Solutions for Homelessness

Global, National, and Local Interventions

Alenka Beralas, Holly Howell, Rebecca Goodsell

ABSTRACT

Homelessness is an issue on a global scale. Countries around the world are working on finding positive solutions to deal with their homeless populations. Case studies from Finland and Canada will be reviewed, regarding their past and current strategies. States throughout the U.S. have taken different approaches to solving homelessness. The successes and drawbacks of these approaches will be discussed. In instances where local governments have been resistant to implement solutions and provide resources, grassroots organizations and local faith groups have stepped in to provide intriguing solutions. The state of Utah has initiated at least two programs that have received national recognition. The Rapid Re-housing program gained popularity because of the 75 percent of recipients that are first placed in temporary housing as part of the program exit into permanent housing. Housing First, is one of two recognized programs due to the simple fact that individuals are provided housing with lowered requirements, allowing far more individuals to qualify. Cache County has more limited resources than other counties, however the Cache Community Food Pantry, several housing assistance programs, and the Cache Valley Veterans Association have been established. The Logan City Housing Authority is one housing assistance program, and like the other housing assistance programs, it relies on government grants and funding by HUD in order to operate.

BACKGROUND

Homelessness is a societal issue that is being fought all over the world. It is a universally known problem without a universal solution. The research for this project takes the homelessness problem and directs it toward the community level, looking for solutions within Cache County. A targeted area of study is existing resources that can be modified or used in finding a solution to homelessness in this area. There is a lack of knowledge and use of such resources that may be inhibiting individuals from receiving the help that they might need. This project is being conducted in order to investigate public awareness of current programs for homeless individuals and the overall beliefs of the homelessness issue. This brief will describe some of the approaches to homelessness on a global, state, and local scale in hopes that the comparison of all three may provide insight or simply a starting point for developing a solution.

GLOBAL INTERVENTIONS

Homelessness is a global issue, and much research has been done to combat long-term homelessness throughout the world. Individual countries have attempted to develop programs and related resources to aide in lowering the overall population of homelessness. Finland and Canada, for example, through trial and error, have developed a variety of programs within their respective countries to end homelessness.

Finland

Finnish researchers Tainio and Fredriksson reviewed their government’s new “Program to Reduce Long-Term Homelessness,” (Fredriksson &Tainio, 2009). This program attempts to move from the Staircase Model to Housing First. The Staircase Model is the idea that a homeless individual needs to gain the desired abilities and status before they could progress up to the next stage of the program. Housing First, in contrast, means getting
homeless people into a home first and then helping them solve the other issues they are facing. Both ideas are not original to Finland, but the country has seen the pros and cons of each and saw a need for a more permanent transition. To fund their programs, the Finns turned to a variety of different and creative resources.

One such resource is Raha-automaatihdistys (RAY), which roughly translates to the Slot Machine Association. “RAY was established in 1938 to raise funds through gaming operations to support Finnish health and welfare organizations, and has an exclusive right in Finland to operate slot machines and casino table games, and to run a casino” (Fredriksson, 2009, p.188). Following Finland’s idea of forming a broad partnership agreement allows the financing of the program to be shared between both the state and local powers, RAY also assisted by providing 21 million towards renovating the homeless shelters (Fredriksson, 2009, 188). In addition, Finland worked on providing conventional shelters, tailored housing, rehabilitative housing, and new types of housing units (Fredriksson, 2009, p.187).

Canada

Canada decided that before jumping into any sort of program planning that they would research other international examples, like the United States, Australia, and a few European nations (Albanese, Pakeman & Turner, 2017). Additionally, defined an end to homelessness in terms of absolute zero and functional zero. This allowed them to envision a more realistic approach to solving homelessness. Homelessness that is at a manageable rate and resources are equally accessible by the homeless population is defined as Functional Zero. The end goal to have no homeless is called Absolute Zero and involves eradicating the homeless from the general population. (Albanese et al, 2017, p. 2-3). Researchers Albanese, Turner, and Pakeman clarify that “[T]hey consider achieving Functional Zero as a step towards the vision of Absolute Zero, although the latter may be more aspirational and visionary... We recommend working towards Functional Zero as we progress towards Absolution Zero, rather than considering these concepts in opposition” (Albanese et al, 2017, pg. 3-4).

Hence, rather than relocating the homeless with the “out of sight, out of mind” attitude, Canada and Finland see the benefits of housing the homeless in effort to achieve Absolution Zero. In the United States, we would do well to follow these models, and research international ideas and tailor them to fit the needs of our nation.

NATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

Many States throughout the U.S. have declared states of emergency in response to growing homeless populations and shortages of beds in homeless shelters. In response to this crisis, different approaches to providing shelter and decreasing homelessness have been implemented. Research shows that Utah and Colorado have found success in the Housing First approach (Reslock, 2016, p.34). This program focuses on getting the homeless into housing, which then allows them to focus on serious life problems such as obtaining employment.

Other states employ the rapid rehousing approach, which focuses on getting the homeless into housing as soon as possible to minimize amount of time spent homeless. It removes barriers that prevent people from obtaining shelter by helping with rent, deposits, and utilities. While useful for keeping families off the streets, research suggests that this approach is not necessarily effective for chronic homelessness (Reslock, 2016, p.36).

An alternative that other states employ is housing vouchers. HUD’s 2015 Family Options Study, concluded that housing vouchers have been shown to be more effective in reducing homelessness than rapid rehousing. In addition this program includes additional benefits, such as reducing domestic violence, substance dependence, and psychological distress (Reslock, 2016, p.36)

Despite the general acknowledgement of states of the national homeless crisis local government responses have not always been positive. In these instances solutions have been created by grass roots organizations and faith groups. A prime example is the Quixote Village. In Olympia, Washington anti-homeless regulations were put in place to disband homeless tent camps popping up in parking lots (Reslock, 2016, p. 36). Multiple churches stepped in to offer space on their properties for the homeless camps. This tent city evolved into a community resource center, with 30 small cottages, a communal kitchen, showers, and laundry.

UTAH & LOCAL INTERVENTIONS

Homelessness in Utah is a growing concern. An increasing population coupled with lack of affordable housing has seen homelessness become a primary concern of state
The following tables are a list of Utah and Cache Valley programs and resources implemented to address homelessness.

**UTAH STATEWIDE PROGRAMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rapid Re-Housing (RRH)</td>
<td>This program provides housing to individuals or families as quickly as possible. This has proven to be the preferred method so far due to the fact that 75 percent of clients that go through rapid re-housing exit the program to permanent housing. For this program to be effective, there has to be landlords willing to rent to the homeless, an RRH provider that gives financial assistance, an RRH provider that conducts case management with the client(s), and an RRH provider that assesses the immediate barriers that are keeping a client from obtaining housing (Hartvigsen et al, 2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing First</td>
<td>The program lowers the requirements needed in order to gain housing. Housing First is meant to create a stable environment so that individuals can be in the position to make changes in their lives (Hartvigsen et al, 2016). This program was part of a ten-year plan the state developed to eliminate homelessness by 2015. It had shown effective results with a 72 percent decrease of the homeless population between 2005 and 2014, and it is still being used today (Day et al, 2014).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Shelter</td>
<td>Emergency shelters provide temporary services to the homeless community. These shelters are meant mainly for overnight sleeping accommodations and can take the form of actual shelters, or even organizations such as CAPSA. Take note that 29 percent of families compared to 45 percent of individuals choose to stay in emergency shelters for various reasons (Hartvigsen et al, 2016). The Emergency Solutions Grant was established in 1986 and incorporated into the McKinney-Vento Act in 1987 and it provides funding to states for shelters and to prevent homelessness by establishing permanent housing (State of Utah, 2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Housing</td>
<td>This is another source of temporary assistance and mainly addresses subgroups such as: domestic violence victims, unaccompanied minors, and certain individuals with substance abuse problems. These individuals are placed in temporary housing for up to two years and can also be given support services such as case management (Hartvigsen et al, 2016). Traditional housing can also be considered rehabilitation and recovery homes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Housing</td>
<td>Utah is battling a gap in housing affordability (30 percent of income) and a low average renter wage. This causes an extreme shortage in affordable housing, and the continual cycle of homelessness. However, in Provo, Springville, and Summit County, there has been the funding and creation of low-income housing units that are available to house the homeless (Hartvigsen et al, 2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Food Bank</td>
<td>This program was founded in 1904 and has delivered more 38.1 million pounds of food to all 29 counties in Utah. The food is either donated or purchased with the help of government and community funding (Utah Food Bank, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran Affairs</td>
<td>This branch of the government program is based mainly out of Salt Lake City with community health clinics located in other cities. One of it’s top 3 goals is to end homelessness among veterans and they plan to do this utilizing the Rapid Re-Housing and Housing First programs. It was their goal to accomplish this task by the year 2015 using strategies of increasing employment and providing personalized care teams to support the veteran and their needs (Department of Veteran Affairs, 2013). The Utah branch has specifically put in place Veteran Service Officers (VSO) that do community outreach, along with a State Approving Agency for Veteran Education office which oversees the continual educational and vocational training for veterans. There are also several veterans homes throughout the state that shelters specifically for veterans (Harter, n.d.).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## CACHE VALLEY PROGRAMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing Assistance Programs</td>
<td>Several programs underneath this broad title that help with correcting problems with residences, obtaining a home, and housing and foreclosing counseling, all within the city of Logan, UT and with the aid of government grants (Logan City, 2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan City Housing Authority</td>
<td>This program distributes housing vouchers to families and individuals in Logan. These vouchers allow them to rent various housing residences and the Public Housing Agency pays the landlord a housing subsidy. The PHA receives funds from the HUD. They gave out 28 vouchers in the year 2016 (Affordable Housing Online, 2017).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cache Community Food Pantry</td>
<td>Established in 1970 with Bear River Association of Governments, this program relies mostly upon donations and volunteer service in order to feed the needy residents in Cache County. It is an emergency food pantry so in order to receive services, an individual has to fill out an application and provide paystubs and proof of address. The distribution of the food happens 3 days out of the week from 10am to 1pm so individuals must be available to pick up the food during those times (“Cache Community Food Bank”, n.d.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cache Valley Veterans Association</td>
<td>This is a veteran organized and veteran run program that helps veterans within Cache Valley with benefits claims, employment, education, medical assistance, and housing (Cache Valley Veterans Association, n.d.).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CONCLUSION

This brief has identified the types of models and interventions for homelessness at local, state, national and international levels. While it is not a comprehensive list it works to demonstrate some of the more innovative solutions other countries have found and take stock of the current resources of the U.S. and Utah. Through our research we suggest the need for an expansion of homeless services in Utah.

While the existing services in Utah and Cache Valley have provided vital assistance for numerous years growth is needed to meet the increase in need. As the issue of homelessness as grown in Utah due to lack of affordable housing more commitment to and ideas of how to eradicate homelessness is needed. It is hoped that the overview of models and interventions of other states and countries can serve as stimulation for further discussion and action in Utah.
REFERENCES


The TCI is a community-based research initiative that brings together faculty, students, and community leaders. We partner with human service agencies to address the pressing social needs within our local and statewide communities and social service system through research, teaching, and action.