

Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, Denver

The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to work towards the creation of lasting solutions for homeless families and individuals throughout Colorado. CCH provides a range of housing, emergency assistance, health care, mental health counseling, and other supportive services to more than 12,000 homeless families and individuals in the state each year.

Renaissance Housing Development Corporation (RHDC) is a subsidiary of the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless. CCH and RHDC have developed more than 1,200 housing units in the Metro Denver area in the past 10 years. The Renaissance Housing Model is focused on integrating formerly homeless families and individuals into mixed income housing developments that enhance the neighborhoods in which they are located. At each Renaissance housing site, one-third of tenants have special health needs and are formerly homeless or at risk of homelessness; two-thirds of tenants pay higher but affordable rents and do not require supportive services. This financing strategy helps CCH provide more highly subsidized housing with supportive services to PSH tenants.



Renaissance at Civic Center Apartments

Renaissance at Civic Center Apartments, located in a building renovated by CCH that formerly housed the downtown YMCA, provides affordable housing in the heart of Denver's expensive "luxury loft" market. Completed in 2004, this housing site currently has 216 affordable rental units with 72 of these providing critical housing to both homeless and at-risk individuals with chronic mental illness and other difficulties. The units also provide housing to residents of Denver who could not otherwise afford to live downtown. In 2004, Renaissance at Civic Center Apartments received the Downtown Denver Partnership's Celebration of Achievement Award.



Off Broadway Lofts

Renaissance Off Broadway Lofts, completed in 2002, were the first newly-constructed, affordable rental lofts in Denver's history. Located adjacent to CCH's Stout Street HCH Clinic, the 81 unit complex is a mixture of studio, one and two-bedroom units over a two-story parking garage. Twenty-four of the units are targeted for individuals who are formerly homeless and the remaining units are rented to downtown workers who otherwise could not afford to live near their jobs. Off Broadway Lofts also houses CCH's Housing First program. (More information about CCH's housing properties for homeless individuals and families is available at: http://donate.coloradocoalition.org/housing_development/properties%20list.htm)

CCH uses a range of housing models as a part of substance abuse treatment for clients in recovery: a Housing First (low-barrier, non-ADFC) program and "sober" (ADFC) housing for clients actively engaged in treatment. Scattered-site as well as congregate housing units are served by mobile Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams. The Housing First program is based on the harm reduction housing model pioneered by Sam Tsemberis' Pathways to Housing program in New York. Residents are required only to meet twice a month with a case manager, have a representative payee if they have SSI/SSDI, and focus on modifying their behavior if they are at risk of eviction (which may require daily intervention involving motivational interviewing/engagement).

CCH has found that Housing First results in better outcomes for people for whom treatment services cannot be mandated, including dually diagnosed individuals with primary mental illness: improved health and mental health status, less substance use, and better engagement (which occurs within approximately 18 months post admission to the CCH Housing First program). (Rosenheck, Kaspro, and Frisman (2003) reported similar data in response to research questions about health, mental health status, and substance use.)

Outcomes of the Denver Housing First Collaborative (DHFC), 2 years following inception:

DHFC, one of 11 programs funded nationally through the Ending Chronic Homeless Initiative program, is a partnership between CCH, Denver Department of Human Services, Denver Health and Hospitals Association, Arapahoe Housing Substance Treatment, the Mental Health Center of Denver, and the Denver VA Medical Center. The following outcomes have been documented for the first two years of the program (Jan. 2004 – Mar. 2006):

- Overall reduction of emergency services costs by 72.95%; average emergency services cost reduction of \$31,545 per person
- 77% of program participants initially housed are still housed in the program
- 50% of participants have improved their health status
- 43% improved mental health status
- 15% decreased substance abuse
- 64% improved overall quality of life
- 34% obtained SSI, SSDI, VA or OAP disability benefits through assistance by the program
- 15% are employed or seeking employment
- Ave monthly income increased from \$185 at entry to \$431 currently
- ER visits decreased by 34%
- Inpatient visits decreased by 40%; inpatient nights decreased by 80%
- ER costs decreased 34%, inpatient costs decreased 52%; outpatient costs increased by 51% (ave. cost increase \$894 per person); total health costs decreased by 44%
- 81% reduction in average detox costs
- 76% reduction in days incarcerated and incarceration costs
- Shelter cost savings for 150 participants: \$4.7 million over 2 years
- Average cost change per person (pre-post program entry): \$4,745; projected savings for 150 participants: \$711,734

Whether permanent supportive housing is developed by direct service providers or by affordable housing developers, the key factor is that the program be mission driven, according to CEO John Parvensky — i.e., that there be a commitment to serve the most vulnerable populations as a matter of social justice. Successful PSH programs are also personality driven; success is partially explained by the passion of their founders. Most of the differences among PSH programs derive from historical differences in their program mission, he says. For example, CCH was initially a housing initiative; Central City Concern in Portland began as primarily a substance abuse treatment and recovery initiative; Project Renewal in New York began as an alcohol detoxification program for public inebriates.

Tim Marshall, Director of Residential Services, stresses the importance of having “many tools in your toolbox” to meet the many different needs of homeless individuals. It is difficult, if not impossible, to say which model of PSH works best for particular disorders or demographic groups, he says. Client choice and case manager preference help guide the assignment of particular individuals to CCH housing units, but individual outcomes are unpredictable. Some people suddenly do well after many unsuccessful attempts at recovery.