



City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor

NEWS ADVISORY

SUBJECT: 'Housing First' Approach to Homelessness Brings Hope to Hard Lives

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'Housing First' Approach to Homelessness Brings Hope to Hard Lives

Two studies show once-controversial projects are helping save lives and money

SEATTLE - Mayor Greg Nickels released studies showing that Seattle's "Housing First" program is helping people whose lives have been shattered by homelessness, mental illness and addiction stay housed while saving an estimated \$3.2 million in emergency social and health services.

"To end homelessness, we must find programs that work in reaching those who are the hardest to reach," Nickels said. "These studies show that Housing First works. Instead of letting people fall through the cracks, this program helps to stabilize and rebuild lives while taking a costly strain off our social safety net."

Separate studies of Seattle's first two Housing First projects - 1811 Eastlake and Plymouth on Stewart - revealed similar findings. Preliminary research shows an estimated savings of \$3.2 million because of fewer visits by these formerly chronically homeless individuals to the Harborview Medical Center and the Dutch Schisler Sobering Center, as well as less use of other crisis-treatment services.

These programs are operated by the Downtown Emergency Service Center (DESC) and the Plymouth Housing Group (PHG) and supported by the city of Seattle. In the past two years, they have helped to change the lives of 100 chronically homeless individuals. Both 1811 and Plymouth on Stewart use the Housing First model, where people are provided rapid access to low-cost apartments, with vital medical, mental health and other support services available on site.

For the residents of Plymouth on Stewart, medical costs were dramatically reduced by 75 percent - or \$1.2 million - from the year prior to admission. More importantly, residents reported that in addition to improving their housing situation, the program helped them deal more effectively with daily problems, improved their physical health and helped them reduce drug use.

When 1811 Eastlake opened, there was much controversy over the fact that residents were allowed to consume alcohol in their homes at 1811. However, since moving in, 1811 residents have reported a one-third reduction in days spent drinking to intoxication, and researchers found an almost total elimination of the use of the sobering center by the building's residents, a decline of more than 5,000 visits per year.

"This is a tremendous start. Working with our partners at King County, the United Way and others, we will see more facilities like these open in the months and years ahead," said Nickels. "With every new building, we take a big step toward ending homelessness in our community."

Every year, the city spends approximately \$40 million to prevent or end homelessness. Since 2006, Seattle has added more than \$6 million in general fund resources for Housing First housing and service programs.

Since the opening of 1811 and Plymouth on Stewart, two more projects have been completed with the help of city funding. DESC's Evans House opened in fall 2007 and houses 75 severely mentally ill people who now live in safety, under treatment of skilled professionals. PHG's Langdon and Anne Simons Senior Apartments opens this month and features 23 units reserved for homeless seniors who frequently use emergency services and 22 units reserved for homeless veterans.

In total, the city has helped pay for 215 Housing First units in Seattle. Another 288 are under construction or planned to open by 2011. And a total of 1,000 are planned countywide under the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness.

Summary of Outcome Studies

Plymouth on Stewart

Client Use of Services	One-Year Prior to Admission	One Year Post Admission	% Change
Medical Respite Days	1,107 days	0 days	-100%
Harborview Medical Center Inpatient	329 days	56 days	-83%
Harborview Emergency Department	191 incidents	50 incidents	-74%
County jail bookings	5 bookings	7 bookings	40%
County jail days	123 days	101 days	-18%
Sobering Center admissions	349 visits	11 visits	-97%
Income support and employment	3 residents shifted from GAU to SSI. No employment income.		
Resident self-reported satisfaction measures	Residents agreed with statements: "I deal more effectively with daily problems." "I am not using drugs as much." "I am better able to control my life." "My physical health is improved." "I am getting along better with my family."		

Aggregate reduction in cost of services used	-\$1.5 million
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Source: Debra Srebnik, Ph.D, King County Mental Health and Chemical Abuse and Dependency Services Division, One Year Outcomes Report for Plymouth on Stewart "Begin at Home" Program, Oct. 15, 2007.

1811 Eastlake

Client Use of Services	One-Year Prior to Admission	One Year Post Admission	% Change
Harborview Medical Center visits	891	596	-33%
EMS paramedic interventions	540	432	-20%
County jail bookings	123	59	-52%
County jail days	1,233	678	-45%
Sobering Center admissions	5,549	222	-96%
Aggregate reduction in cost of services used	-\$1.7 million		

Source: Downtown Emergency Service Center, preliminary data on one-year outcomes, Nov. 28, 2007

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