

The Video: Ending Chronic Homelessness: DESC's Strategic Partnership

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Westat is collaborating with CMHS/SAMHSA to create an effective approach to knowledge transfer, creating products that take abstract research results and outcome measures and translate them into practical implementation strategies for providers and administrators.

Among the major challenges facing communities committed to ending chronic homelessness is the need to leverage resources to effectively meet the multiple needs of persons who are homeless and have mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders. Essential services, including housing, mental health, substance use, income supports, medical care, and planning, span a range of sectors—business, behavioral and medical healthcare, justice and local government—and effective collaboration strategies are required. While there are many technical assistance initiatives giving practical guidance on the implementation of individual service components, there is still a need for practical guidance in identifying and implementing community collaboration practices.

There have been a number of studies attempting to isolate and articulate the most effective strategies for mounting a community based response to ending homelessness. Martha Burt and colleagues at the Urban Institute published a landmark report¹ in 2004, which identified the community strategies needed for ending chronic street homelessness and chronicled their application in seven cities. The federally funded ACCESS Demonstration Study, an 18 site study examining the concept and impact of systems integration, noted the importance of a inter-organization relationships in gaining access to services, especially housing. Working with the CMHS, Westat conducted a Secondary Analysis of the data from the ACCESS Demonstration Study which included a qualitative analysis. A pattern of collaboration strategies were identified and formalized into a Partnership Model which captured essential planning and implementation steps needed to effectively leverage community resources. The parameters of this model were consistent with the strategies identified as critical in the Burt analysis.

The Westat team explored the practical application of the partnership model in communities at the forefront in establishing successful collaboration strategies. Discussions at workshops and collaborations with homeless service providers helped further refine and formalize the model to insure applicability in other community settings. Through our focus groups and workshop experiences, we learned that persons working in or planning for homeless services have a definite preference for learning from the stories of persons that had successfully implemented partnering strategies. By seeing concrete examples of partnerships in action, people not only

¹ “Strategies for Reducing Chronic Street Homelessness.” Burt, M., et al. Prepared for: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research. [Urban Institute online report](http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=1000775). Posted January 15, 2004; URL www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=1000775

become familiar with the formal principles of the model but they get a feel for the 'on the ground' challenges, strategies and accomplishments of successful partnerships.

In response to this, we created an educational DVD entitled "*Transformation Through Partnerships: Systems Change to End Chronic Homelessness*". The DVD contains three videos: an *Overview*, *Ending Chronic Homelessness: DESC's Strategic Partnerships* (featuring Seattle); and *Transformation, Recovery and Revitalization: Project Home's Community Partnerships* (featuring Philadelphia). We selected Seattle and Philadelphia for several reasons. The organizations we feature, Seattle's Downtown Emergency Services Center and Philadelphia's Project Home, have both won multiple local and national awards for their programs; both are featured in the Urban Institute report as having strong programs and partnering approaches; and they have complimentary yet very distinct approaches to partnering based on differences in the host cities—differences that will be relevant to other communities' adaptations of the partnership model.

We will be presenting the Seattle video, *Ending Chronic Homelessness: DESC's Strategic Partnerships*, along with the *Overview*, at the conference. The *Overview*, which features an introduction to the videos and the Partnership Model, has a run time of 5 minutes; the Seattle video runs 30 minutes. We will present a brief introduction to the videos, and have discussants from the Seattle site, from the Homeless Program's Branch, and on the partnership model. We will leave half of the 90 minute presentation time for audience discussion on applying the film's practices in their local community.

The video captures commentary from diverse community partners of the Downtown Emergency Services Center (DESC) in Seattle, as they plan together to meet the needs of persons with mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The DESC is a community mental health and substance abuse services provider which also operates permanent, supported housing. The Seattle video features innovative programs and collaborative efforts of the Seattle Police Department, the Mental Health and Drug Courts, the Seattle Business Association, the Mayor and County Executive and others that have brought multiple awards and recognition to DESC in their struggle to end homelessness. There is also commentary from the consumers whose lives these innovative partnerships have changed.

The DVD includes printed viewer's guides; a partnering principles guide, and an in-depth issue brief presenting the partnership model and case study examples.