

Report from HFPC to the REACH Team:

First, I want to tell each of you how much I appreciated the support you gave me to attend this conference. There were over 800 people in attendance and I made some very significant contacts for my understanding of Housing First.

My main take away is that Housing First is not just a model for homeless programs. It is a movement within a much broader movement that is trying to change how we think and talk about poverty in this nation. Housing is a central source of stress and the absence of available and truly affordable housing is a contributing factor in the number of homeless we see on our streets. In addition, I much more aware of the meaning of the word “supportive” in the idea of Permanent Supportive Housing. People who have become chronically homeless are in need of a circle of support as they adjust to living in their own place. I am more than ever appreciative of the work of our social work team. And I now have a new better understanding of what is called a ‘harm reduction’ approach to client driven support.

I also learned the many of the successful HF organizations have a large team with differing roles:

- Case manager
- Housing manager
- Health care manager
- Psychological and psychiatric manager.

So Andy, Ashlee, and Kevin, how do you do it?

What all this means to me is that when we added “Advocacy” to our name we have become a part of this movement. And I have picked up some clues about how we might become better at advocacy. First, it is clear to me that we cannot do this alone. We need to help form and become a member of a coalition for the creation of supportive housing in Rochester. I have learned that there are many groups who have a vested interest in a successful Housing First model for Rochester:

- The police department who often deal on the frontline with homeless people often involving serial arrests at great cost to the city.
- Hospital administrators who treat many of the homeless in their emergency rooms.
- Educators who have to deal with homeless children, and children in homes stressed by the cost of housing.
- Political leaders who have to foot the bills of medical and public safety concerns.
- Business leadership who want the homeless off their streets.

So, one of our projects could be gathering the data and forming relationships with these stakeholders to expand the idea why Housing First is a good public housing model that will save the city and the county in the long run.

Along with the centrality of housing as an issue in the fight against poverty, I also became aware of some new insights into the issue of addiction. Too often we are treating this as an issue of poor choice rather than an issue of health. One most helpful workshop introduced me to the concept of what happens to our brains when we live with stress, and the longer we live with stress and treat it with drugs, the longer it takes for us to heal. All this gave me a sense of how much education needs to take place in our communities for a better understanding of our homeless population.

I began to speculate on another kind of advocacy. REACH could create an educational module that we could offer to communities of faith and invite them to join us in becoming advocates of the HF model.

This whole experience has deepened my own sense of commitment to doing all that I can to end homelessness. For me this is both a matter of compassion and justice. Thank you again for encouraging me to be here.

Peter

Peter W. Peters, Co-Chair of REACH Advocacy.