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How Did This Grantmaker Help Reduce Homelessness by 98 Percent?

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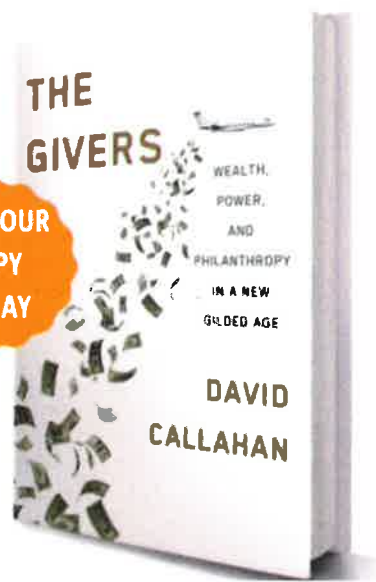




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The rate of homelessness in America has increased for the first time in seven years, according to HUD data recently released. The lack of affordable housing in West Coast cities like Los Angeles and Seattle is a major factor, here. And big East Coast cities like New York aren't seeing much progress against a problem that has long felt intractable.

But in some places around the country, major strides are being made towards decreasing chronic homelessness at the local level. And philanthropy has played a key role in such efforts. In fact, as we've been reporting, there's growing optimism among funders right now who feel like they've finally cracked the code of helping chronically homeless people, many of whom struggle with a combination of challenges that include substance abuse, mental health and a lack of job skills. A key to success with these folks turns out to be a combination of permanent housing and access to the range of social services they need to get back on their feet.

For example, we recently looked at Orlando, Florida, which has been able to reduce homelessness by nearly 50 percent over the past few years through a strategy of providing permanent supportive housing. The CEO of the Central Florida Foundation, which has played a key role in this effort, has said that licking

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homelessness is "fundable, doable and measurable."

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But CFF is not alone in making gains against homelessness in the Southeast. Heading a bit further north, a collective effort funded by the Phillips Foundation has achieved an even greater rate of homelessness reduction. Chronic homelessness in Guilford County, North Carolina, has dropped from 143 cases down to just three.

The Phillips Foundation is based in Greensboro, North Carolina, and was established by a local real estate entrepreneur in 2002. The funder provided nearly **\$2 million** over three years to a group called Partners Ending Homelessness, which is a United Way partner involved with nearly 50 homelessness-related community agencies.

The grant money is being put to use by rapidly rehousing individuals who enter a continuum of care program and providing them with resources to help them stay in their homes and become self-sufficient. At least 135 of the 143 participants in this local program have improved their lives in terms of housing stability, financial stability, and/or health for a year or longer.

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It's important to note that the population of Guilford County is around 517,600. Yet we share this hyper-local story from North Carolina as a source of inspiration for other grantmakers around the country. While homelessness is most visible in cities like Los Angeles and New York, it's also a problem in many other places. And looking to smaller municipalities for models of solutions that work can yield important lessons.

The Southeast has definitely had some successes on this front lately, but it's not the only region making progress. Perhaps most impressively, Bergen County, New Jersey, and Rockford, Illinois, achieved a sustainable zero in chronic homelessness. Now, Guilford County is a bit closer to reaching that goal, as well. A community can claim "sustainable zero" status if the number of chronically homeless individuals is at or below the monthly placement rate for housing.

There's a definite economic benefit in reducing homelessness rates. In Guilford County, for example, each case of chronic homelessness cost taxpayers \$30,000 per year in subsidized care and emergency services.

Overall, the biggest nationwide successes in reducing homelessness have been a result of joint efforts between government and nonprofits. The private sector has also been getting in on the action to help such efforts with low-interest loans, grants, financial advice and volunteers.

While there are never any silver bullets, the news from Guilford County offers more grounds for optimism that America can solve one of its most shameful social problems. "We remain hopeful that with continued community support and public-private partnership, the ultimate objective of reaching a sustainable zero in chronic homelessness is in sight, setting an example for the nation," said Elizabeth Phillips, executive director of the Phillips Foundation.

But there are dark clouds on the horizon.

The Trump administration wants to slash low-income housing subsidies, which could potentially make the homelessness problem worse and reverse some of this newfound progress.

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