



HOUSING FIRST: Reaching Nearly 9 Million Media Consumers through Messaging and Earned Media Strategy

The Issue: Ending long-term (chronic) homelessness in Cuyahoga County and in the City of Cleveland, Ohio.

For the past 15 years, the Housing First initiative in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, has worked to reduce long-term (chronic) homelessness by providing rent-subsidized permanent housing, medical care, mental health, recovery and employment services to help individuals

Housing First's Successes to Date

- 13 buildings, 781 units
- More than 100 scattered site units for adults
- \$131.1 million in total capital investments
- 86 percent drop in long-term homelessness since Housing First began in 2006
- Only 3 percent return to shelter after exiting Housing First
- On pace to end long-term homelessness in Cuyahoga County by 2020

integrate back into their communities. Housing First serves long-term homeless individuals, who are defined as individuals who have been homeless for at least one year, or at least four episodes totaling 12 months of homelessness in the past three years, and who have a disability. These individuals comprise about 20 percent of Cuyahoga County's overall homeless

population, but before moving into the housing, these individuals utilized about 70 percent of emergency resources for homeless individuals when cycling in and out of shelters, jails, emergency rooms and the streets.

Housing First has had remarkable success, cutting the rate of long-term homelessness by 86 percent in Cuyahoga County. The initiative's lead organizations wanted to pursue a media campaign to earn positive media attention for this highly successful work. Advocacy & Communication Solutions, LLC (ACS) formulated a messaging and media strategy that reached nearly 9 million viewers/listeners/readers in Northeast Ohio.

The Housing First initiative is led by Enterprise Community Partners and has four other

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community partners to implement the initiative (Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland, CHN Housing Partners, EDEN Inc., and FrontLine Service). The initiative will break ground on its 13th and final permanent supportive housing building in summer of 2018, which, when complete in 2020, will provide enough housing for long-term homeless individuals across the county and into the future. Housing First had a great story to tell, but with so many partners at the table, it had been historically difficult for the partners to agree on consistent messaging and strategies to approach the media.

The ACS Approach:

ACS worked with Housing First in a short-term engagement on a messaging and media outreach strategy. The goals of the media strategy were to celebrate Housing First's success; to educate the community about Housing First and its impact on the community; to share best practices; and to boost momentum and recommit partners to sustain the initiative over the long term. This strategy included:

- 1. Messaging Development:** ACS helped Housing First refine a comprehensive messaging framework that consists of core messages, media talking points, audience-specific messages, an elevator speech, and a boilerplate description of the initiative.
- 2. Spokesperson Training:** ACS developed a custom media spokesperson training for more than a dozen of the initiative's experts to prepare them for media interviews. The training also gave the spokespeople strategies for answering difficult questions and included mock interviews.
- 3. Media Strategy Development:** ACS formulated a strategy for local media and national trade media outreach. This strategy included recommendations for target publications and specific reporters.
- 4. Media Outreach:** ACS embarked on an earned media outreach campaign to highlight the work of the Housing First partners. The ACS approach ensured equal media representation of the five Housing First partners by featuring different spokespeople who worked from consistent messaging and media talking points.

“ACS did an incredible job for Housing First. We were impressed by their work and who they are as people. Thank you on behalf of the hundreds of people who won't be living on the streets and in shelters in the near future.”

—Mark McDermott, vice president of Enterprise Community Partners

The Results:

Housing First's story was profiled in local television, radio, print and digital outlets, which have a combined reach of more than 8.8 million viewers/listeners/readers a month across Northeast Ohio. Housing First organizational partners were represented across the coverage, and individual partners, including a funding partner and a Cleveland City Councilman, were quoted. Significantly, *The Plain Dealer's* editorial board named Housing First's progress as one of the “Cheers” for 2017 in its Cheers and Jeers column. National League of Cities also published a case study about Housing First's approach and outcomes for its membership.

The Housing First partners applauded ACS' work and outcomes. Mark McDermott, vice president of Enterprise Community Partners, said, “ACS did an incredible job for Housing First. We were impressed by their work and who they are as people. Thank you on behalf of the hundreds of people who won't be living on the streets and in shelters in the near future.”

Susanna H. Krey, president of the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland, echoed Mark's comments. "Thanks for all your hard work in leading the team to tell this amazing story to the community," she said. "We are so pleased with the outcomes of the media outreach, and we couldn't have done this without the thoughtful guidance and expertise of ACS."

Irene Collins, executive director of EDEN, Inc., said: "This communication effort has been a terrific step forward for the Housing First Initiative. Thanks to ACS for putting in so much work and time to help us tell our story."

Outcomes

1. Cleveland Housing First

The Housing First initiative in Cleveland/Cuyahoga County, Ohio, formed in 2002 in response to all-time-high levels of long-term (chronic) homelessness in the city and county.

<http://www.nlc.org/resource/cleveland-housing-first>

2. WCPN Sound of Ideas: Net Neutrality and Housing First

A look at Housing First, a collaborative in Cuyahoga County that announced it is on pace to end long-term homelessness in the region by 2020.

<http://wcpn.ideastream.org/programs/sound-of-ideas/net-neutrality-housing-first>

3. WVIZ ideas: Long-Term Homelessness Dwindles Down in Cuyahoga County

Housing First says that it is on track to end "long-term homelessness" in Cuyahoga County by 2020. The group looks to finish its 13th project in 2019, bringing the total number of residential units to 781.

<http://www.ideastream.org/programs/ideas/long-term-homelessness-dwindles-down-in-cuyahoga-county>

Note: ideastream programs and services are used by 2.8 million people in a typical month, primarily from an 18-county service area.

4. Crain's Cleveland Business (appeared online and in print): Organizations near milestone in housing for Cuyahoga County homeless

A \$12.9 million apartment building in Brooklyn Centre may be the final puzzle piece in solving chronic homelessness in Cuyahoga County. Housing First, a collaboration of community organizations in Cuyahoga County fighting long-term homelessness, has announced it is on pace to end the problem in the county by 2020. With the construction of this new apartment building, slated to be completed in 2019, the group said the county will have enough permanent supportive housing to sustainably serve all individuals and families with disabilities who are struggling with long-term homelessness.

<http://www.crainscleveland.com/article/20171217/news/145986/organizations-near-milestone-housing-cuyahoga-county-homeless>

Note: Crains' average paid weekly circulation is 19,961. Digital readership statistics are not available.

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—Irene Collins, executive director of EDEN, Inc.

5. Cleveland.com: Housing First coalition on pace to end Cuyahoga County long-term homelessness by 2020 (290 shares via Cleveland.com)

Housing First is on track to end long-term homelessness in Cuyahoga County by 2020. Housing First will complete its 13th housing project in 2019, bringing the number of units to 781. Since 2006, the organization reduced long-term homelessness in Cuyahoga County by 86 percent, from more than 800 homeless to less than 200, according to the agency's data http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2017/12/housing_first_announces_coalit.html

6. Cleveland.com: The Best Cheers of 2017 (57 shares via Cleveland.com)

Cheers to Housing First Coalition for building housing and providing resources for the long-term homeless—those who have been homeless for 12 months either continuously or for a 12 month period within three years in Cuyahoga County—reducing their number by 86 percent. The coalition is on track for ending this scourge by 2020. http://www.cleveland.com/opinion/index.ssf/2017/12/the_bestCheers_of_2017Cheers.html

Note: *cleveland.com* is the premier news and information website in the state of Ohio attracting an average of 6 million unique users every month.

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