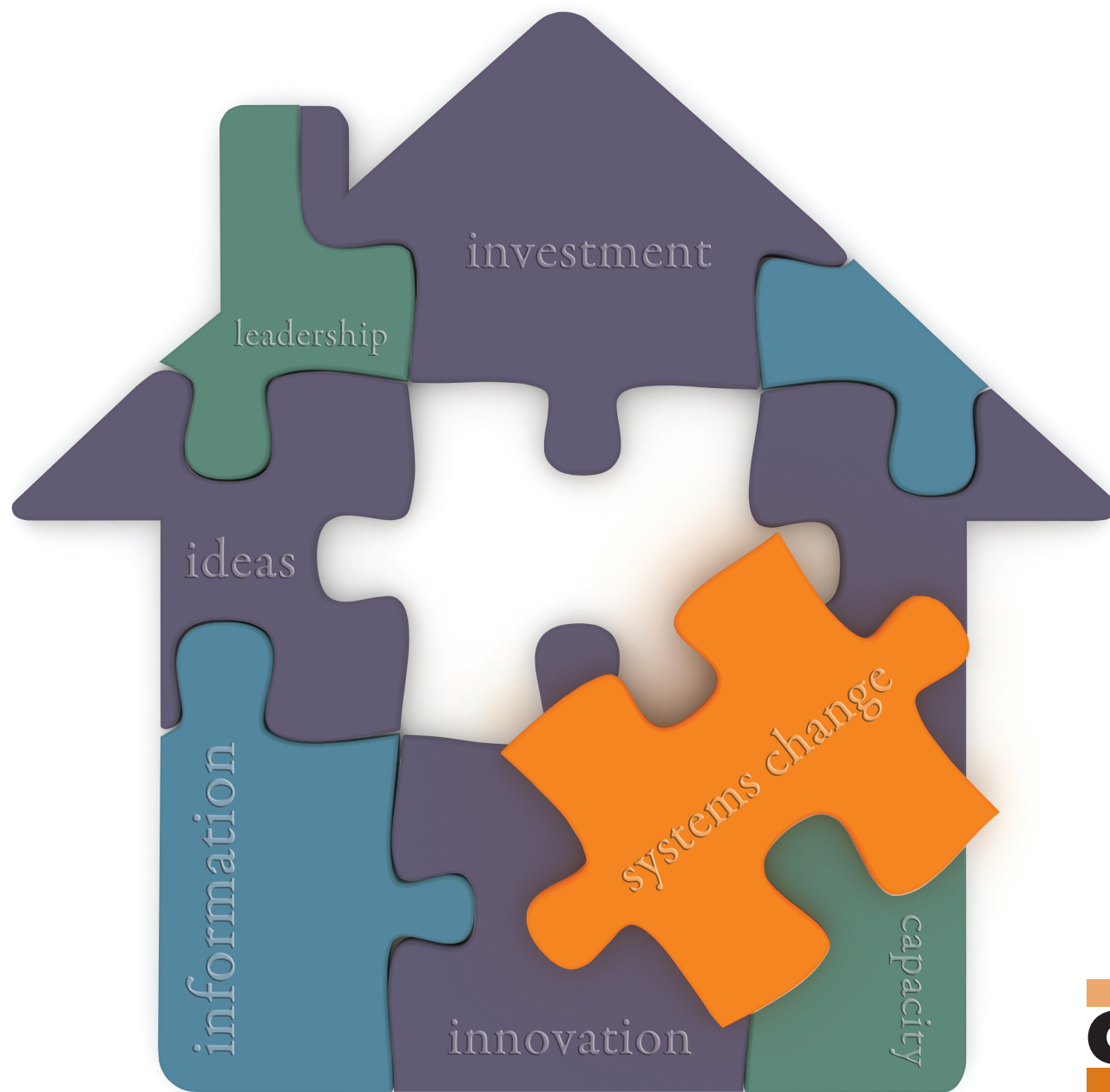


Ending Homelessness

THROUGH SYSTEMS CHANGE



For almost two decades, the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) has pursued the goal of ending homelessness for people with chronic health and behavioral health issues.

CSH has worked intensively at both the national level and the local level to promote supportive housing, a cost-effective combination of housing and services for people with complex challenges. Years of persistent effort have changed public and private systems, created more cross-system collaboration, and expanded the availability of supportive housing.

With this backdrop, CSH sought to expand its reach and help places beyond its hub locations to achieve the same impact. This brief summarizes the scope and impact of a variety of strategies that began and received significant support as part of Taking Health Care Home (THCH), a major CSH initiative supported with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that ran from 2003 through early 2010.¹



The Taking Health Care Home Initiative

In 2003, CSH received funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to launch Taking Health Care Home, a national effort designed to prevent and end long-term homelessness for people with chronic health conditions including mental illness, alcohol and chemical dependency, HIV/AIDS, and other chronic conditions. The effort was aimed at changing the way that housing, health and social support services are financed, organized, and delivered to serve these individuals. The goal was to make access to initial capital and ongoing operating and services funding for permanent supportive housing easier and more reliable to obtain.

As part of this initiative, CSH regranting THCH funds to selected states and localities to provide supports for them to create new systems able to produce supportive housing. THCH resources also funded other activities, described in this brief, that were intended to extend CSH's reach to localities where it does not have an office. Some of these strategies targeted the general audience of policy makers and practitioners interested in supportive housing, some targeted specific stakeholders at the national level, some were designed to stimulate interest and commitment in local communities, and some provided resources to local CSH office staff.

Systems Change Strategies

CSH developed a number of strategies to achieve systems change, described below, which have proven very effective:

1. Inspiring commitment to supportive housing,
2. Building agency and provider capacity to create supportive housing,
3. Organizing and sharing information and research, and
4. Making major investments in communities poised for change.

¹ The full evaluation report, "Promoting Systems Change in New Communities: Effective Strategies for Going 'Beyond the Footprint'" can be found on CSH's website, www.csh.org.

Strategy 1: Inspiring Commitment to Supportive Housing

To reach its goal of ending long-term homelessness by creating adequate supplies of supportive housing, CSH knew that it would have to inspire many communities throughout the country to adopt this goal as their own. To further this strategy, CSH used THCH funds to generate enthusiasm about and build commitment to supportive housing. These activities — which target people in positions to modify public policies, increase collaboration among public and private agencies and allocate public resources — were deployed at the local, state, and federal levels. They were designed to introduce the concept of supportive housing to new communities, agencies, and organizations; share information and best practices about providing housing and services to vulnerable populations; and generate consensus and commitment to supportive housing as an effective strategy for ending long-term homelessness. Activities varied but included the following:

- **Supportive Housing Leadership Forums (SHLFs)** brought together teams of decision makers, champions, and opinion leaders from selected states and local communities to share their experiences and get energized for the next stage of work.
- **Peer-to-Peer Visits** brought local officials from communities where supportive housing was not a household word to one or more communities with highly developed supportive housing and local political supports.

- **National Strategic Partnerships and Advocacy** encouraged national trade associations representing directors of state housing finance, mental health, substance abuse, and other agencies to make policy decisions at the national level that could engage their state and local counterparts in developing supportive housing.

People interviewed for the THCH evaluation described the ways that participation in these activities contributed to their communities “seeing the light,” “buying the concept,” “turning them around,” and similar expressions of enthusiasm and commitment. Some of the accomplishments of this work include:

- Substantially increased commitment to supportive housing in Texas and Indiana, culminating in local and other funding to open CSH offices in both places;
- Commitment of new public resources for supportive housing, including:
 - Indiana state agency commitment to support a CSH office and Supportive Housing Institutes;
 - \$3 million of city funding in Fort Worth for services in supportive housing;
 - \$20 million in state funds for supportive services in the eight largest cities in Texas;
- Changes to the Texas Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) that make it easier for supportive

housing projects to access the Low Income Housing Tax Credit; and

- A memorandum of understanding between the National Council of State Housing Agencies (NCSHA) and the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) that led to increased collaboration between state housing and mental health agencies in many states across the country.

Texas Peer-to-Peer Visits

In April 2007, CSH coordinated a peer-to-peer visit to Seattle for a number of stakeholders in Texas. Participants described the event as “really stellar” and an “aha moment” about supportive housing as a solution to homelessness in their own community. A second peer-to-peer was organized specifically for Fort Worth stakeholders including the mayor, city council members, and the director of planning and development. This event resulted in a substantial commitment to supportive housing in the ten-year plan and new city funds for services in supportive housing.

Strategy 2: Building Agency and Provider Capacity to Create Supportive Housing

Achieving a state or local commitment to end long-term homelessness through supportive housing is only the first step. Most communities making this commitment do not initially have the knowledge, skills, or capacity to fulfill their commitment. While Strategy 1 targeted decision makers and champions and was designed to build commitment, Strategy 2 was designed to build public agency and provider capacity once a commitment has been made. Local CSH offices used activities within this strategy to expand the number and type of developer and service agencies involved in supportive housing and to help them form strong collaborative partnerships. They recruited promising agencies from geographical areas where supportive housing was scarce or nonexistent, as well as those from major metropolitan areas that do not have adequate supplies of supportive housing to end or prevent long-term homelessness. These agencies received training and technical assistance to help them become high-quality supportive housing developers and providers. CSH also worked closely with communities to develop and implement strategic plans to end homelessness by creating an adequate supply of supportive housing. Specific activities included the following:

- **Supportive Housing Institutes** brought together teams of developers and providers to help them understand each step in the process

of creating and operating supportive housing. CSH-New England created the template for these Institutes in 2005 using THCH funds. Since then, seven additional CSH offices have offered the Institute at least once (Illinois, Indiana, Los Angeles, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Texas), and CSH-New England also continues to run these Institutes.

- **Other training** occurred at conferences, at full- or part-day training sessions, and through work with planning and implementation groups working from the state level on down. CSH continues to offer hundreds of training sessions per year at local and national events.
- **Consulting and technical assistance** was provided by CSH in many forms, from extensive work over many months to limited engagements of one or two conference presentations or group facilitations. These services continue to be available to interested communities.

The result of this work has been a greatly increased capacity within state and local agencies to facilitate supportive housing development. The Supportive Housing Institute stimulated a tremendous expansion of supportive housing development teams and the creation of thousands of new units of supportive housing. Communities including cities, counties, local regions, tribes, and whole

states have benefited from help to develop strategic or ten-year plans for supportive housing, implementation schedules, financial models, pilot supportive housing projects for specific subpopulations among long-term homeless people, and approaches to engaging new partners in the various aspects of supportive housing.

Supportive Housing Institute

CSH has used the Supportive Housing Institute to build provider capacity across the country. In total, CSH has conducted 28 Institutes in ten states involving over 250 developer/provider teams. This work has resulted in thousands of new units of supportive housing.



Strategy 3: Organizing and Sharing Information & Research

People in the supportive housing world look to CSH to provide concise and up-to-date information about best practices on a wide array of topics related to supportive housing. Issues range from the nitty-gritty of operating housing units to the strategic concerns of getting multiple public agencies to work together and the best ways to foster community-wide commitments to end homelessness. For the work conducted under THCH, the effectiveness of Strategies 1 and 2 depend on having essential information easily available. Activities — some of which were initially funded under THCH — included:

- **Developing basic framing and analytical documents.** THCH supported CSH staff and others to create basic documents that address specific issues such as using Medicaid to pay for supportive services, financing supportive housing through state housing finance agencies, conducting cost avoidance studies, estimating the need for supportive housing, and addressing the housing needs of frequent users of crisis public services.
- **Creating toolkits.** Toolkits are the essential building blocks of CSH's training activities, and also serve as quick and reliable resources on specific topics. They contain many examples of best practices in their particular area of focus, as well as presentations, handouts, and exercises. Toolkits created by CSH address topics such as basic supportive housing project development and operations, employment and training for supportive housing tenants, and assuring quality in supportive housing.
- **Conducting research and evaluation.** Evaluations of CSH's major initiatives — including THCH, the Returning Home Initiative (preventing homelessness among people leaving jails and prisons), and the California Frequent Users of Health Services Initiative — have described key outcomes and identified important success factors and barriers that will help communities interested in establishing similar programs for their own residents.
- **Maintaining a website and producing material for it.** Many people's first experience of CSH is through its website, where they can find descriptions of its activities, toolkits, policy positions and analyses, short pieces describing populations in need of supportive housing and types of programs to meet their needs, publications, and results of evaluations it has conducted.
- **Making conference and meeting presentations.** This is a basic way of "spreading the word," allowing CSH to reach a wide variety of audiences and address both general and specialty interests.

- **Having a "knowledge manager" or "librarian"** who can respond to information requests quickly and definitively.

The wide range of stakeholders for whom this information is intended, and who use it extensively, include funders and decision makers at every level of the public and private sector, providers and potential providers of supportive housing, researchers and evaluators, proposal writers, reporters, and the interested public.

CSH Resources

CSH has a wide variety of resources on supportive housing, including toolkits, training resources, financing guides, and information on research and evaluation. These resources are available on CSH's website: www.csh.org.



Strategy 4: Making Major Investments in Communities Poised for Change

In addition to the many activities that CSH used to extend its ability to help communities beyond its geographical footprint, as part of Strategies 1, 2, and 3, CSH designed THCH to explore what would happen if it made a major investment in selected communities. The object of this strategy was to see whether a large but short-term investment could help communities accomplish and sustain significant system change without having a local CSH presence.

In three THCH communities — Maine, Portland/Multnomah County, and Seattle/King County — which were funded with this interest in mind, the THCH investment paid off in many ways:

- **Extensive system change occurred** during the period of THCH funding.

- **Development has continued** after THCH funds ended, indicating that the collaborations and commitments made as part of THCH have continued and expanded to the benefit of long-term homeless people in those communities.
- **These three communities have served as models** for others desiring to follow their path of development and as hosts for many peer-to-peer visits arranged by CSH and others. They have also shared their experiences and models at many national and state conferences.



Impact of Major Investments in THCH Communities

The investments that CSH made in three communities — Seattle/King County (WA), Portland/Multnomah County (OR), and Maine — have resulted in significant change that continues even after the grant period:

- Seattle created a Funders Group, a collaboration of public agencies that continues to produce a pipeline of new supportive housing units for single adults and families.
- Portland created a ten-year planning process that continues to be a model for other jurisdictions interested in integrating the goals of all community stakeholders.
- Maine created a position focused on homelessness within the governor's cabinet making it easier to negotiate collaborative approaches to developing supportive housing.

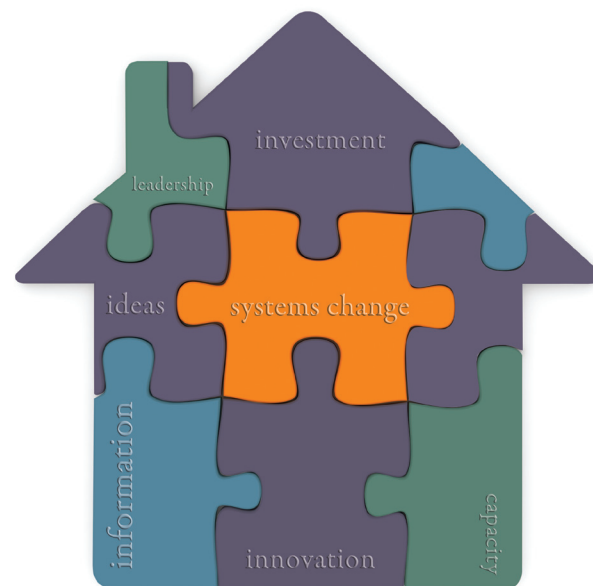
Lessons Learned

Continuing to use all of these strategies and activities in concert will continue to give CSH a far greater geographical reach than its own “footprint” and will bring the organization closer to achieving its ultimate mission. The allies gained in the process of implementing these strategies, spread as they are throughout the United States in communities of every size, are living testimony that system change to end homelessness through supportive housing is possible and practical.

The THCH evaluation provides guidance to CSH and other organizations and agencies attempting to create systems change in their communities:

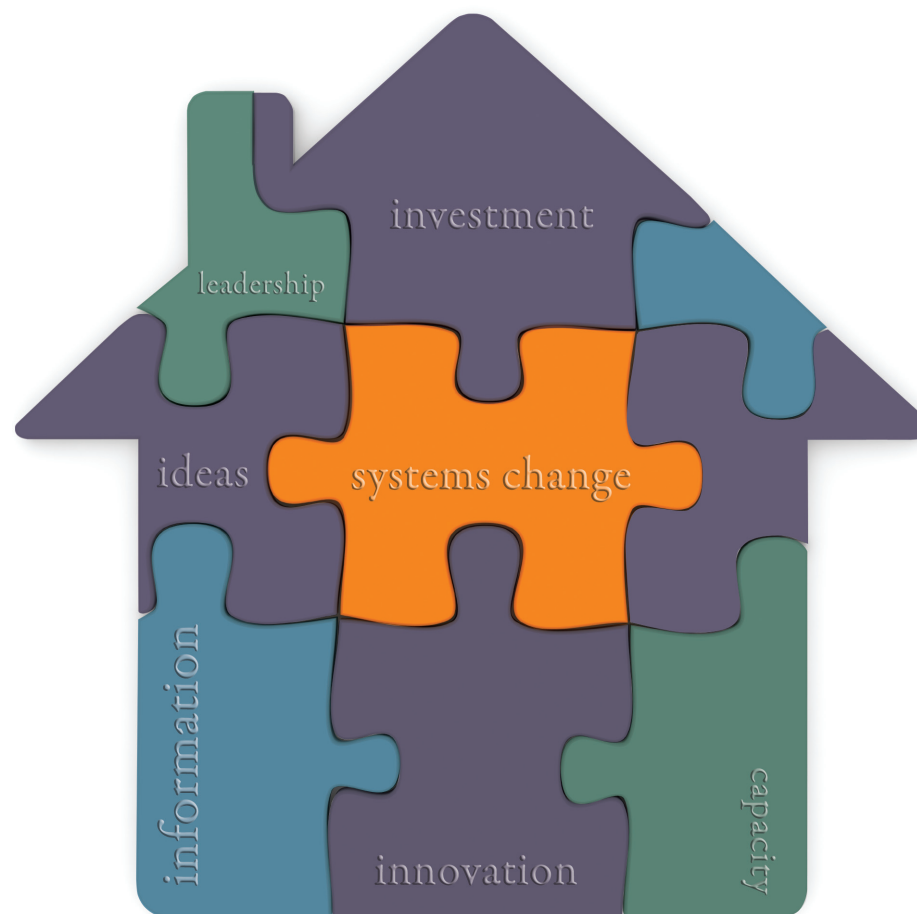
- **In almost every instance, systems change happens because of the work of “champions” who bring together partners from the necessary agencies and sectors that control the resources needed to finance supportive housing on a large scale.** CSH can support the cultivation and work of these champions and provide the strategic guidance necessary to help them build and manage partnerships and collaboration.
- **Supportive housing requires a strong non-profit industry to ensure that public investments result in quality supportive housing projects.** Through the Supportive Housing Institute, training on the Dimensions of Quality and other capacity building activities, CSH can help work with local champions and their partners to strengthen the industry of non-profit developers and service providers.
- **The foundation for systems change can be established by arming “champions” with the wealth of evidence regarding supportive housing’s cost-effectiveness, and information and knowledge around how supportive housing is financed and brought to scale.** Through comprehensive resources and toolkits, CSH can assist people, organizations, and agencies in those communities to make their colleagues and stakeholders aware of the transformative impact that supportive housing can have on their community’s chronic homelessness and related policy problems.
- **For communities that have reached a “tipping point” with regard to systems change — where elected and appointed officials, and leaders in the non-profit sector are in agreement about the importance of investing resources in supportive housing — a major strategic investment of philanthropic resources can help push the community to make that final step of aligning public systems and financing.** CSH’s major investments under THCH achieved this push in several communities.

The THCH strategies examined in this report are essential to extending CSH’s impact and exporting the innovation of supportive housing to more communities and sectors across the country. The words heard most often about CSH during this and other aspects of the THCH evaluation were “catalyst,” “expertise,” “neutral on local politics while committed to supportive housing,” and “invaluable.” The strategies THCH supported are central to creating and maintaining these testimonials everywhere CSH works. These strategies, which serve as stimulus and catalyst, are vital to CSH’s expanding mission.



About the Corporation for Supportive Housing

The Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) is a national non-profit organization and community development financial institution that helps communities create permanent housing with services to prevent and end homelessness. Founded in 1991, CSH advances its mission by providing advocacy, expertise, leadership, and financial resources to make it easier to create and operate supportive housing. CSH seeks to help create an expanded supply of supportive housing for people, including single adults, families with children, and young adults, who have extremely low-incomes, who have disabling conditions, and/or face other significant challenges that place them at on-going risk of homelessness. For information about CSH, please visit www.csh.org.



50 Broadway, 17th Floor, New York, NY 10004

For more information, please contact CSH:

212.986.2966 www.csh.org info@csh.org