

Getting Out With Nowhere to Go



*The Case for Re-entry
Supportive Housing*





Dead-Ends

Lavelle Conner, 46, estimates he's been arrested 150 times. While struggling with schizophrenia, depression, and drug addiction during his 12 years of homelessness, he slept in abandoned buildings and ate out of garbage cans. With little if any support on the outside, Lavelle faced one dead end after another. "The drugs helped my pain, so I kept taking things that weren't mine to support my habit."

"Do I go back to the abandoned houses and the garbage cans? That was always my first thought on release. And I found myself back in the same situation."

—Lavelle Conner

Lavelle's story is not unusual. Every year, our prisons and jails release almost 10 million people. **Like Lavelle, many return to impoverished neighborhoods and are trapped in a cycle of homelessness, incarceration, and health and mental health crises.** More often than not, these individuals find themselves right back in prison or jail for parole violations and quality of life crimes. Taxpayer dollars are wasted as the status quo continues and peoples' lives spiral out of control.

Of all issues facing parolees reentering communities, studies suggest that none is more immediate than the need to find a place to live. Without stable housing, returning to jail or prison is almost a given in a system where homeless people find themselves arrested again and again for violations related to homelessness, untreated mental illness, and addiction.



“Re-entry supportive housing is essentially a public safety initiative; serving to stabilize people in the community and reduce recidivism.”

—Gordon Bass, Director, Jacksonville, FL Sheriff’s Office

In addition to the mind-boggling costs in lost human potential, productivity, child and family stability, and public safety, states and cities are spending billions as a result of failed policies. Among the 20,000 mentally ill parolees exiting California prisons each year, about 3,500 become homeless. Ninety-four percent return to prison within 24 months. This alarming recidivism rate results in an equally shocking expense to the state: the average annual cost of housing a mentally ill inmate in California is \$110,000. Pricy prison mental health care does not alleviate the state’s over-burdened system. On the contrary, in 2007 the California Legislature approved a \$7.4 billion prison expansion to build 40,000 more beds. Keeping an individual incarcerated in a Chicago jail or at New York’s Riker’s Island is no less expensive and averages more than \$47,000 a year, without considering the added costs of mental health treatment.

Homelessness, Disability, and Incarceration

- More than one in three jail inmates report a disability.
- Prisons and jails treat more people with mental illness than hospitals and residential treatment facilities combined, making our jails and prisons the primary provider of mental health care in the U.S.
- Rates of shelter use are higher for people exiting prison than for people exiting mental hospitals.
- Parolees released to homelessness are at greater risk of returning to jail or prison than parolees who do not experience homelessness.
- 54% of homeless persons in shelters report previous incarceration.
- 43% of defendants with mental disorders were homeless when committing the crime for which they were arrested.
- 22% of New York City inmates were homeless the night before their arrest.

Getting On the Right Track

With the right help, Lavelle was able to turn his life around. He became a permanent supportive housing tenant through Thresholds, a Chicago-area nonprofit. Since obtaining housing, counseling, and other support services he has been living with stability for three and a half years. Lavelle no longer abuses drugs and has remained out of trouble. He has served as president of the tenant council and a consumer

“Placing people into supportive housing costs about half as much as keeping someone in jail or prison, while also promoting public safety and improving life outcomes for people”

—Martin F. Horn, Commissioner of New York City Department of Correction



Supportive housing—permanent, affordable housing linked with services that meet the needs of individuals—has emerged as a real solution that works. Services are tailored and coordinated and provide health, mental health, substance use, vocational services and benefits advocacy, and other supports necessary to help people succeed. Successful programs often begin to engage and provide services while the participant is still incarcerated.

With thousands of Lavelles ready to reenter communities across the nation every year, it’s time to ask ourselves if we can afford to continue our reliance on systems that are not working, wasting public dollars, and creating generations of people robbed of hope. Supportive housing changes the paradigm by building a bridge that allows those reentering society to cross over to more stable and productive lives.

Supportive Housing Works

Among mentally ill individuals experiencing homelessness and substance addiction, one study revealed that supportive housing yielded the following results:

- 81% of participants remained housed after one year and 63% remained housed after two years.
- Participants experienced a 56% decrease in their number of visits to the emergency room.
- Participants were admitted to the hospital 45% less frequently than before tenancy.

Other data shows that supportive housing produced:

- A 76% reduction in days spent in jail/prison in Denver.
- A 57% reduction in the rate of prison incarceration and a 30% reduction in the rate of jail incarceration among those with mental illness in New York.
- A decreased recidivism rate from 50% to 7% in Maryland.

Trail-Blazers

Nationwide, more and more cities, counties, and states are investing in supportive housing for people reentering their communities from jails and prisons. Political leaders, agencies, and nonprofit partners are breaking the cycle of incarceration and homelessness. These visionaries are providing a home and hope to people who otherwise would have no place to turn.

In **NEW YORK CITY**, the Department of Correction partners with the Departments of Homeless Services and Mental Health and Hygiene and others to break the cycle of crime and despair. Using Section 8 rental subsidies and local funding to offer services through collaborating service providers, the City sponsors a pilot program that provides 200 units of supportive housing for people exiting jail.

In **CHICAGO**, the Chicago Low Income Housing Trust Fund, in conjunction with the Mayor's Office on Re-entry and the city's housing department, uses housing vouchers (as part of the City's Plan to End Homelessness) to provide supportive housing to people cycling between homelessness and incarceration. This effort is complemented by support and resources from the state's Division of Mental Health, Cook County Criminal Courts, Cook County Jail, Cermak Hospital, and community-based organizations and providers.

In **OHIO**, the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections has invested in a supportive housing pilot program targeted to parolees at risk of homelessness. The program is linking and integrating the efforts of corrections with housing, mental and behavioral health and other agencies to more effectively and efficiently transition people back into the community.

In **LOS ANGELES**, the L.A. County Sheriff's Department is investing \$1.5 million and partnering with non-profit providers to create linkages to housing and services for people cycling between incarceration and homelessness.

Promising Outcomes

After one year of New York City's supportive housing reentry program:

- 91% of tenants remained stably housed.
- A 92% reduction in days spent in shelter.
- A 53% reduction of days spent in jail.
- Potential cost offsets to the jail and shelter system of \$2,953 per person, per year.

In Rhode Island, an evaluation of the first year of a supportive housing program targeted to the state's most vulnerable population indicated:

- A 79% decrease in jail and prison overnights.
- Decreased costs in the use of other public systems by \$29,851 per person.
- Potential cost offsets of \$7,946 per person, per year.

In Seattle, studies of supportive housing at 1811 Eastlake demonstrate:

- 52% reduction in jail bookings.
- 45% reductions in days spent in jail.

Destination Supportive Housing



Photo of Project Renewal, courtesy of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *More than a Place to Live*.

“They met me coming out of jail and showed me that I don’t have to go back to these abandoned houses. I learned that it took guidance and support to help me get my life back together...I prefer opportunities over privileges.”

—Lavelle Conner

Supportive housing is a proven method that can help reduce the high rates of recidivism experienced by people with histories of homelessness, mental illness, and other health conditions. Working together, those of us who care about our communities have a solution we can turn to and end the cycle of homelessness and incarceration. Achieving success requires commitment and action from a variety of stakeholders.

Government agencies can be aggressively involved in:

- Identifying populations with histories of homelessness, de-stabilizing health conditions, and high recidivism through multi-agency data sharing and matching.
- Promoting inter-agency collaboration between agencies with programs serving people with criminal histories, including corrections, housing, human services, and the judiciary.
- Investing criminal justice (and other agency) resources into supportive housing
- Developing pilot programs that serve this population.
- Supporting evaluations to document costs and impacts on individuals and the community.

Nonprofit and community organizations are vital contributors as well and offer:

- **HELP** — Supportive housing developers and others working with corrections officials successfully place people into the community.
- **LINKAGES** — Organizations focused on people with criminal histories partnering with supportive housing providers to better serve the population.
- **SUPPORT** — Local, grassroots groups engaging elected and appointed officials to promote successful re-entry efforts.
- **KNOWLEDGE** — Experts sharing best practices to create positive outcomes.



“The time is right to end the cycle of homelessness and incarceration in this country. It will require commitment and imagination, but will generate a transformation in the lives of everyone who gains a place in the community and gets the chance to live with dignity.”

*—Deb DeSantis,
CSH President & CEO*

CSH is the Leader in Supportive Housing

CSH is working in a number of states to end the cycle of incarceration and homelessness. CSH can assist your community by:

- Helping identify populations with high recidivism rates who could benefit from supportive housing.
- Collaborating with government and partner agencies to promote more effective programs.
- Providing technical assistance.
- Sharing best practices.
- Developing cutting-edge models for attracting investments in supportive housing.
- Conducting comprehensive evaluations to document cost savings.
- Steering philanthropic and government funds to projects.



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For information about how your
community can learn more
contact reentry@csh.org or
visit our website www.csh.org

*"We can either waste money
keeping people homeless, or
we can spend those dollars
on long-term solutions that
produce positive results."*

**—Ohio State Supreme Court
Justice Evelyn Straton**