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# BRINGING IT HOME

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*COMPLEX PROBLEMS  
INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS  
REAL RESULTS*

**COMMUNITY  
SOLUTIONS**

**2017 ANNUAL REPORT**

# HOW TO SOLVE A COMPLEX PROBLEM LIKE HOMELESSNESS



You can tell a lot about leaders by the way they approach complexity. When a problem isn't simple or clear, what do they do?

Exceptional leaders question old assumptions. They learn their way forward to create a new path. They build teams as multifaceted as the problem to test and refine solutions together as they go. That approach has driven advances in sectors from software development to manufacturing to global health, and it's how we're helping communities across the country solve homelessness.

Today nine of the communities we support have measurably ended chronic or veteran homelessness. Another 10 communities are actively reducing veteran homelessness and 4 are driving monthly reductions in their chronic homeless population. At the same time, our neighborhood-based teams are leading collaborations to tackle the tangled roots of homelessness, and our real estate team is creating some of the most innovative housing and financing models in the country.

The stories in this report offer a window into that work. We've organized them by the powerful problem-solving tools so central to our success: data analytics, complex facilitation, quality improvement, and human-centered design. These skill sets aren't new, but applying them to social problems like homelessness, especially in combination, is fresh and powerful. Our team is at the forefront of those efforts.

You can read the report straight through or flip to the stories that pique your curiosity. Perhaps you're interested in how we're deploying social impact capital to create new housing for veterans in a fraction of the time typically required (p. 7), or how we're preparing to use real-time analytics and quality improvement feedback loops to prevent new cases of homelessness before they occur (p. 18). Let me especially draw your attention to the Q&A features (p. 10, 15, 29, 36), where several members of our team have explained how the problem-solving approaches we're deploying have pushed their own thinking and transformed their work as changemakers.

Our work is a journey of discovery fueled by the conviction that homelessness is a solvable problem. We never lose sight of the fact that success means deep and lasting improvement in the lives of some of our most vulnerable neighbors. Thank you for supporting that vision.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosanne Haggerty".

**ROSANNE HAGGERTY**

*President, Community Solutions*



# WHAT'S INSIDE?

Complex social problems like homelessness don't have a silver bullet solution. Instead, we teach communities the skills required to master these problems, so they can surface and test new ideas quickly using data to refine their approaches and gain ground as they go.

## DATA ANALYTICS

*Complex problems typically have hidden leverage points. Data analytics helps a community zoom in on the heart of the problem by spotting outliers and trends that could hold the keys to broader progress.*

**PAGE 07** HOME, SWEET HOME—FASTER

**PAGE 10** Q&A WITH ARAS JIZAN, PRODUCT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION MANAGER

**PAGE 12** FOLLOW THE DATA



## QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

*Homelessness changes too quickly for traditional planning. Instead, communities need a rigorous way to test, measure, and improve new solutions as they go. Quality improvement offers a way forward to successful results.*

**PAGE 15** Q&A WITH BETH SANDOR, BUILT FOR ZERO CO-DIRECTOR

**PAGE 18** PREVENTION IS THE BEST CURE

**PAGE 20** CHICAGO, IL: USING QUALITY IMPROVEMENT TO REDUCE HOMELESSNESS

**PAGE 22** WORKING TOWARD ZERO



## HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN

*Society often blames people experiencing homelessness for their situation. But what if the problem isn't them, it's us? Human-centered design helps local leaders reinvent their housing systems in response to what will get results for those they serve.*

**PAGE 25** DESIGNING FOR—AND WITH—THE COMMUNITY

**PAGE 29** Q&A WITH PATRICK MCKENNA, SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER

**PAGE 30** TAKING HOMELESSNESS DOWN TO ZERO



## FACILITATING PROBLEM-SOLVING TEAMS

*Problems like homelessness cannot be solved by any single actor. Communities must develop results-driven teams with the skills to collaborate and innovate. Effective facilitation of these cross-sector partners has emerged as a breakthrough discipline.*

**PAGE 33** TEAM BUILDING

**PAGE 36** Q&A WITH MARY TOBIN, BROWNSVILLE PARTNERSHIP DIRECTOR

**PAGE 38** LEARNING, TOGETHER

# DATA ANALYTICS

USING DATA  
TO DRIVE  
PROBLEM SOLVING



## HOME, SWEET HOME—FASTER

*HOW WE'RE BRINGING METRO DENVER VETERANS HOME,  
THANKS TO A NEW FINANCING MODEL*

Look at the data on veteran homelessness in Metro Denver and you'll see a strange pattern: despite qualifying for federally backed housing vouchers, many homeless veterans have been unable to find housing, because they can't find landlords to rent to them. In one of the fastest-growing markets in the country, with few vacant apartments, Denver's homeless veterans discovered that fixed-amount subsidies, even at average rent levels, put them at a disadvantage in an overheated market.

"We knew we needed to get veterans into housing more quickly, but the supply just wasn't there," says Melanie Lewis Dickerson, who has worked to reduce homelessness in Denver for 10 years. She currently serves as the Large-Scale Change Portfolio Manager on our Built for Zero team.

A typical solution might involve developing new affordable housing using federal tax credits. But this traditional development process takes years. Even emergent funding models, like social impact bonds, are complex with high transaction costs. This year, we sidestepped both approaches by bringing together private donors willing to invest their own capital at a below-market rate of return to buy an existing apartment building for homeless veterans. The result? A 90-day closing and veterans moving into their own homes within months, not years.



We purchased the Abrigo Apartments in Aurora, Colorado, as the first phase of an initiative that will eventually bring many more units online for veterans in the Denver metro area and accelerate progress in ending veteran homelessness there. With nearly 300 veterans remaining on Metro Denver's current by-name list of those experiencing homelessness, this accelerated housing pipeline can't come too soon.

Adding to Metro Denver's supply of affordable housing for veterans was a direct response to the area's data. The specific housing needs of veterans could be understood as our team helped the community improve its data on homelessness. Today Denver has a comprehensive, continuously updated by-name list of every veteran and disabled adult experiencing homelessness. That list allows local leaders to observe the dynamics of homelessness in their community over time and to prioritize their resources for the most vulnerable individuals. It also allows them to parse out larger trends in their data, like the decline in landlords accepting vouchers, and focus on high-impact solutions, like the Abrigo Apartments.

"Using this data, communities can target their efforts at what will drive reductions in homelessness while also looking at the bigger picture to think about specific gaps in resources that require creative solutions," says Melanie. "Our team has the skills to help them on both fronts."



**\$7.5M**  
TOTAL COST  
TO PURCHASE  
AND REHAB

INCLUDING  
**100%**  
PRIVATE  
FINANCING



**1.9 MILES**  
FROM NEW  
VA MEDICAL  
CENTER

*Using this data, communities can target their efforts at what will drive reductions in homelessness while also looking at the bigger picture to think about specific gaps in resources that require creative solutions.*

— MELANIE LEWIS DICKERSON, LARGE-SCALE CHANGE PORTFOLIO MANAGER FOR BUILT FOR ZERO



**66**

TOTAL TIME  
TO CLOSE  
ON THE DEAL

**90 DAYS**



**UNITS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN METRO DENVER**  
COMING IN UNDER A YEAR— FOR US A NEW RECORD FOR PUTTING  
HOUSING UNITS ONLINE

# Q&A

## ARAS JIZAN

ARAS WORKS ON THE BUILT FOR ZERO DATA TEAM WHERE HE DESIGNS, CUSTOMIZES, AND IMPLEMENTS DATA TOOLS AND ANALYTIC FRAMEWORKS THAT HELP COMMUNITIES END CHRONIC AND VETERAN HOMELESSNESS.



### ■ What is data analytics?

At a basic level, it's collecting and looking at information systematically in order to make better decisions. For the work we do at Community Solutions, it involves helping communities use new or existing data on the services they're providing to people experiencing homelessness to figure out what's really going on. Zooming out can help you spot patterns in the data showing opportunities for improvement, like a bottleneck in your housing process. Zooming in allows you to identify whether changes to your system are having the desired result.

### ■ How does using data analytics help end homelessness?

Having up-to-date, reliable data on a community's homeless population is critical to ending homelessness. You can't end homelessness without having the data to track progress toward that goal and make sure you've reached it. You have to be looking at systems-level data around the number of people experiencing homelessness in your community in order to reach, and hopefully sustain, that measurable end state.

Folks on our team often note that solving homelessness isn't a technical problem— it's a complex problem. So, it's not like baking a pie or just following a recipe; it's more like raising kids. There's no fixed blueprint.



### QUALITY BY-NAME LIST

*A comprehensive, by-name accounting of every person experiencing homelessness in a community, updated in real time as each person's circumstances change. A by-name list provides a dynamic picture of homelessness across a community while also helping leaders triage and match the right level of assistance needed to resolve each person's housing crisis.*

If I'm looking at one person experiencing homelessness, there's a really solid evidence base of best practices to resolve that person's experience of homelessness permanently. But those best practices for individual people don't automatically add up to communities ending homelessness for everyone— there are countless externalities that complicate things. That's a systems problem, and you need to take a broader view informed by data to be able to solve it.

Data analytics is also the key tool for helping us understand whether we're making meaningful progress nationally. It gives our Built for Zero team the information we need to know when and where we might need to course correct in terms of our own strategy.

### ■ What kinds of data are communities collecting?

A big part of the work we do is pushing communities to improve the ways they keep track of data. We've been coaching each community to create a by-name list of all those who are experiencing homelessness in their communities and update it continuously— a real-time, person-specific accounting.

This list has become a core component of what the federal government and our sector call a coordinated entry system, which is a protocol for helping communities make smarter, more consistent decisions with housing resources. A good by-name list can give you a sort of instrument panel— like your car dashboard— to figure out how you're doing and where you might want to make some tweaks. It can also help you understand the impact those tweaks are having on your overall progress.

### ■ What happens after you look at the data?

Data analytics works in tandem with quality improvement, another core skill we use here (see p. 14). Imagine data analytics as the flashlight that helps identify trouble spots, and then quality improvement is more like a hammer or a wrench— it's a tool to test, build, and improve new solutions.

### ■ What are some of the tools communities use to make sense of their data?

We just switched our communities over to a powerful, cloud-based data visualization platform called Tableau, which is an industry standard for data analytics. By shifting to this more robust platform, we're offering community teams more engaging visuals and a more powerful analytic tool kit. It's unlocked the potential to do much more scalable data analytics work, and it's already empowering communities to create more flexible and locally customized tools.



# FOLLOW THE DATA

USING DATA TO CHANGE THE CONDITIONS THAT CREATE HOMELESSNESS

North Hartford, Connecticut, is a community of highly-engaged residents, but they face serious challenges. Some challenges are visible—blighted property, neglected schools and parks, a lack of basic amenities like grocery stores. Others are more hidden, like frequent evictions, crime, chronic joblessness, and health disparities. Yet the community has hidden strengths and assets too. We're helping the community combat the conditions contributing to homelessness by using data to make opportunities more visible.

Part of the problem is that the conditions that create homelessness are all connected, but the data reflecting these conditions often isn't. Our team works with residents and partner organizations to integrate the picture. Using data drawn from public sources, such as eviction and crime records; de-identified Medicaid claims; and survey data contributed by residents on their specific challenges and strengths, we're creating a multi-dimensional baseline view of the neighborhood. This data reveals patterns—like the connection between poor housing and poor health, for example—and shows which organizations need to be collaborating in new ways to make sure assistance is reaching those who need it the most.

As a starting point, our Community Health Manager Nadia Lugo guided a neighborhood Health Risk Assessment, funded by Cigna and staffed by residents, to document the self-reported health and well-being of local families. Building on this research, Nadia and our Community Engagement Coordinator John Thomas worked with University of Connecticut interns and teens participating in summer youth employment programs to map the conditions of all neighborhood properties. With support from GIS Corps,



PROPERTIES SURVEYED  
IN NORTH HARTFORD  
FOR OUR NEIGHBORHOOD  
CONDITIONS STUDY.

The data on exterior blight in the neighborhood will inform the next phase of our work in North Hartford.

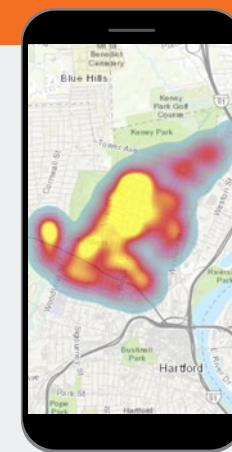
*We're helping the community combat the conditions contributing to homelessness by using data to make opportunities more visible.*

Trinity College's Action Lab, and ESRI, Nadia is now creating a single dashboard to allow residents and partner organizations to see "hot spots:" the places where problems or surprising opportunities cluster.

Integrated data is already driving new ways of working in North Hartford. Our team has brought together residents and institutions to:

- Identify the neighborhood's most frequent users of partner St. Francis Hospital's emergency room, then work with those individuals to sort out the housing, legal, transportation, and other challenges that were showing up as health emergencies.
- Piece together records on neighborhood evictions to understand the dimensions of the problem and inform our current housing stabilization efforts.
- Develop a comprehensive response to childhood asthma, which is rampant in the neighborhood and also the most expensive area of Medicaid spending in North Hartford. With partners and affected families, we're developing a plan linking schools, pediatricians, landlords, and community health workers to reduce hospitalizations and school and work absences caused by asthma.

Most dramatically, this year we begin the \$35 million renovation of the former Swift Factory to bring more than 350 construction and long-term jobs to the neighborhood. Why take on this project? The local data showed the connection between long-term unemployment and homelessness. *For more on the Swift Factory redevelopment, see p. 25*



The neighborhood study was tracked in the Loveland App, a property mapping tool.

# QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

TESTING AND  
EVALUATING IDEAS  
WITH REAL-TIME DATA

# Q&A



## BETH SANDOR

*BETH IS A PRINCIPAL AT COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS. SHE CO-DIRECTS THE BUILT FOR ZERO TEAM, WHICH HELPS COMMUNITIES END CHRONIC AND VETERAN HOMELESSNESS.*

### ■ *What is quality improvement?*

It's a methodology for testing and improving new ideas that developed in the private sector. We're bringing it into our work to end homelessness in several ways. First, we coach communities on the methodology. Local teams start by building a real-time, by-name list of people experiencing homelessness. That information is essential to creating a feedback loop that lets you know whether you're making progress. We teach communities how to use quality improvement to test new ideas quickly, so they can avoid investing a lot of time and resources into things that aren't getting results. We know if change ideas are working based on the by-name list data, which is continuously updated. We also use QI to guide our own work on the Built for Zero team. It's a powerful tool for letting us know whether our large-scale coaching and data strategies are helping communities reduce homelessness or not and when new ideas are needed.

### ■ *How do Built for Zero partner communities use QI?*

Communities are trying to drive month-over-month reductions in chronic and veteran homelessness, but in the past it's been very hard for them to know if what they're doing is working. QI helps them test concrete ideas in short cycles and use the resulting data to understand what happened. Were there fewer people experiencing homelessness once they implemented those changes? If so, then great— let's keep doing more of that and track that it's working. If not, then what can be learned from that experience that they could either tweak or throw out in favor of a different strategy altogether? That information informs their next round of changes— it's a process of continuous testing to drive improvement.

### CHANGE IDEAS

*Actionable new ideas, which can be tested and refined in rapid cycles to determine what works, are a key part of the quality improvement process.*



■ *So you're learning even when a change idea doesn't work?*

It's all in this idea of failing forward. Part of quality improvement is seeing the data as information to drive improvement, rather than judgment. The goal isn't to be right or wrong on the first try; it's to figure out what it will take to get real results.

■ *Is applying quality improvement methods to homelessness a new concept?*

Communities have always wanted to know what works and to try those ideas. I think the missing piece has been knowing if those changes were leading to improvement or not. The level of data quality we've helped communities build is definitely new. Having a real-time feedback loop for the first time has enabled them to do much more rigorous testing of their strategies, and many are starting to bend the curve on homelessness downward for the first time.

■ *How did you start using QI tools at Community Solutions?*

The idea comes from manufacturing, but we've learned a lot from how it's been implemented in the healthcare sector. The approach to the work itself translates across industries— how you break down the problems and how you approach the data.

About six years ago, I took a six-month quality improvement course through the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. I just remember feeling like: *This is it. This is the change we need to make in how our organization works and how communities are working in our sector.* Slowly over the course of the last five years we've been changing the way we're working to include quality improvement techniques. The key idea was that if we could help communities embed quality improvement deeply in their work, then we would see them start getting to the goal of ending homelessness faster and sustaining that result.

■ *Has that worked?*

Yes. I would even say quality improvement is the primary success factor in the nine communities that have now reached functional zero. These communities are using their data completely differently— they've developed real-time feedback loops, and they're using them to make decisions. It's exactly the way we need every community to work if we want to get to zero. *For more on functional zero, see p. 23.*

And that is our goal: to fundamentally shift the way communities are working. I really believe that's the thing that's going to end homelessness.

■ *What are some of the challenges of using quality improvement tools in this field?*

The initial challenge is having good data that people trust. In order to do quality improvement well, you need a way to measure if what you're trying is working or not. The only way to do that is through person-specific, real-time data on your homeless population. That is a big shift for the sector.

■ *It's one thing to get to zero. But what does it take to hold it?*

Historically, we've framed homelessness as a static phenomenon. We count once a year and then we act like that number doesn't change for 12 months. But that's ridiculous! It's not like if you just helped X number of people, you'd be done with the problem. Homelessness is much more dynamic than that.

Ending homelessness is actually about developing a system that once functional zero is reached, we can constantly solve for the problem over time. Zero isn't a destination— it isn't like you get there once and then you're done. We need to have this continuous improvement mindset everywhere on this issue to ensure that we can hold on to the gains in ending homelessness over time as the problem changes and people's needs change.

Gulf Coast, Mississippi, is a great example. They've been at zero veteran homelessness for over two years. Today if a veteran becomes homeless in Gulf Coast, they can house that person in less than 11 days. Imagine if that were the new normal everywhere.

Someday we'll end homelessness altogether. In the meantime, we need to make it like breaking your arm or getting the flu. It's not something you hope for, but if it does happen, communities would have the ability to resolve it quickly. The idea that people would spend a whole lifetime on the streets...that just isn't something we need to accept anymore.



*Quality improvement is the primary success factor in the nine communities that have now reached functional zero.*

— BETH SANDOR, CO-DIRECTOR OF BUILT FOR ZERO





# PREVENTION IS THE BEST CURE

*WE'RE USING DATA TO INTERVENE BEFORE PEOPLE BECOME HOMELESS*

How does someone end up homeless? Maybe because of a lost job, or a costly medical emergency, family conflict, or a struggle with a chronic health or mental health challenge? When combined with poverty, these too-common occurrences can precipitate the loss of a home.

"Helping communities build by-name lists of everyone experiencing homelessness has revolutionized their ability to get people rehoused more quickly," says Jake Maguire, a Principal at Community Solutions and the Co-Director of Built for Zero. "But at the same time, how did we end up with so many people on these lists to begin with? The real endgame is figuring out how to head off homelessness before it starts. That's what we're working toward."

What would it take for a community to intervene before someone becomes homeless? We think the same quality improvement approaches that have helped communities create strong housing systems that get people out of homelessness could also help communities prevent new instances of homelessness from occurring.

Our hypothesis is simple— ample evidence shows that a significant percentage of people who become homeless have recently touched other systems, like healthcare, foster care, or criminal justice. Many also come from high-poverty neighborhoods. Yet we still lack real-time, person-specific data on who is falling through the cracks between systems and where and how communities' "safety nets" are failing.

"When someone is aging out of foster care or leaving prison, who is ultimately responsible for ensuring they don't end up homeless?" asks Jake. "Without better data, it's impossible to hold anyone accountable. Waiting until someone becomes homeless is a pretty disruptive way to solve for things that could have been managed more humanely and cost effectively further upstream."

The answers may lie in the real-time, by-name lists of people experiencing homelessness we've helped communities to build. In 2018 our team will interview people from communities' by-name lists to get a much fuller picture of how they became homeless. *What challenges did they face on their way in? Which systems did they touch, and where, precisely, did those systems let them down?* By focusing on the experiences that lead people to become homeless, we'll be able to surface new change ideas to help communities prevent homelessness from happening.

In addition to the qualitative interviews, we'll also be analyzing data from Built for Zero communities to find innovative solutions for managing "inflow." For example, one community's data uncovered that most of the new veterans entering homelessness were coming through the same hospital. They then targeted problem solving and prevention training at that hospital. Unearthing new insights like this from data can help communities develop effective ways of intervening before people become homeless.

*The real endgame is figuring out how to head off homelessness before it starts. That's what we're working toward.*

— JAKE MAGUIRE, CO-DIRECTOR OF BUILT FOR ZERO



# CHICAGO, IL

## USING QUALITY IMPROVEMENT TO REDUCE HOMELESSNESS

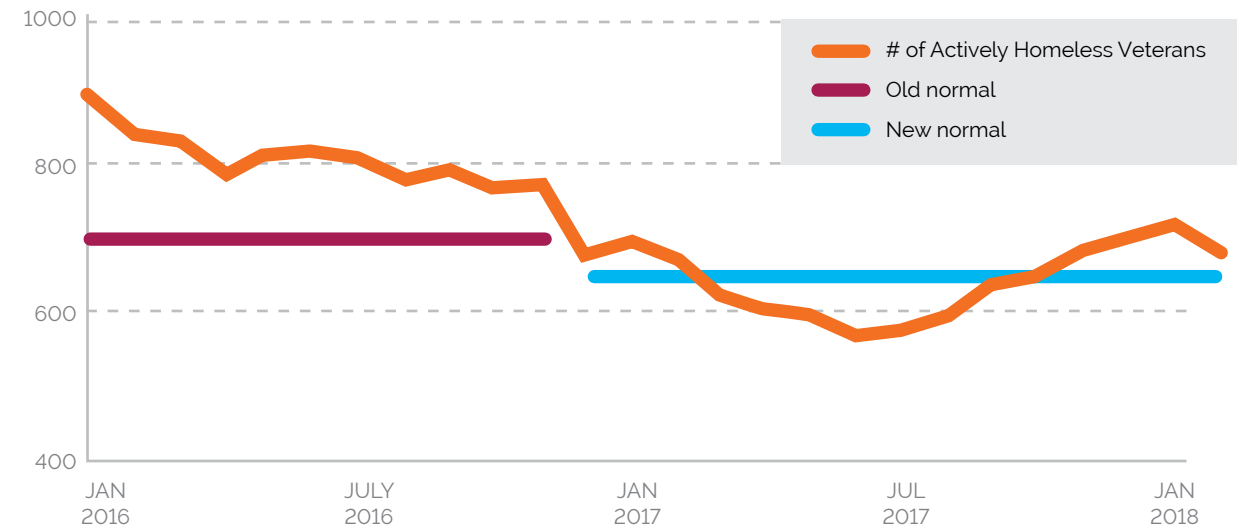
Chicago has used quality improvement strategies to dramatically reduce the number of veterans experiencing homelessness. The local team has achieved this impressive result by testing change ideas designed to move the needle on veteran homelessness, then tracking their data to see if these interventions were having the desired effect. The result: they've reduced veteran homelessness significantly and developed effective strategies that work in their market.



# 22%

## REDUCTION IN VETERAN HOMELESSNESS OVER TWO YEARS

### RESULTS: Reduced veteran homelessness by 22% over two years



### HOW THEY DID IT:

#### GOAL SETTING

The local team working to end homelessness in Chicago set goals each month for reducing the number of veterans experiencing homelessness and used those goals to get every stakeholder rowing in the same direction. Each time the team achieved one of its goals, it immediately set a new one and communicated the change.

#### THEME-BASED CASE CONFERRING TO ACCOMMODATE THE LARGE SCALE OF HOMELESSNESS

Because its by-name list is so large, the Chicago team couldn't strategize around each individual veteran at every meeting. Instead it designed a schedule for rotating through key themes on a weekly basis: first, it focused on veterans experiencing chronic homelessness, then long-term shelter stayers, then veterans in transitional housing, and finally veterans connected to housing subsidies who hadn't yet been able to find apartments. These prioritized individuals are the focus of the team's work between meetings.

#### BIMONTHLY MEETINGS WITH THE MAYOR'S TEAM

The Chicago team meets bimonthly with the Mayor's staff to brief them on progress and provide clear requests to the Mayor to take specific actions that could advance their efforts.

#### CREATIVE DATA PROCESSES

Street outreach workers were struggling to find specific veterans when housing became available for them. In response, the local team expanded data-sharing permissions in its HUD-funded data system. Now outreach workers can see the services each veteran is accessing at any time and the best point of contact at each program. This helps outreach workers find those on the street more quickly and reduces the time it takes to connect homeless veterans to housing.

# WORKING TOWARD ZERO

THESE NINE COMMUNITIES HAVE ACHIEVED FUNCTIONAL ZERO



FUNCTIONAL ZERO

# ACTIVELY HOMELESS VETERANS



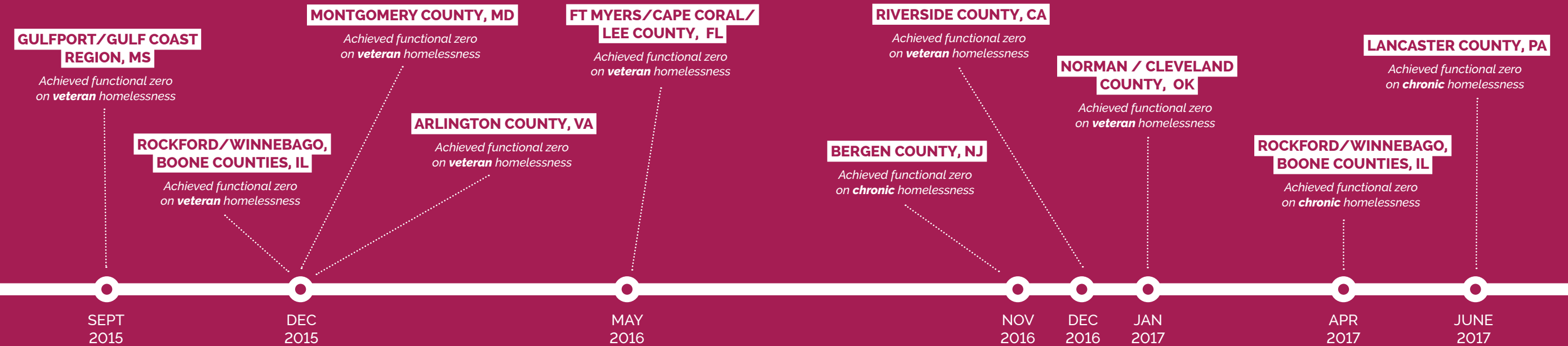
AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING RATE



# ACTIVE CHRONICALLY HOMELESS



3 OR 0.1% INDIVIDUAL PIT COUNT #



**Built For Zero.**

Community Solutions' national effort to help communities end veteran and chronic homelessness. Currently we're coaching more than 80 communities in the U.S. and Canada.

**91,642** INDIVIDUALS HOUSED SINCE JANUARY 2015

**10** COMMUNITIES ACTIVELY REDUCING THE NUMBER OF HOMELESS VETERANS

**4** COMMUNITIES ACTIVELY REDUCING THE NUMBER OF CHRONICALLY HOMELESS

**80%** COMMUNITIES WITH REAL-TIME DATA

**70%** PROOF POINTS SUSTAINING FUNCTIONAL ZERO



# HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN

CREATING SOLUTIONS  
AROUND THE NEEDS  
OF YOUR USERS  
AND ENGAGING THEM  
IN THE PROCESS



## DESIGNING FOR— AND WITH— THE COMMUNITY

*HOW THIS NORTH HARTFORD FACTORY WILL BRING JOBS BACK TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD*

Where some might see a vacant, blighted building, the residents of North Hartford saw 65,000 square feet of potential in the abandoned Swift Factory. In its heyday, the historic building housed the neighborhood's largest employer, which manufactured delicate gold leaf that covered capitol domes around the country. But in 2004 the factory closed its doors, taking with it the jobs that had supported neighborhood families since the 1880s.

The decline of the factory coincided with hard times for the neighborhood. Today nearly half of North Hartford's residents live in poverty. More than 20 percent of homelessness in the Hartford area could be traced to the neighborhood, and unemployment hovers at 27 percent, more than five times the national rate. Although Connecticut boasts the highest per capita income of any state in the country, residents of North Hartford earn an average of only \$12,099 a year.





Despite these grim realities, residents weren't giving up on their neighborhood or the factory. They believed that the Swift Factory could once again be an important economic engine in the community and help local families remain securely housed. Leaders sought Community Solutions' help in finding a way for the historic factory to bring back jobs.

We approach all our projects through the lens of human-centered design. This means putting the people we're designing for first, observing and listening to their needs, and iterating potential solutions with them. In the case of transforming the Swift Factory, neighborhood residents knew they needed jobs to combat homelessness, and we listened.

Consider for a moment what often happens with old industrial buildings: those in appealing locations become loft apartments with industrial features and exposed brick walls. Funding for affordable housing was available and much more straightforward and easier to secure than what would be required to revive employment at the site. But we trusted the residents' belief that the key thing needed to stabilize the neighborhood and curb homelessness was new jobs.

To develop a viable business plan that would match the skills and interests of residents with market needs and potential business tenants, John Thomas, our Community Engagement Coordinator, met with hundreds of residents and organizations to learn about talents and aspirations ready to be tapped. Simultaneously, our team conducted regional market research to find unmet needs that could be successfully addressed through the redevelopment of the Swift Factory.

These two lines of research converged in the concept of a food business hub to house food growing, manufacturing, and distribution businesses and support local food entrepreneurs. We discovered that a number of community residents were already

operating small-scale food businesses out of their homes and that the demand for locally sourced food was significant and increasing throughout the Hartford region. The compelling business plan for the food hub was recognized by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Last year Community Solutions was awarded a \$2.8 million federal grant for the Swift Factory to implement the plan.

The redeveloped factory will feature a 36,000-square foot indoor farm operated by Fresh Box Farms; the commissary kitchen for the popular Bear's Smokehouse BBQ, a Hartford restaurant group, that will also produce sauces and other products for sale; and a kitchen incubator with 10 spaces for local food entrepreneurs to expand their operations. Combined, these businesses will create more than 150 long-term jobs with a hiring priority for local residents. Construction begins on the Swift Factory this June and will open in late 2019.

"The Factory is not the end product— it's a step toward achieving our higher goals," says John. "We're creating jobs where there are none and we'll be speaking to the real needs of the community."



*We're creating jobs where there are none, and we'll be speaking to the real needs of the community.*

— JOHN THOMAS,  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT  
COORDINATOR



65,000 SQ. FT.

SIZE OF THE SWIFT FACTORY RENOVATIONS BEGIN IN JUNE 2018.

# Q&A



## PATRICK MCKENNA

PATRICK OVERSEES COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS' \$35 MILLION REDEVELOPMENT OF THE SWIFT FACTORY IN NORTH HARTFORD. CONSTRUCTION BEGINS IN JUNE 2018.

### ■ What is human-centered design?

It's a process for designing a product or service in collaboration with those who will use it. The principle is the same whether you're designing a government program, a smart phone app, a consumer product, or a whole building.

### ■ After the neighborhood reached out to Community Solutions to save the Swift Factory, how did you apply principles of human-centered design?

First we listened to the community to learn what they needed and how the factory could support those needs and aspirations. We learned quickly that people needed better employment opportunities in the neighborhood and they wanted to use the factory to address that. That insight has guided our work at Swift. Also if you're trying to build something with and for a specific community, you need to be in that community and seeing and interacting with the challenges that residents face. Our office is on-site at the Swift property. We participate in neighborhood events and provide regular updates on Swift.

### ■ How does using human-centered design principles help Community Solutions end homelessness?

Involving the community in the design process is crucial to developing solutions to specific needs and opportunities like the future of the Swift Factory. We will have better outcomes and see that projects like Swift contribute to creating a healthier, more vibrant, and more stable neighborhood. Ultimately this means fewer people from North Hartford will end up in homelessness.

200+ JOBS CREATED DURING THE CONSTRUCTION PHASE OF THE SWIFT FACTORY



& 150+

LONG-TERM JOBS CREATED BY BUSINESSES LEASING SPACE AT THE RESTORED SWIFT FACTORY





# TAKING HOMELESSNESS DOWN TO ZERO

## HOW ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS, BECAME THE FIRST PLACE TO END VETERAN AND CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

Can you imagine living outside so long that you're afraid to come in? What happens when sleeping inside feels even scarier than staying on the streets? When Angie Walker and her team joined our Built for Zero initiative and set out to end homelessness in Rockford, Illinois, they knew they would need to find answers to these questions.

### REACHING ZERO

*When we launched Built for Zero, no definitions for the end to veteran or chronic homelessness existed. We developed the concept of functional zero to ensure communities knew what to aim for. For veterans, a Built for Zero community reaches functional zero when fewer veterans are homeless at any time than the community has proven it can house in a routine month. This housing rate is determined by a rolling average of a community's last six months of housing placements.*

**See p. 23 for more information on functional zero.**

Finding homes for people experiencing chronic homelessness isn't just about resource challenges. Outreach workers also have to convince people who have given up hope that finding housing is a real possibility. Some are wary that there are unbearable strings attached. Others talk about their friends on the street and what it will mean to leave a familiar group. Others have had so many disappointments—outreach workers who didn't follow up on promised help with housing, landlords who mistreated them—that they are skeptical that the offer of housing could be real.

In Rockford Angie knew a group of men who had lived on the streets for as long as eight years. This group lived in tents and abandoned buildings, sometimes seeking shelter in concrete construction tubes. They were on the city's real-time, by-name list of the chronically homeless, and the Rockford team was determined to house them. But this group was a special challenge. The men insisted that they weren't interested in Angie's offer of housing.

But Angie suspected they were really just doubtful that her offers of help would amount to anything. Those who have been homeless the longest have generally been offered emergency services time after time without much changing for them. The notion of a real solution, housing, would be radical.

Angie knew it was her responsibility to find a way to house these men. She suspected that if they experienced a taste of what it was like to sleep inside again, they might be willing to accept more permanent housing.

The opportunity to test her instinct arose from an unlikely place: the Chicago Cubs. One day, Angie overheard the men talking about the upcoming World Series in which the long-suffering Cubs would be playing. One member of the group was upset that he couldn't watch because he didn't have access to a TV.

Angie made an offer on the spot: come inside and watch the Series. She knew she could get them into a nearby short-term residency hotel, so she invited the men to stay there and watch the games. It worked. The men put aside their discomfort, moved inside, and watched the Cubs win the World Series for the first time in 108 years.

This taste of housing warmed the men to the idea of living indoors again. They asked to stay in the hotel a bit longer. Soon Angie and her team were moving them into permanent apartments, ending their homelessness for good.

Housing the hardest-to-reach people in a community takes creativity and a refusal to give up. Outreach workers must figure out what really matters to each person and then focus on delivering those things. It's the very essence of human-centered design. Success depends on a willingness to try new approaches, including ones tailored to specific individuals whose fears or circumstances present unusual challenges.

"Every time I talk to the Rockford team, there's something new they're trying," says Julia Parshall, an Improvement Advisor on the Built for Zero team who works closely with Rockford. "They understand that homelessness is a complex problem, and they are constantly learning what works and adapting."

Last year Rockford became the first community in the country to end both veteran and chronic homelessness. Since then they've been working to sustain this achievement while expanding their focus to youth homelessness.



### CHRONICALLY HOMELESS INDIVIDUAL

*An individual who has been continuously homeless for a year or more or has had at least four episodes of homelessness totaling at least 12 months in the past three years; the person must also have a disability.*

## DOUBLE ZERO

*In 2017, Rockford, Illinois, became the first community in the country to end homelessness for both veterans and the chronically homeless. They're now focused on sustaining functional zero and working to end youth homelessness.*



# FACILITATING PROBLEM- SOLVING TEAMS

CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR  
COLLABORATIVE INNOVATION



## TEAM BUILDING

*HOW WE'RE BRINGING TOGETHER PARTNERS TO WORK  
COLLECTIVELY IN BROWNSVILLE*

For years Brownsville, Brooklyn, has had one of the highest rates of family homelessness among all New York City neighborhoods. To learn how to change the conditions leading to homelessness, we joined forces with Greg Jackson, a legendary local leader and former professional basketball player who had grown up in Brownsville. Greg, a point guard, had a strategy: first build a team.

Since 2008 the Brownsville Partnership, an initiative of Community Solutions, has built a network of partner organizations and residents to reduce the risks faced by families there. In that time, we've learned that successful collaboration— the kind that leads to lasting change— requires more than good intentions. It also takes more than sharing the same space, more than having complementary goals, and more than regular check-ins with partners. It requires disciplined communications, driven by skilled facilitation.

Ten years into our work in Brownsville, more than two dozen partner organizations are regularly collaborating on critical shared aims designed to tackle the biggest issues facing neighborhood families. Greg led the effort until his unexpected death in 2012. Today Brownsville Partnership Director and Community Solutions Principal Mary Tobin channels Greg's passion for the community and his relentless optimism.

In the early years the work of collaboration focused on meeting with residents, especially in the dense public housing developments that dominate Brownsville. It also involved recruiting high-performing organizations to come to the neighborhood, join the team, and work on the issues that mattered most to residents: crime, jobs, and creating more opportunities for children and youth. Addressing the poor conditions of public housing and public spaces in the community soon emerged as other challenges that would require group effort and a long-term plan.

In 2015 our team opened the Greg Jackson Center for Brownsville to provide co-located space for partner organizations as well as space for cultural and community gatherings. Our monthly partner meeting, which once fit comfortably in a modest-sized conference room, now takes over the building's multi-purpose convening space on the third Wednesday of each month. Notably, senior leaders— those with decision-making authority for their organizations— attend the meeting.

As the lead facilitator, Mary spends a lot of time thinking about what will make for a good meeting. The details matter: how the room is set up, making sure there's an ice breaker that gets people laughing and loosened up, building in time for people to network. There's food, announcements, and then the structured part of the meeting begins. Neighborhood data provides a common language across different types of organizations and issues. Determining the most valuable data to pay attention to is a group project. *What tells us what is changing, getting better— or worse— and for whom? Where are the problems occurring? Where are the bright spots?* These questions inform joint efforts now underway to improve outcomes for 0-to 3-year-olds; to get more disconnected youth ages 16 to 24 into jobs; and to improve neighborhood common spaces to enhance connections between neighbors, improve public safety, and promote healthy activity. The effort to improve housing conditions is now formalized in the Brownsville Plan, which was adopted by city agencies and is guiding development in the neighborhood. Partners also work together to test and track the significance of various indicators to learn the best measures of positive change.



## ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING IN THE BROWNSVILLE PARTNERSHIP MEETINGS

With 12 years as an Army officer under her belt, Mary knows how to lead. She keeps the conversation flowing by appreciating partners and shouting out successes, making sure that everyone is drawn into the discussion, guiding the group to concrete actions, and grounding commitments in measurable form.

"With the partner meetings, we're helping others see that they have value in this community and bringing them into the conversation," says Mary. "We're creating this space where people can talk about— and even debate— how we solve these complex problems. And crucially we're ensuring accountability through rigorous follow-up."

Community Solutions Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer Jamie Schleck agrees.

"The whole idea is we enhance serendipity," says Jamie. "We create the opportunities for these collisions between people to take place, and the collaborations that emerge really move the needle on key issues."

One of those collaborations is the Brownsville Portal, a new website under development that is assembling neighborhood data and a community calendar of events. The site came about in response to requests from partners to be able to better communicate with one another outside formal meetings.

"I think the true testament of whether or not we're being successful is the extent to which these things start happening without us," says Mary. "We provide the tools, we foster the initial conversations, we ensure there's momentum, we track the results, but we know things are really working when we don't have to make them work. What's so exciting to me is building this ecosystem that works naturally."

*We're creating this space where people can talk about— and even debate— how we solve these complex problems. And crucially we're ensuring accountability through rigorous follow-up.*

— MARY TOBIN, DIRECTOR  
OF THE BROWNSVILLE  
PARTNERSHIP



# Q&A

## MARY TOBIN

MARY IS A PRINCIPAL AT COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS AND DIRECTOR OF THE BROWNSVILLE PARTNERSHIP, WHICH BRINGS TOGETHER RESIDENTS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO COLLABORATE IN SOLVING THE NEIGHBORHOOD'S MOST PRESSING CHALLENGES.



### ■ What is facilitation?

Facilitation is the art of bringing together interested parties to brainstorm, express feedback, and implement initiatives that help us achieve shared aims for Brownsville. It's creating a space where people can talk about how we solve complex problems and then take collective responsibility for taking action and achieving results.

### ■ Why is attention to facilitation important when problem-solving?

Ultimately facilitation is about helping people collaborate to solve problems that no one person or group can solve alone. That's what we're doing in Brownsville. We're bringing together people who have different skills to the table and getting them to all work together toward a shared mission. This collaborative approach has led to real progress on the challenges the community is facing.

### ■ How does facilitation fit into the larger work being done by the Brownsville Partnership?

Facilitation works in conjunction with all of the other problem-solving tools we deploy. Our team aims to catalyze change across the whole neighborhood, so we've got to shape a vision that includes everyone. The best way to do that is to use data as the foundation. We start with aggregate information on what's going on in Brownsville, but we also look at the program landscape. *What's been tried before? Has it worked? Where are the bright spots?* Data can identify challenges, but it can also highlight new opportunities for collaboration, which helps complex facilitation.

Sometimes we speak of our work like a command center. There's so much data available, but our job is to help people act on it. Good facilitation helps our group of partners turn raw information into a shared aim and a collaborative strategy. Our monthly Brownsville Partner meetings have created a place where people who want to see the best for the community gather and actively work toward these solutions together.

### ■ How do you facilitate progress through these meetings?

The secret to the meetings is that it's not just a meeting— again, it's that command center approach to problem solving. Every meeting we build on solutions and feedback from our past meetings. We've implemented a rigorous structure intended to invite participation from our partners and lead to meaningful progress.

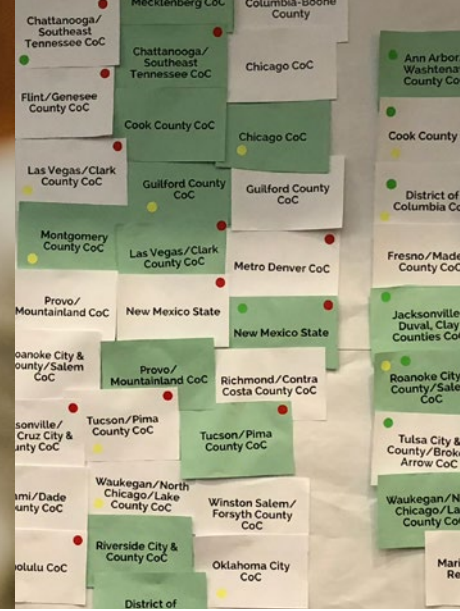
In response to the issues raised in these meetings, we've created some simple problem-solving tools to better serve our partners and the neighborhood. One of these is the Brownsville Partners Portal, where we will provide detailed data on the community. The portal helps you ask better questions. *How is this neighborhood doing? How does this compare to five years ago? Are we improving in specific areas?*

We're also working on a resource map that shows where more than 100 partners are operating in the neighborhood. The map will provide a vetted picture of good programming and services in the community and hopefully expose some of the gaps too.

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— MARY TOBIN, DIRECTOR OF  
THE BROWNSVILLE PARTNERSHIP





Next it's off to cohort time, where communities partner with other teams at similar stages in their respective journeys. Cohort time is a heavily facilitated space where communities work together to integrate everything they're learning into concrete, testable, and measurable work plans before returning home.

At all stages, our facilitation is geared toward creating the conditions for innovation. Every aspect of the Learning Session is planned with this in mind— from designing exercises that will lead to better brainstorming, to creating an agenda around relevant challenges communities are facing.

# LEARNING, TOGETHER

*OUR LEARNING SESSIONS BRING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER TO INNOVATE*

Homelessness is a complex and constantly shifting problem. To solve it, communities need more than a fixed recipe— they need new, more flexible ways of problem solving, designed to tackle problems as they evolve. While conditions vary across contexts, local teams can learn from one another and use similar ideas, skills, and tools to make sense of complexity and drive reductions in homelessness.

That's why three times a year we convene Built for Zero Learning Sessions: high-energy, two-day experiences that draw on our data and facilitation expertise to help participants learn new skills, partner with peers, innovative collaboratively, and take bold action quickly.

Each Session starts with a facilitated data dive, as we help communities look at their numbers from the past four months. We provide analytics support and a structured process that helps teams make their own determinations about strategy. This helps communities set ambitious new goals and break these down into concrete action plans.

After goal-setting, teams attend expert-led training and "bright spot" sessions hosted by community leaders who share successful strategies. By the end of day one, teams know exactly what they need to accomplish in the next four months, and they've loaded up on new ideas to help them do it.

"We want to build mechanisms that rapidly share and spread what's working with communities that are tackling the same problem, in order to speed up the rate at which good ideas are disseminated across the country," says Nate French, a Portfolio Lead for Built for Zero.

Built for Zero communities are challenging norms, disrupting established ways of working, and coordinating stakeholders from many different organizations to work toward a large shared goal. Coming together with other people doing this work can be energizing and even cathartic.

"What so many of our communities are doing are things that people haven't done before," says Nate. "The Learning Sessions breathe new life and energy into their teams."

To cement that energy, we close each event with appreciation— the fuel of large-scale change. The progress wall is a sprawling map displaying where each community is in its journey toward functional zero. Throughout the event we update the wall, moving each community's marker forward to reflect the advances it has made and close the session by presenting awards to each community that has reached a key milestone on its path to zero.

Communities return home reinvigorated, full of new ideas, and propelled by the power of peer learning. This rhythm of innovation— strategy and action— is the lifeblood of our work with communities, nine of which have already ended chronic or veteran homelessness. Many more are on their way toward these goals.



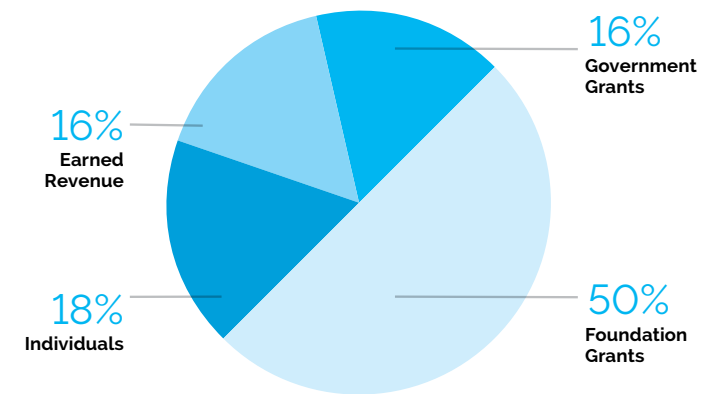
**PEOPLE ATTENDED ONE OF OUR LEARNING SESSIONS LAST YEAR**



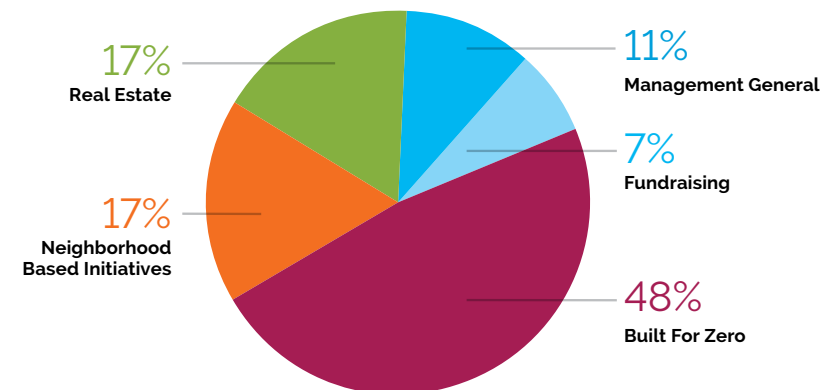
# 2017 FINANCIALS\*

\* Pre Audited

Revenue  
\$7,439,390



Expenses  
\$7,075,760



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