What Can Be Done About Homelessness?

Central City Concern has pledged to increase its capacity across all of its programs over the next two years. Key goals from our strategic plan include:

• Increase access into our comprehensive health services by 30% or 2,000 individuals (We are already halfway toward this goal.)

• Increase housing capacity by adding 250 units of low-barrier affordable housing (107 units will be completed and open by the end of this summer; we’ll break ground on 39 units this fall; approximately 300 units are in “funding and predevelopment” phases of work.)

• Increase access into our employment services by 43%, serving 1,110 individuals annually (Our Employment Access Center served 848 people in 2015 and is on track to meet this goal in 2016.)

By Ed Blackburn, Executive Director (pictured above)

Homelessness has often been in the Portland, OR news over the past year. Donors and friends frequently ask me, “Why do we still have homelessness?” and “What can be done? What can I do?”

Last month, we brought Central City Concern’s best thinking together to address some of these questions. About 50 donors joined a “Get to Know the Real CCC” event to gain a better understanding of the problem.

Chief Medical Officer Rachel Solotaroff, Chief Housing & Employment Officer Sean Hubert, and I led a 90-minute discussion about the history of homelessness, the state of rental markets, and the individual factors, structural systemic effects and medical contributors to homelessness. We were heartened by a caring and keenly interested audience who asked an array of astute questions.

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, a lack of affordable housing is the leading cause of homelessness. Between 1970-2000, three million low income housing units dropped out of the marketplace nationally. Portland lost 70% of its low-income housing units during this time.

Although construction is currently booming in many west coast cities, rents are skyrocketing with San Francisco, Denver and Portland leading the way. People who are working hard at living-wage jobs struggle to find affordable places to live. Individuals with very low incomes are left even further behind.

And with the Portland metro area’s dramatic growth expectations – an estimated additional 260,000 new residents in the next 10 years according to a recent Metro study - concern is high about the equitable livability of our communities.

It’s easy to feel overwhelmed at the complexities around homelessness but I have cause for hope. Our donors, staff, clients and friends join me in believing that progress is possible.

Across the country, cities are evaluating methods to increase reliable funding for affordable housing. The Affordable Care Act has gone a long way toward improving access to healthcare for our most vulnerable citizens. In Portland, there is much discussion around the need for both shelters and permanent housing solutions.

By Ed Blackburn, Executive Director

To learn more about homelessness, we suggest the following websites:

• National Alliance to End Homelessness
• National Health Care for the Homeless
• Welcome Home Coalition (a Portland-specific organization working to stabilize affordable housing funding.)

For more information about how to join future Get to Know the Real Central City Concern events, please contact Mark Alejos: 971-244-5040 mark.alejos@ccconcern.org
Central City Concern’s Old Town Clinic is a recognized Health Center for the Homeless (HCH) center. HCHs share similar organizational challenges, complex patients and unique opportunities for growth and transformation. The National Health Care for the Homeless conference is an opportunity to spend several days learning with and from our peers around the country, who are doing extraordinary work under very difficult circumstances. CCC will have many staff members attending this conference. Art Rios, Chair of our Health Services Advisory Council, will also join the conference in addition to other members of the Council.

CCC will share its best thinking on a variety of topics through panels, presentations, and posters featuring our work across the broad spectrum of our Health Services programs, and policy and organizing work.

Portland May 31-June 3

Presentations

Ed Blackburn
HCH Pioneers Explore the Past and Address the Future of HCH

Pat Buckley and Teresa Ransom
Healing from the Outside In: Developing a Comprehensive Wound Care Program in Your HCH Clinic

Gary Cobb (joint with Baltimore Healthcare for the Homeless)
Organizing for Power: Critical Consciousness and Social Change +
The Personal is Political: Liberating Consciousness Through Storytelling

Eowyn Reieke, Facilitator
Crossing the Abyss:
Engaging People Experiencing Homelessness in Health Care Through Innovative Service Delivery Models
Features Central City Concern’s Bud Clark Clinic and Outside In

Amy Hardy
Crucial Conversations to Empower the Underserved:
Integrating Alcohol, Drug and Tobacco Interventions into Primary Care

Susan Marie
Primary Care Providers and Psychiatric Care: The Next Level

Rachel Solotaroff and Eowyn Rieke
Measuring What Matters: How can Homeless Health Care Providers Shape the Measurement of Our Performance?

Rachel Solotaroff
A Seat at the Table: Influencing State Health Care Delivery System Reforms & Aligning Internal HCH Operations

Posters

Nicole Cerra
Central City Concern Census

Anne Arthur
Health Literacy

Emily Ashjian
Integrating Clinical Pharmacists in Primary Care

Matthew Mitchell
Summit (Ambulatory Intensive Care Unit)

Central City Concern and the Central City Bed ® will be on location with exhibitor tables
It’s that memory: a recovering formerly homeless addict. A friend’s daughter. That’s the one that keeps Jan Brehm and Ron Grant coming back to Central City Concern’s Letty Owings Center (LOC), a residential treatment program for pregnant women and those with young children. The couple has been volunteering there for three years—bringing in a monthly Alcoholics Anonymous® meeting, providing holiday gifts, and making time for whatever is needed.

What Jan and Ron like most about volunteering at LOC is witnessing and influencing transformation. They get to experience the warmth of newborns, proud siblings, and healing moms. They help women fight for sobriety and watch them move on to fulfilling lives.

Jan is also volunteering for CCC’s upcoming We Are Family celebration—a benefit for Letty Owings Center and family housing. When asked what she’s looking forward to most at the event Jan said, “Experiencing the power of people gathering for a common purpose. Not just to raise funds but to hear and be impacted by the testimonies of young women who’ve received love and support.” Jan believes there is hope for everyone, and she’s excited to share the uniqueness of the event with others.

Ron and Jan are both in recovery and make no secret of it. What most people don’t know is that Jan’s nickname is “Campfire Girl,” due to an ability to start a fire in any weather condition. As for Ron’s superpower—he’s an ex-Marine who served two tours in Vietnam, and if someone needs help, he’ll be the first one in.

Fire and a kind heart ... that’s what our donors are made of.
Nearly half of Central City Concern’s 1,600+ units of housing are transitional housing units, primarily for people newly engaged with CCC’s addiction treatment services. These individuals can be prone to experiencing crises, which can lead to them abruptly leaving their housing. People leave behind assorted items: clothes, linens, kitchen items, and other housewares, most of which CCC has traditionally had to throw away when not reclaimed by their owners.

Recognizing that many of these items could help people moving into Central City Concern housing with little of their own, the CCC Green Team—a group of CCC employees that spearheads sustainability and conservation projects—collected and cleaned abandoned dishware, then redistributed them to housing programs. The success of their dishware re-use project confirmed that there was a need and an opportunity to provide new residents with the basics and have less waste headed to the landfill.

In a stroke of fortunate timing, Traci Kinden, of REvolve Waste, LLC, had recently begun volunteering at CCC. She too had a passion for minimizing waste, maximizing reuse, and recycling when possible. With the help of the Green Team, Traci collected abandoned property, including bed bug-free clothes, in the basement of a CCC building. She sorted. She cleaned. She organized and got items ready to be reused. Thanks to Traci’s work, many clients who needed items were able to access them almost as soon as they get engaged with CCC services.

Volume of goods, storage and organization challenges prevailed and the Green Team urged CCC to hire a dedicated employee to coordinate the program. Jerry Boynton was hired and a modest empty space was identified and quickly converted to function as the new Recycling and Reuse Operations Center (ROC).

Today, all abandoned property from CCC housing units, as well as most in-kind donations, are sent to the ROC for processing. Items are weighed, cleaned and sorted. Impractical things or items in poor condition are sorted for recycling. Unusable textiles are sent to a company that recycles fabric into washcloths. Only items that have no use and absolutely cannot be recycled are thrown away. To make items more easily accessible by clients, items are then redistributed to several CCC housing properties, as well as to CCC’s Employment Access Center. ROC is also open on a regular basis for clients and staff to drop in for impromptu shopping for needed items.

In January alone, the ROC processed 2,040 pounds of items: 44% of that was redistributed within CCC, 33% was sent to other social services agencies, and 8% was sent to curbside recycling. Only 15% was sent to the landfill!