
Community Solutions

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COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

The Problem: Over two million Americans are homeless each year, including the 20% of all homeless who are veterans, many of the over 25,000 young people who age out of foster care annually in the United States, and people who are chronically and mentally ill. There is also growing demand from other vulnerable populations, particularly the elderly and disabled, for integrated housing and support services.

The Solution: Common Ground (CG) has created award-winning, cost effective solutions to homelessness that combine housing and services. Over 20 years, the program has reduced homelessness and its costs to communities. They are now bringing the work to scale nationally through a new not for profit entity, Community Solutions. This model has proven successful to date in over 25 communities throughout the country and internationally where it has supported replications.

The Method: Using data to identify and prioritize the highest need individuals and families, the organization assists communities in creating a new, sustainable local housing system that systematically transitions the homeless from streets, shelters, hospitals and other precarious settings to stable homes linked to the health, mental health and employment help. This puts lives back on track and ends dependence on expensive emergency services and institutions. This approach has demonstrated that housing linked to health, mental health and employment assistance ends homelessness permanently at a lower cost than standard responses like shelters and other temporary, institutional approaches.

The Strategy: To support the large number of communities who wish to adopt the program—over 80 communities are now in the process of instituting this approach—Common Ground’s national division, Community Solutions, (CS) will become a separate 501 (c) 3 not for profit in 2011. CS’s management team will be led by Rosanne Haggerty, a MacArthur and Ashoka Fellow, who founded Common Ground in 1990 and has served as president since its creation. CS’s senior team is made up of current, experienced staff members who have developed the national and international programs as a division of CG since 2007. CS’s board, led by former Smith College President Jill Ker Conway, brings broad governance, strategy and financial oversight capacity. CG’s original New York City organization will continue to focus on established programs in New York City, while CS will provide its services in targeted, “tipping point” communities throughout the country characterized by high rates of homelessness/ homeless veterans; motivated local leadership and the involvement of strong national partners. To establish CS as an independent entity with sufficient capital and scale to reach their goals, CS will require \$5 million in growth capital to support expansion activities between 2012 and 2015 and a \$2 million real estate pre-development and acquisition fund.