how hard things get. This refusal to give up on anyone has required agencies to re-examine and revise their policies, to step in for one another when a client refuses to engage or has violated too many of the standards set by one of the partners, and to develop a more flexible, tenacious approach that supports the long-term prospects of the participant.

This lends another meaning to the phrase "No giving up!" The partner agencies have refused to give up on one another, even when the stress of working in a complex collaboration has worn thin the bonds between them. Such inter-agency or interpersonal conflict is a normal feature of the human service sector; HomeWork has paid special attention to the building and mending of these ties. This function is a critical element of HW's success.

There is no quick fix. This work cannot be done in a hurry. Virtually all of the participating agencies have had to adjust their vision and lengthen their timeframes as

¹¹ Gladwell, Malcolm. "Million-Dollar Murray: Why Problems of the Homeless May be Easier to Solve than to Manage," *The New Yorker*, February 13, 2006.

¹² This kind of response – real consequences for behavior that jeopardizes oneself or others -- is often a part of an agency's commitment to the success of people who require structured, supportive, and exacting programs that build their long-term capacity to function independently. HomeWork's approach is for a different population with whom few institutions have thus far demonstrated success.

they engage in the HomeWork Initiative. Chronically homeless people need time to adjust to having housing, to adjust to getting work, and to cope with the ups and downs of being employed, having a place of their own, and having a set of weighty responsibilities. In the words of one Initiative staff person:

Collaborating agencies need time to learn one another's methods and to coordinate. This takes time. You have to fight to carve that time out of everyone's schedules, and to protect it. It's not easy, but it's what has made the whole thing work.

Mark Crosby, Career Advancement Resources

Under normal pressures in demanding work environments, there is temptation to cut corners, skimp on planning and communication time, or lower standards, but the Initiative's capacity to meet and exceed its ambitious goals is a product of partner agencies' perseverance, focus, and willingness to take the time needed to do the job right.

If HomeWork is to continue and expand, the key will be helping people to understand the time factor: changes take time. Most people with any experience in housing or employment think that a year is a long time to find a job or get housing. But for people who are trying to put their experience with chronic homelessness behind them, it may not be so weird to need a year to get work. People will have peaks and valleys. It is hard to find a job and look for a place to live at the same time. There are no quick fixes.

Serena Powell, Community Work Services

Concerns and Challenges

Not everything works perfectly for the HomeWork Initiative. The concerns of program leaders and participants include:

- **A need for greater participant interaction and peer support.** Participants in the program report little exposure to one another. It may be that the Initiative is missing an opportunity to develop positive peer interaction and support. As one participant said, "It would help me a lot to hear from people who have been down this road before." Ironically, many of the partner agencies are experts in peer-facilitated programming, so this is a situation that the partners are in a good position to address.

- **Limited substance abuse experience among participating agencies.** Substance abuse affects three quarters of participants, but few partner agencies have a strong and well-established approach to helping people cope with their substance abuse issues. This is an area in which the expertise of some partners – notably VPI and DMH – could be made more widely available to partner agencies through an expanded professional development or training program.
- **A need for an increased focus on mental health treatment.** Mental illness and its attendant effects are a central feature of the HomeWork Initiative, affecting perhaps as many as 80% of participants. Future efforts should therefore place mental health treatment and support strategies at the center of the work, in recognition that mental illness is so often a reliable co-condition of chronic homelessness. As one staff person put it: *“Maybe the program should really be called HomeWorkHealth or HomeWorkMentalHealth!”*
- **A vague identity as a program.** The program lacks a powerful identity as a separate entity, at least for some participants. A participant with recent, positive employment experience and seeking independent housing described his experience: “I had been in the program for a year before I knew I was in it...” This program invisibility may be caused in part by the existence of so many partner agencies, each performing tasks that they normally do in the course of their work. Some agency leaders regard the Initiative’s lack of emphasis on its “own” identity as a strength, as it affords participating agencies plenty of visibility and ownership, and has no serious effect on participating individuals.
- **The need for professional development.** Normal agency staff turnover means that people are constantly in need of updating about the nature of the Initiative. More importantly, on key issues like substance abuse, harm reduction, HIV/AIDS, immigration and documentation issues, and others, Initiative team members have a lot to learn. Fortunately, they also have a lot to teach and to share, since expertise in most of these areas can be found within the partner agencies. Organizing such cross-fertilizing professional development in the future is an opportunity not to be missed.

Steps to Sustainability and Expansion

The lessons from the HomeWork Initiative can play a role in Boston’s and the nation’s future response to chronic homelessness. The following suggestions, culled from the insights of the participants, agency partners and program staff, can contribute to that prospect.

- **Get known.** Establish a firmer, more distinct identity for the Initiative, so that both participants and observers are more aware of its unique qualities and achievements.

- **Document effectiveness.** Highlight the Initiative's success, by documenting it more thoroughly and calling attention to it more vigorously.
- **Explain how ambitious and successful HomeWork is.** Many people do not yet understand that successfully housing 32 chronically homeless people for multiple years is a major accomplishment, and that employing them and their peers is a powerful, even radical approach. It is important to convey the scope of this achievement, and its potential for shaping future policy and practice, in all public discussions.
- **Show savings.** How much money is the HomeWork Initiative saving society because its participants are getting work, paying taxes, and contributing to the local economy instead of enduring hospitalizations, incarcerations, emergency treatments and other publicly-funded, high-cost interventions? While difficult to document, these "avoided costs" are a major contribution that should be better understood. Such documentation will go far in protecting the idea of expanding HomeWork-like services from challenges on the grounds of cost.
- **Aim even higher.** Shift the way people see the issues. Instead of regarding chronically homeless people as people from whom to expect less, society must begin to expect more of them. Then, rather than simply standing by with higher expectations, society, like the HomeWork Initiative partner agencies and staff, must begin to raise its expectations of itself, and do more than it has before. Many people do not "get it" that working with chronically homeless people is about raising expectations *for all*. As one staff person put it: *"I have learned a lot from HomeWork. My department has learned a lot. We do things very differently now. But I would not say that my agency has learned a lot, at least not so far."*
- **Diversify.** Many of the lessons from this Initiative can be applied in work with people whose experience with homelessness is not chronic – people who are aging out of foster care, for instance, or others facing similar challenges. At a time when resources for people experiencing other forms of homelessness may not be as plentiful, the team-building, resource-sharing approaches of HomeWork are especially appropriate to adapt and apply in work with others who are homeless.
- **Carry it forward with new funding and new staffing patterns.** Mobilize existing and new resources to sustain the HomeWork Initiative. This means prevailing on current participating organizations to renew their support. This could mean renewed grants from funding partners, pledges of staffing from existing partners, or investments of dollars and people from new sources. The emphasis is less on finding large grants or new allocations of funding, and more on securing ongoing commitments of staffing and collaboration from existing and future partners.

- **Grow it.** The need in Boston is vastly greater than the three or four dozen people that the HomeWork Initiative currently reaches. In Boston alone, hundreds of people could benefit from an expanded program. Across the country, there is room for many new HomeWork-style ventures. While the participating partner agencies are not equipped to expand indefinitely, many of them express an interest in increasing the work that they do with the Initiative. In one approach to such a scaling-up operation, current HomeWork Initiative partner agency staff could act as trainers and disseminators of these ideas and practices, and work with other agencies to help them develop mastery of this approach, in Boston and across the country.

Now, the HomeWork partners have to take their passion and energy and goodwill and export it, to help people coalesce. People have to be educated, and shown the potential for sweeping change.

Walter Jabzanka, DMH

Conclusion

The HomeWork Initiative has achieved a series of successes. But a set of tough questions remains. How will HomeWork carry on when the federal grant runs out in 18 months? Will the partners stay together, generate new resources, perhaps even expand? Will they use their data to develop an even stronger case for the impact and promise of this approach? Will local and national funding sources respond?

Several things are clear:

- ❑ First, 40 formerly chronically homeless people and the team of agencies in Boston that support them are demonstrating that the lives of chronically homeless people can change, dramatically, for the better.
- ❑ Second, this same group is well positioned to participate in a planned, deliberative expansion of this work to serve others in Boston.
- ❑ Third, money may not be the principle barrier to expansion. With the nation anticipating substantial new investment in federal funding for the chronically homeless, the issue is this: can the Boston partner agencies and their allies mobilize the political will to continue and expand the HomeWork Initiative?

In the end, the challenge is not simply for current HomeWork agencies and leaders to address – it applies to all those who are concerned about homelessness and the quality of life in the United States.

Can we see beyond the confines of our job, our agency, our sector, or our community, and begin to embrace new, more effective policies and practices in the effort to end homelessness? A vibrant and effective set of such practices is established and continuing in Boston, for all to observe and learn from, in the HomeWork Initiative.

It is up to Boston – and the nation – to learn from this example, and rise to this challenge.

