

**Small Group Discussion Summary**  
**10-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness in Pitt County**  
Buddy, Can You Spare a Job?: Education, Training and  
Employment of the Homeless  
Tuesday, April 29, 2008  
Boys & Girls Club – North Campus

1. What would it take for employers to hire homeless individuals? What are some effective employment strategies for hiring individuals with criminal records?
2. Are the obstacles and challenges facing the homeless unique enough that we as a community should develop a training, placement, and employment program targeting the homeless? Are there existing entities that can handle the specific challenges or are there public/private possibilities to explore?
3. With strong concerns from employers regarding substance abuse and drug screening, what needs to happen for businesses to feel comfortable hiring people who are homeless and have a history of substance abuse? Would services and support need to follow potential hires to the workplace?
4. How do we make job skills training and education accessible and affordable for individuals so that they can maintain a home while improving their skills?

**Participants' Comments and Recommendations – (Group #1)**

- Third person/support person to help mediate for the employer with the employee
- Create a “Human Resource Development” program to help build self-esteem for homeless so they are job ready
- Provide education and awareness for employer to understand the criminal record (difference between arrest, conviction and dismissed)
- Need to develop personal relationships with employers (to encourage employing the homeless). There needs to be a sense of trust between the employer and the agencies working with placing homeless.
- Matching the employer with the employee; employers want to know what the value/assets “you” bring to the job
- Criminal records
  - Need to ensure employee is not assigned to an inappropriate job(e.g. drug addict should not work at a pharmacy)

- Need to involve legislators to change public policy on documentation of criminal record
- Community needs a plan to help chronic homeless get employment. The plan needs to include follow-up as it relates to case management
- Need to know what programs are available in communities and determine what pieces are missing
- Can we really employ chronically homeless?
- Many people with mental illness are not being helped, so how can they work?
- Education and collaboration with all agencies and people dealing with work and homelessness
- Are we really assessing the individuals' needs? Intake is important; need to know what serves the individual needs to received employment.
- There are problems with mental health service delivery – mental health professionals are not qualified.
- Lack of communication and collaboration is a problem
- One-Stop place where all agencies are connected is needed; all information is shared between agencies to help individual; need partners such as vocational rehab, Pitt County Community College, etc.
- Raise awareness; outreach into and throughout communities
- Involve the faith-community. Faith Community can be part of the “hiring network”
- Help build the individuals' self-esteem
- Involve legal and medical community
- Support service person to help mediate work with the employer and employee
- Trust between agency and employer is critical
- Agencies must be truthful with employer about the individuals' situation (previously incarcerated, mental illness, etc.) to build trusting relationship
- Job skills training and how to maintain home are needed
- Public assistance for individual to pay for housing is needed

- We need a step program that moves people from shelter to transitional housing to permanent housing
- People need to make a living wage
- Ultimate “service center” (again this is the one-stop idea of providing all services in one place)
- Need dwelling (housing), even if the person can’t work; needs training
- Partner with employers like Grady White. Grady White has good record in working with employing at risk but skilled people
- Develop a business venture within shelter to employ the hardest to employ
- Have business on-site where funds go back into the organization, but also provide income for homeless individuals
  - there are programs/facilities that serve senior citizens and those with disabilities (autism, mental retardation) that have business venture programs
- Child-care services are needed; how can you seek employment or keep employment if you have not daycare for your children?
- Other ideas – create jobs and offer:
  - street cleaning jobs
  - a partnership with the Salvation Army (organizing donations)
  - internships for homeless
  - community gardening opportunities
  - apprenticeships – provides opportunity to learn job skills while working and earning wages. Examples are programs in Atlanta where they run a restaurant and employ the homeless who become cooks.
    - Another program is construction training, etc.

## Participants' Comments and Recommendations (Group #2)

### Question #1

- Educate employers to see beyond the stigma of homelessness.
- Educate/encourage homeless persons to act positively and demonstrate how they have changed to balance off prior negative behavior. Be honest in applications and interviews.
- There should be evidence that the homeless person is actually connected to a support system – the mentor or counselor should be known to the employer.
- Provide incentives for employers – e.g. recognition for being involved in the community, part of an innovative approach. Understand the business' needs and interests and show how their participation would address these needs (Carson gave an example of a new, small business that wanted name recognition – they got it and continue to employ homeless).
- Ending homelessness is good for economic development.

### Question #2

- Consensus that there are enough unique characteristics/barriers that special programs need to be available, including:
  - Using the Shelter address on applications - can impact whether there is even an interview
  - Transportation – limited routes, or NO routes if you are outside Greenville, limited hours – a big problem if you are on 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> shift
  - Support services, especially day care (again 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> shift an even bigger issue)
  - Bad credit is now a barrier, usually for “big box” retailers (these are the employers that are on the bus routes). Smaller businesses can be more willing to “take a chance” if there is a relationship built
  - Life style of the chronically homeless – a culture – as much as behavior
  - Be sure training and placement make the “right match”, e.g. persons with certain mental illnesses may be better suited for outdoor or constant activity vs. a desk job.
- There should be tiers of support that taper off as the person has more success – an intensive “boot camp” of support in multiple areas to start, then adjusts as needed.
- Public/private partnerships are a must.

- Faith-based could do more, be creative (rather than cooking meals) – provide transportation to/from work, serve as mentors, be volunteer trainers to help persons improve skills, etc..
- We need a comprehensive transportation plan!

### Question #3

- Support needs to follow the employee (mentor or case manager idea).
- Educate employers about incentives such as tax credits or subsidies, or protections such as the federal bonding program that protects employers.
- “Visible” support (e.g. on-site mentor, case manager or approved time off for appointments), is a two-edged sword as it may jeopardize a person’s confidentiality/privacy.
- Is the upcoming Business Round Table going to get all the right people involved? (question from participant). It is a start at education and awareness. Need to start with a core group of employers committed to the community.
- Provide peer mentors – persons who were homeless and have made it – to support those just starting.
- Churches could offer support circles. Comment: there are homeless adults (males) who have never experienced an adult “getting up every morning to go to work”.

### Question #4

- Training needs to be affordable and accessible (transportation) so a person can participate **and** have a home.
- Volunteer operated training centers that use volunteer trainers (based on the volunteer’s assessed strengths/skills) and could be located where the persons in need of training are – e.g. smaller communities outside of city.
- Educate employers that hiring homeless is a win-win – they will have the employees they need.
- **Big question of the night: HOW DO WE GET BUSINESSES INVOLVED? Absence of business community from the forum noted.**

- Job mentors.
- Establish satellites that are located in outlying communities.

**Other comments from index cards:**

- STRIVE works in conjunction with the Shelter but the Strive was never mentioned to me while I was there. Are we doing enough to make sure the homeless are aware of the variety of services offered?
- Hold a fundraiser “The Long Journey Home” – a walk/rely (ex. Relay 4 Life) and other fundraisers
- The parks and recreation used to have vans or trailers that went to the parks shelters on certain days. The concept could be used to conduct job and resource fairs and forums.
- Day care including transportation included in the benefits package. Carpooling advance throughout the city (use gas process to market this and solicit more church involvement
- Addressing the financial aspects such as budgeting would help a great deal because that’s part of the problem. To help save money or put aside for a period of time to invest in something that would be essential.
- Training and education for those at various states of homelessness
- One place that serves as a clearinghouse. This place will know all of the services available in the community.
- Need physical dwellings for people at various stages of homelessness; have a dwelling in which they can abide.
- I think it is important to have dwellings, services, and support for individuals and families, and employers support so that we can address the needs of the diverse populations. For example, If on average we have 100 people who are chronically homeless and half are employable take them to the next step – job training, etc. If the other have are severely mentally ill we do what we can to employ them on their level.