

**HOMEWARD PIKES PEAK**  
**518 North Nevada Avenue**  
**Colorado Springs, Colorado 80903**

**Housing First Program**

**Background:**

Homeward Pikes Peak is the coordinating agency for homeless services in the Pikes Peak Region. As such, it manages the Continuum of Care, a broad array of services that cover topics from pre-homelessness, e.g. problems with rent, utilities, etc., through homeless services, per se, up to achievement of self-sufficiency. One of the responsibilities of HPP is to encourage agencies to coordinate in alleviating overlaps in the Continuum of Care, as well as to fill gaps in services.

One of the most profound gaps in services has been in the area of caring for the chronically homeless: usually males who are frequently mentally ill and who are, for the most part, substance abusers. They are usually seen wandering downtown, drinking in parks and sometimes panhandling near Interstate on and off ramps.

**The Program:**

Two years ago Homeward Pikes Peak introduced a program called “Housing First” to help these individuals. The concept behind the program is that, not surprisingly, what the chronically homeless need most is a permanent place to live. They also need treatment for their dual disorders; but what has happened in the past is that they would seek mental health help only to be told to quit drinking first. When they went to a substance abuse counselor, they were told to get treatment for their mental illness first. Needless to say, most quit trying to seek help.

The Housing First program in Colorado Springs receives housing vouchers through the HUD Super NOFA Grant that is managed by Homeward Pikes Peak. Valued at approximately \$6,000 per year, these vouchers are used for very small, scattered site, apartments for the chronically homeless. To be eligible, a chronically homeless individual must be dual-diagnosed with substance abuse and mental health issues, must agree to case management for both issues, and must agree to abide by the terms of the lease. The client is not forbidden from drinking, but cannot use illegal drugs.

What we have found over the past two years is that the first year is very difficult for both clients and case managers: Some clients drink to excess, knowing that it is allowed, and the program nationwide experiences an approximately 10% mortality rate. (These are already extremely medically fragile individuals when they enter the program.) Generally, in the second half of the first year the client begins to experience less of a drive to abuse alcohol and we see reduced intake. This is called a “harm reduction” model, e.g. cutting down from 1.5 liters of

vodka daily to three beers. At this point we begin to see a request for medical attention from the clients. They are more sober and begin to be aware of their health problems. This stage lasts about six months. Beyond the first year and a half we see many clients begin to work part-time and to appreciate a new quality of life.

### **Why Bother?**

Certainly because it's the right thing to do: to be compassionate to one's fellow man. However, Homeward Pikes Peak never relies solely on compassion as a motive. Programs must be cost-efficient, as well, and the Housing First Program is a true bargain for taxpayers.

When the homeless person is on the streets, he will often pass out after drinking. A compassionate passer-by will call 911 and chain of events will ensue. At the scene we will find police, fire and ambulance personnel and equipment. The call will most probably end in a trip to the Emergency Room. The average price for this action is about \$2,000. And the average chronic substance abuser will utilize these services more than once every two weeks.

The bottom line is that the Housing First Program costs about \$13,000 per year, per person (\$6,000 from HUD and \$7,000 in local services) while the person not in the program is costing local taxpayers about \$54,000 per year in police, fire, ambulance and ER services.

The Housing First Program is incredibly cost efficient for taxpayers!

### **The Problem:**

While the funding for the housing units is provided through a competitive HUD grant (\$6,000 per year, per person), the case management funding is not. Presently, we are using twenty housing units for clients, because we have been able to raise the funds for only one case manager. However, if we could raise another \$35,000 per year to hire another case manager, we could open the program to twenty more chronically homeless individuals, for whom we already have HUD housing vouchers!

Twenty people off the streets saves taxpayers over \$800,000 per year. If we could raise \$35,000 to hire another case manager, we could increase that yearly savings to \$1,600,000!

### **How Can I Help?**

Homeward Pikes Peak is accepting donations to put toward the hiring of a case manager for the Housing First Program. Every penny received will go toward this purpose. No administrative or overhead fees will be deducted. Every tax deductible dollar donated has the potential to save city taxpayers \$23.

Please help! Contact Bob Holmes, Executive Director of Homeward Pikes Peak for further information: [HYPERLINK "mailto:bobholmes@ppunitedway.org"](mailto:bobholmes@ppunitedway.org)

[bobholmes@ppunitedway.org](mailto:bobholmes@ppunitedway.org) or 719-955-0731 or 513 North Nevada Avenue, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80903.