

# Responsive Philanthropy

## Under the Big Top

By Neil Donovan

Despite decades of efforts from government agencies, nonprofits and philanthropists, millions of Americans will experience homelessness this year, including 1.5 million children.

A true understanding of homelessness and how to end it requires recognition of its primary causes, comprehension of the consequences of failure and the involvement of key stakeholders from the beginning to the end of efforts to address this problem.

Funders Together to End Homelessness (Funders Together) is an affinity group of leading philanthropies that have chosen to dispose of their independence by harnessing the collective power and potential of its membership. With many of the funders that seek to address homelessness working under one umbrella organization, the sector has lost diversity of perspective to address a complex social issue. Additionally, input from critically important stakeholder groups, including nonprofits and homeless constituents, has largely been left out of the strategy and decision-making process; they are outside the tent – The Big Top. As a result, Funders Together has underperformed compared to the previous accomplishments of its individual members. The lasting impact of individual funders *(continued on page 8)*



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### IN THIS ISSUE

Under the Big Top BY NEIL DONOVAN	1
Maximizing the Impact and Amplifying the Voice of Philanthropy BY DAVID WERTHEIMER	1
Who Doesn't Get To Vote Should Matter to Philanthropy BY NIKI JAGPAL	3
Breaking the Wall Between Funding Direct Services and Advocacy	6
A Message from the Executive Director	2
Member Spotlight	15

*Photo courtesy of United Way of Greater Los Angeles.*

## Maximizing the Impact and Amplifying the Voice of Philanthropy

By David Wertheimer

people are homeless on any given night in America.

We tolerate homelessness among single adults, young people and families, labeling it an “intractable” social problem that can't really be solved. At Funders Together *(continued on page 11)*

We can end homelessness in America, but philanthropy must be willing to step forward and challenge the status quo.

These are the facts: The United States remains – even during a recession – one of the most economically powerful nations on the planet. Many Americans live with a comparative wealth that contrasts starkly with the lives of those across much of the globe. Our country possesses the resources required to ensure that not one resident of our communities spends a single night without a safe, decent and affordable place to live. And yet, 650,000



challenging grantmakers  
to strengthen communities

# A Message From the Executive Director



Dear Readers,

As this issue of *Responsive Philanthropy* was going into production, the Occupy Wall Street movement was picking up steam and showing signs it might have some staying power. Will the scrappy protests help ignite broad concern about issues of equity? Will the movement result in actual policy change or have electoral implications? I don't know the answer to those questions but, like many of you, I'll be following the situation closely and looking for opportunities for philanthropy to ride the wave.

This fall issue of *RP* tackles difficult questions related to "strategic philanthropy," especially as it pertains to efforts to combat homelessness. Should we be concerned that there is too much strategic thinking and collaboration in philanthropy? While the Center for Effective Philanthropy continues to tell us that most foundations aren't very strategic, nonprofits sometimes feel that the trend over the past decade toward foundations having highly developed theories of change puts funders, not communities, in the driver's seat and tends to favor linear approaches to solving complex problems. We asked two authors to contribute their perspectives on the issue.

In "Under the Big Top," Neil Donovan from the National Coalition for the Homeless makes the case that funders who care about homelessness are too narrow in their thinking about how to combat the problem, and that collaboration among funders actually is hurting

the cause by reducing the kinds of approaches funders are willing to consider. He argues that homeless people have been left out of the discussions, and that if we hope to succeed, they need to be at the center of the strategy- and decision-making that's taking place.

In "Maximizing the Impact and Amplifying the Voice of Philanthropy," David Wertheimer of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, who also serves as chair of Funders Together to End Homelessness, argues that the affinity group actually is bringing more rigor to the cause while attracting new funders. He makes a compelling case for why funders should care about this issue and for the added value that Funders Together brings to the work.

Also in this issue, we hear from Marguerite Casey Foundation and Foundation for the Mid South about the importance of combining funding for direct services with funding for advocacy and community organizing. They point out that direct services organizations often have a base of clients that can be mobilized for advocacy, and that good service work often contributes to generating practical ideas for policy solutions.

Voting rights are on the minds of many this year, and some in our nation are working to tighten restrictions on voter eligibility. They say they are concerned about voter fraud. In "Who Doesn't Get To Vote Should Matter to Philanthropy," NCRP's Niki Jagpal explores felon re-enfranchisement and argues for greater

philanthropic investment in this area. Nearly two million African American former felons are systematically denied their fundamental right to vote, a situation that Jagpal describes as antithetical to the democratic spirit of this country.

Finally, our member spotlight for this issue features the Appleseed Network. Too often, legal advocacy is overlooked by philanthropy as an avenue for reform. Appleseed shows us the tremendous opportunities for impact.

I hope you find inspiration in these pages, and that you think about your work a little differently as a result of something you read. NCRP is working to hold up a mirror to our philanthropic sector. Hopefully, this issue contributes to that.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in orange ink, appearing to read "A. Dorfman". The signature is fluid and stylized, with large loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Aaron Dorfman  
Executive Director

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# Who Doesn't Get To Vote Should Matter to Philanthropy

By Niki Jagpal

When our country was founded, numerous groups were denied the right to vote – African Americans, women, the illiterate and people convicted of felonies. However, as executive director of The Sentencing Project Marc Mauer notes, after significant advocacy and organizing to gain democratic parity, restrictions on each of these groups' right to vote were eased, with one exception: our fellow citizens with felony convictions.<sup>1</sup>

With the 2012 presidential election coming quickly upon us, the country already is kicking into campaign mode. But every election cycle serves as a painful reminder of those among us who are barred from equal participation in our democratic process.

More than 5 million people are currently ineligible to vote because of felony convictions, past or present. This should be a concern for any foundation concerned with advancing democracy. Not only is denying any individual the right to vote inherently undemocratic, it does not align with most Americans' opinion on this issue. As Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza found, most Americans believe that the right to vote should be restored once a person has served his or her time or "paid their debt to society."<sup>2</sup> In addition, because voting builds social capital, engaging in the democratic process has been shown to ease successful reintegration into society from prison.

The time to increase investments in re-enfranchisement efforts is now. Our prison population is at the highest level

ever recorded, at 2.3 million, and fully 38 percent of the disenfranchised population is African American, a figure substantially higher than the national African American population. This translates into almost 2 million African Americans being barred from voting.<sup>3</sup>

There had been some improvements in recent years as a result of efforts to re-establish voting rights for offenders and ex-offenders. For example, in November 2010, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that fully 23 states had revised their laws to allow one-time offenders to vote. However, the political right marshals significant resources in its attempts to roll back any gains these efforts made.<sup>4</sup> This is particularly ironic because several states where the laws were eased were, in fact, "red states" where Republican leaders eased voting restrictions. As noted in the *Tribune* article, restrictions on felon voting rights were eased despite the fact that some Republicans feared that most offenders and ex-offenders, a group comprising a disproportionate share of African Americans, would lean Democratic.

Grantmakers have a tremendous opportunity to play a catalytic role in advancing democracy – as overall philanthropic investments in offender and ex-offender re-enfranchisement efforts are incredibly small given the scope of the problem.

Total giving to benefit offenders and ex-offenders is appallingly low, especially with 5 million people affected and only 0.7 percent of all foundation grants from pre-recession 2004-2006





Demonstration against the Voter Obstruction and Suppression Act of 2011. Photo by Peter Patau.

classified at the Foundation Center to benefit this constituency.<sup>5</sup> In examining the top five funders of this specific group, it was the now-defunct JEHT Foundation<sup>6</sup> that provided the highest share of its grants for offenders and ex-offenders (57.7 percent of total giving). With JEHT now gone, it is worrisome to consider what share of total giving foundations now are providing to benefit this group.

The Foundation Center's 2009 *Social Justice Grantmaking II* provides some signs of hope: support for crime and justice work grew by more than one-third from 2002 to 2006, representing 3.5 percent of social justice grants made in 2006. Grant dollars increased to \$81.3 million, a rise of close to 38 percent.<sup>7</sup> However, this analysis of giving includes a range of activities, such as juvenile justice system reform and law enforcement reform, also imperative to fund but making it difficult to determine how much was specifically targeted at addressing the disenfranchisement crisis.

Such dollars are needed more than ever as right-wing activists have launched a comprehensive campaign to suppress likely Democratic voters. Uggen and Manza's analysis of the

potential impact of ex-felons having been allowed to vote in the 2000 presidential election found that just below 70 percent of these votes would have favored Al Gore. A similar analysis of senatorial races done by these researchers found that six races between 1978 and 2000 won by Republicans would have swung in favor of Democrats instead.<sup>8</sup> In a recent article in *Rolling Stone* titled "The GOP War On Voting," Ari Berman argues, "Just as Dixiecrats once used poll taxes and literacy tests to bar black Southerners from voting, a new crop of GOP governors and state legislators has passed a series of seemingly disconnected measures that could prevent millions of students, minorities, immigrants, ex-convicts and the elderly from casting ballots."<sup>9</sup> And a study published by the Brennan Center for Justice estimates that as many as 171 electoral votes could be at stake because of regressive laws passed in 13 states and pending in 21 more, all affecting the votes of underserved communities disproportionately.<sup>10</sup>

Berman highlights four overarching areas in which Republicans are working to erect barriers to voting that would affect the Democratic base disproportionately: restrictions on regis-

tration, scaling back early registration, requiring photo identification to cast a ballot and disenfranchising ex-felons.

As Berman notes, although Gov. Charlie Crist (R-Fla.) restored the voting rights of some 154,000 former convicts who had committed non-violent crimes, his successor Rick Scott overturned Crist's decision. Scott's action resulted in instant disenfranchisement of 97,491 ex-felons and denying an additional 1.1 million prisoners from voting even after they have served their time. In Iowa, Gov. Terry Branstad (R) similarly overturned his predecessor's decision to re-enfranchise 100,000 ex-felons.

Indeed, as Mauer notes, as of 2010, imprisoned felons in every state except for Vermont and Maine are ineligible to vote; in 35 states, parolees and individuals on probation also are ineligible; and in 12 states, individuals who already have served their time for felony convictions are not allowed to vote.<sup>11</sup>

With a well-financed and centrally coordinated campaign being waged by Republicans to suppress the Democratic voter base, civil rights groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union and its state affiliates are working hard to try to overturn these regressive policies and tactics. The ACLU has received funding from the Open Society Foundations and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in the past, demonstrating these funders' commitment to democratic parity. Other organizations such as the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and less well-known groups such as the Hampton Roads Missing Voter Project in Virginia and The Michigan Participation Project also work on this salient issue.

The disenfranchisement efforts affect marginalized groups so much they raise the question: What can foundations do to help avert such a campaign? By providing groups such as those listed above

to ensure participatory parity at the ballot box with significant funds targeted explicitly to benefit offenders and ex-offenders, philanthropy has an opportunity to play a catalytic role in advancing democracy. Because most of these groups use advocacy and community organizing to confront barriers to democratic participation, foundations could provide at least 25 percent of their grant dollars for this civic engagement work to counter the well-financed Republican attacks on voting rights.

With large sums of money being provided to the American Legislative Exchange Council, a conservative advocacy group founded by Paul Weyrich and funded by Charles and David Koch, nearly 40 states introduced legislation that would curtail voting rights in some

way since 2010. Consider Weyrich's 1980 opinion that he does not want everyone to vote because "our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down."<sup>12</sup>

As Mauer notes, denying any group a fundamental civil right is unique to felon disenfranchisement. And as law professor Debra Parkes contends, "[T]he reality that prisoners may have an impact on the outcome of elections is an argument in favor of allowing them to vote rather than against it."<sup>13</sup>

By no means should any reader surmise that felons would vote in a uniform way. However, studies demonstrate that people from similar socio-economic and demographic backgrounds tend to vote along similar lines. If the well-funded Republican campaign to suppress the Democratic vote truly is "the most significant setback to voting rights in this country in a century,"<sup>14</sup> as stated by Judith Browne-Dianis of the civil rights group Advancement Project, grantmakers, especially those with missions that explicitly state a commitment to advancing equity and democracy, have an obligation to counter this movement and to do it now.

Philanthropy needs to do all it can to ensure democratic parity come 2012. By failing to do so, the likes of Weyrich and the Koch brothers' philanthropic advocacy will likely succeed in orchestrating an unfair election with a dubious outcome. ■

*Niki Jagpal is research and policy director of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy.*

## Notes

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11. Mauer, *op.cit.*
12. Berman, *op.cit.*
13. Mauer, *op.cit.*
14. Berman, *op.cit.*

As many as 171 electoral votes could be at stake because of regressive laws passed in 13 states and pending in 21 more, all affecting the votes of underserved communities disproportionately.

# Breaking the Wall Between Funding Direct Services and Advocacy

*Editor's note: We've heard many grantmakers say that the reason they don't fund advocacy and community organizing is because they fund direct services. They seem to be under the assumption that funding one precludes funding the other. We hope to dispel this myth by featuring two foundations that fund important social services their communities need as well as policy and civic engagement efforts that seek to address the root causes of critical social issues. May their stories inspire other foundations to break the imagined silos.*

## MARGUERITE CASEY FOUNDATION: Supporting Families, Leading Change

By Kathleen Baca and Cheryl Milloy

Marguerite Casey Foundation is dedicated to creating a movement of working families advocating on their own behalf for change. We fund cornerstone community-based organizations that train leaders, advocates and organizers to work for changes in public policy. We ask grantee organizations to work across issues, regions, ethnici-

ties and egos in support of all families. Our grantmaking and communications support movement building in an effort to bring about much needed change in policy and public attitudes that negatively affect poor and low-income families.

We do not fund direct services but rather provide general support to community organizations, some of which provide direct services along with engaging families in organizing and advocacy. We know from experience that providing unrestricted, long-term grants

is a direct and efficient way to effect change at the grassroots level. Since its inception, Marguerite Casey Foundation has provided long-term general support grants to community organizations. We find these organizations not by soliciting proposals, but by relying on community members to point us toward specific groups already successfully engaging low-income families in policy solutions. We believe that unless poor families are leading the efforts for policy change, their issues will never be addressed.

## FOUNDATION FOR THE MID SOUTH: Expanding Knowledge. Improving Lives.

By Chris Crothers

The Foundation for the Mid South is a regional foundation focused on building the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi from within – engaging residents and communities to become more knowledgeable about how to improve their own conditions and quality of life.

Our region continually ranks nation-

ally at the bottom of many quality-of-life indicators, including educational achievement, income and health issues like mental health and obesity. Needs in our region are greater than our states' abilities to meet them. One of the region's biggest challenges is an inability to connect efforts, people and resources, creating an overlap of activities and missed opportunities. The foundation's approach is to support and expand innovative ideas and programs that provide direct services, as well as to work with communities and local and state

officials to develop solutions and policies that will benefit the public.

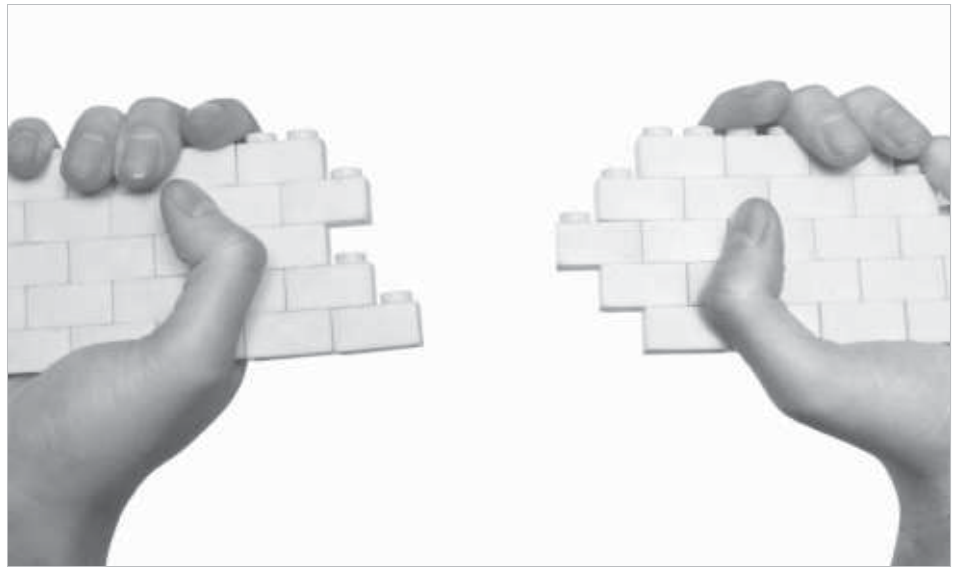
The two most important lessons that the foundation has learned are that: 1) it is not all about the money and 2) effective direct services and impact builds a strong case for policy change.

In many of the areas we serve, significant change can occur by simply making connections – large amounts of funding are not always the answer. It can be as easy as bringing people together to create a forum for discussion and conversation, to share their



Cornerstone direct-service providers have a natural base of families that can be empowered and engaged. Marguerite Casey Foundation has learned that long-term general support grants give direct service providers the operational flexibility to turn their attention to organizing and advocacy – critical components of social justice. It takes time, however, to incorporate movement building principles into direct service organizations; thus, multi-year grants are crucial. We also have learned that direct service organizations sometimes are unable to incorporate movement building into their operations. It requires staff and board commitment, as well as funding.

After nearly 10 years, the results are in. Our approach has created networks of low-income communities that rolled back payday loans in New Mexico, provided improved support for ex-felons reentering society in Illinois and, in 2010, increased voter participation by 246 percent in two of the poorest precincts in South Texas. In addition, our grantees have developed hundreds of thousands of community leaders, both youth and adults. Overall, our approach to philanthropy is to create strong organizations on the ground,



engaged and informed families that can advocate on their own behalf, and networks of organizations working to ensure the well-being of all of America's families.

The advice we would give to other funders interested in supporting direct service as well as organizing and advocacy is that long-term general operating support is a critical grantmaking strategy. Such support allows community organizations to incorporate organizing and advocacy into their service programming. Direct services can empower as well as stabilize families

when they are provided with tools for systems analysis, organizing and policy advocacy. Working together across issues, geographies race and ethnicity, families and organizations then can advance a common agenda to achieve prosperity for all America's families. ■

*Kathleen Baca is director of communications, and Cheryl Milloy is evaluation and research officer of Marguerite Casey Foundation. For more information about the foundation's programs, visit [www.caseygrants.org](http://www.caseygrants.org).*

resources and ideas, or to leverage existing resources with others that may be available. Oftentimes, nonprofits and sometimes even elected officials might not be aware of effective programs and approaches at their disposal that can be used to improve their communities

It is in grantmakers' best interests to inform policymakers of the effective services and outcomes their investments generate. When advocates reference data-driven research and proven, successful models in their dialogues with policymakers, they build a more

compelling case to influence how public resources should be used to bring proposed efforts to scale.

The foundation believes that progress in each area is required to create impact and sustainability. Our advice to grantmakers interested in adopting a comprehensive approach is to understand that progress sometimes is slow and success will not occur overnight. It takes time to develop trust and build the capacities necessary in communities for long-term sustainability. We also suggest taking time to understand the procedures and

processes of government at the local and state levels. It is important to create relationships and establish communications among funders, nonprofits and elected officials, informing policymakers how best public sector resources should be used to benefit communities and their people. ■

*Chris Crothers is director of communications for the Foundation for the Mid South. For more information about the foundation and its priorities, visit [www.fndmidsouth.org](http://www.fndmidsouth.org).*

# Under the Big Top

(continued from page 1)

will be diminished and undervalued by the group's chosen trajectory. With the creation of Funders Together, the shared goal of ending homelessness is farther out of reach.

## THE LIMITS OF NAVIGATIONAL TOOLS

In the privacy of the places where they gather, Funders Together has planned and executed an expansion of its scope far beyond the traditional role of philanthropy. The group describes itself as facilitating the national response to homelessness by advocating for a change in charitable organizations and government agencies, to assure the smart and efficient use of grant and tax dollars. It explains research, business and science as critical navigational tools to understand and explain how its members' social investments are made or denied.

While this controlled form of analysis has enabled Funders Together to have a set of defined goals and strategies, it also restricts its members' ability to renew or change as real-time

responders. Their use of analyses is vitally important to their decision-making, but it must remain measured and should never blunt innovation. Most philanthropists will attest to the need for more effective ideas, but the enemy of innovation is the overarching requirement to demonstrate this solely by evidence. New ideas aren't proven in advance by inductive or deductive reasoning alone; they emanate from intuitive thinking. And intuitive thinking may well be the best hope in addressing this intractable social problem.

Most advocates now attest that the end of homelessness in America only will occur when the creation of housing aligns with the scope, needs, resources and geography of the unhoused. A wide variety of housing approaches and funding will be necessary to accomplish this goal. Funders Together, while understanding this reality, has chosen to promote "Housing First," a limited single housing approach, over a more systemic approach. This focus on the "Housing

First" approach, while admittedly successful in its limited scope, is an insufficient strategy in moving America toward the goal of ending homelessness.

## PRESUMING THE FEDS' ROLE

By assuming much of the vacated role of the federal government, without the required conditions of public comment and participation, Funders Together is risking the commitment of its members as philanthropists to be open and accountable to the public good. This commitment ensures the free flow of thoughts and ideas across a broad spectrum of voices. Including these voices also provides essential checks and balances against the dangers of concentrated wealth and power in the service of an ideology, which support the interests of the funders and their benefactors.

Funders Together has quietly inserted into a national conversation data, research, theory and practice designed to meet yet another overly ambitious federal plan to end homeless in America, but ignored the history and consequences of limited and incomplete social interventions.

Philanthropy must abandon the security and convenience of its privacy and weigh the importance of learning from a version of history that only can be seen from beyond its walls. Philanthropists must consider the importance of first person testimony to homelessness, along with the science and research they cherish. The final measure of philanthropy's achievement will be determined over time not only by its ability to achieve a particular purpose or goal, but also by the degree to which the course of its actions were inclusive.

## AN INCOMPLETE SOCIAL INTERVENTION

In 2002, the Bush administration, together with a select group of funders and "bipartisan" national advocates,



Homeless family. Photo by Jim Hubbard.



began developing a decade-long strategic plan to end homelessness. Rather than seeing the growing national housing crisis as a consequence of flawed macroeconomics and the failure of the federal government to invest adequately in an aging and shrinking stock of affordable housing, the plan's developers focused on local interventions and chose to see homelessness as an individual's responsibility or pathology, best explained using clinical terminology.

Congress' growing frustration in the 1990s with "the intractable nature of America's homeless problem" cleared a path for the administration's new plan to end homelessness. The final hurdle for the administration was crafting an argument to the American people that clearly spelled out the reasons for replacing the Clinton administration's integrated Continuum-of-Care system with a new approach to end homelessness.

The Bush administration, known for creative messaging, began levying significant criticism against the nation's homeless service providers – a decades-old symbol of the war on poverty. The once noble "shelter operator" was now being viewed by some critical thinkers as merely *managing* America's homelessness, without end. Government agencies and foundations soon followed suit, calling into question the very integrated systems of care that for decades had acted as the nation's final safety net for millions of homeless Americans.

### TEN YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS

As dubious accusations mounted, nonprofit organizations on the front lines began to show signs of stress from inattention and underfunding from both the government and philanthropy. Calls rang out from the public sector for the newly minted

Homeless individuals were still without any power, voice or authority. They continued to be perceived as clients, rather than citizens.

national strategic plan – the "Ten Year Plans to End Homelessness," created by a highly eager administration, driven by a desire for immediate systems change and backed by the unconditional endorsement of frustrated philanthropists. Providers, advocates and activists for the homeless sat silently as decades of service and commitment to the care of homeless people were assailed. No longer were communities accountable for managing or reducing the number of homeless – now they were responsible for nothing less than ending homelessness.

The administration's message – "Homelessness must end once and for all" – was heard loud and clear, from the Roosevelt Room in the White House to the boardrooms of philanthropy.

Philanthropy had made a considerable down payment on an unsuccessful Continuum-of-Care, so there was no appetite to repeat such a costly and failed type of investment. From this point on, the federal government's foot-

print would be considerably smaller, which made it easier to deflect blame. Much of the traditional work done by federal agencies would now be parsed out to large national consulting groups. Nonprofits would now be answerable to both the federal government and local jurisdictions. Homeless individuals were still without any power, voice or authority. They continued to be perceived as clients, rather than citizens.

### THE TENT MAKERS

By 2004, a select cadre of homeless experts from American philanthropy had begun building a virtual tent to harness their expanding potential for impact and change as well as provide individual shelter from the dangers inherent in uncertain investments. Initially, the small group focused its attention and resources on "chronically homeless individuals – the most visible sign of society's failure." Two years later, an expanding tent welcomed additional foundations with a broader reach to assist families with children, youth and veterans.

The original funders were an exclusive seven-member steering committee named after the primary goal of the federal government's new plan: The Partnership to End Long-Term Homelessness. As the tent grew to accommodate more funders and a changing federal landscape, "The Partnership" adopted the name Funders Together to End Homelessness. Two years later, in 2011, it formed a nonprofit corporation, to engage, educate and support funders committed to ending homelessness.

Access to the tent remained limited to funders alone. Groupthink led to most members espousing a belief that America can end homelessness through rapid rehousing. The name adopted for this concept was "Housing First," an approach that had moderate to good success moving homeless individuals and

## New and Renewing Members

Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Bauman Family Foundation  
California Community Foundation  
California Endowment  
Common Cause  
Communities for a Better Environment  
Compton Foundation  
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation  
Consumer Health Foundation  
Disability Funders Network  
Edward W. Hazen Foundation  
Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund  
Fabrangen Tzedakah Collective  
French American Charitable Trust (FACT)  
Funders Together to End Homelessness  
Gamaliel Foundation  
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation  
Justice at Stake  
Lumina Foundation for Education, Inc.  
Marguerite Casey Foundation  
Mexic-Arte Museum  
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force  
Needmor Fund  
New Mexico Environmental Law Center  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
Rockefeller Foundation  
United Way of Greater Los Angeles  
USAction  
Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation

families immediately from the streets or shelters into permanent housing. However, the true impact of Housing First can be measured only by the capacity of each community to build and maintain its affordable housing.

America's nearly 350,000 units of affordable post-war housing from the 1970s has dropped precipitously by more than 85 percent to its current level of 50,000 units. A children's simple game of musical chairs will show the disparity between the need for and availability of affordable housing. This shortage in the current stock of available affordable housing forces us to reject out of hand any thought of ending homelessness predicated on the condition or assumption that simply "putting" America's homeless into housing is a viable and lasting permanent solution. Funders Together simply had neither the scope nor the inclination to see how its "Housing First" focus would face serious limitations as soon as stocks of affordable housing ran out.

In just a matter of years, the canopy had been stretched wide over dozens of social investors. The tent now is large enough to fit social entrepreneurs, housing developers and social engineers, but not nonprofits, advocates and – most importantly – those experiencing homelessness. The drawbacks to focusing primarily on Housing First became clear by the end of 2010. The Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness was exhausted. The economy was just recovering from recession. Foreclosures had become the new feeder system into shelters. Gains made toward housing the chronically homeless were quickly undercut and vastly overshadowed by a dramatic increase in the number of homeless families and veterans.

For some, the goal of ending homelessness now seemed more elusive than ever. The noble shelter operator

was called upon, once again, to shelter those most in need. In many communities, however, the frayed and tattered final safety net was now beyond repair. Demoralized and underfunded, shelters have been unable to keep up with the growing populations of homeless that are continuing to arrive at their doors.

## ENDING HOMELESSNESS

The three primary causes of American homelessness are: (1) a lack of affordable housing; (2) systemic deficiencies in public healthcare; and (3) a shortage of living-wage jobs. A successful system-wide effort to end homelessness must address each of the primary causes. Anything less will result in a failed attempt and a heightened resistance to future social reforms. Funders Together has not taken all three of these causes into account because it has not been receptive to the expertise of the homeless and those who have worked with them for decades.

The mission of Funders Together is to "help end homelessness." The nation's leading philanthropists will achieve their ultimate goal only by transitioning from an affinity group to an open partnership in which independent philanthropy once again plays an important but limited role. Philanthropy needs to work with a broad community of experts to ensure that their ideas and plans are valid and useful.

What's more, philanthropy needs to consider this revolutionary idea: The solution to ending homelessness in America rests squarely in the hands of the un-housed. The tent – The Big Top – must be a home for the homeless themselves, as well as for all of those committed to supporting the homeless' plan to end their homelessness. ■

*Neil Donovan is executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless.*

# Maximizing and Amplifying

(continued from page 1)

to End Homelessness, a national network of funders supporting strategic, innovative and effective grantmaking to end homelessness, we find this situation unacceptable, and we're determined to change it.

We know it can be done because communities across the country are successfully reducing homelessness. A few recent examples:

- Salt Lake City, Utah, just announced that its chronically homeless population – composed of people with a long history of homelessness – has declined 69 percent since 2006.
- Fairfax County, Va., reduced total homelessness 16 percent and family homelessness 19 percent in 2009-2010.
- Between 2003 and 2009, Alameda County, Calif., reduced total homelessness 15 percent, chronic homelessness 20 percent and family homelessness 37 percent.

With critical support from government, providers, advocates, people who are or have been homeless themselves and philanthropy, these and other communities are restructuring their homelessness response systems. They are helping people without stable living situations move quickly into permanent housing and providing them with the supports they need to remain housed. Building on these and other examples, Funders Together is helping to spread the word among funders about solutions to homelessness, with the goal of attracting more of our colleagues to the work.

Granted, ending homelessness is a daunting goal for philanthropy; our resources, considered on their own, are simply insignificant in comparison to the task. Just as with health care – as NCRP's Sean Dobson pointed out in a recent blog post<sup>1</sup> – the total amount that philanthropy spends annually in

homelessness is dwarfed in comparison to the many billions of public-sector dollars expended annually that touch the lives of at-risk and homeless populations. This shouldn't scare our sector away from the issue, but increase our determination to use our limited funds as catalysts for real change, for the solutions that evidence tells us will have the greatest impact. I'm not sure we've been doing that consistently.

## MAXIMIZING PHILANTHROPY'S IMPACT ON HOMELESSNESS

Over many decades, philanthropy has supported countless programs that have provided desperately needed aid to many thousands of people experiencing homelessness in America. But despite our best intentions, homelessness hasn't gone away. In recent decades, the problem actually has gotten worse.

To me, this means we're not doing something right – or at least as well as we could or should. Our sector's work must be about more than just results that let grantmakers sleep better at night; we also must seek to promote the lasting,

sustainable changes in the systems that touch people who are homeless. We must move beyond the management of homelessness to the collective work of crafting solutions that end it once and for all.

At Funders Together, we have learned from providers, advocates, researchers and people who are homeless about the clearest ways to end homelessness. These include:

- **Prevention and diversion:** The most effective way to end homelessness is to prevent it from occurring in the first place. This means promoting "upstream" interventions, both for individuals and families at imminent risk (e.g., short-term rental assistance, landlord mediation and discharge planning from institutional care) as well as those whose trajectories create the risk of homelessness over the longer term (e.g., families involved with the child welfare system, people struggling with severe mental illness or substance abuse and survivors of domestic violence).

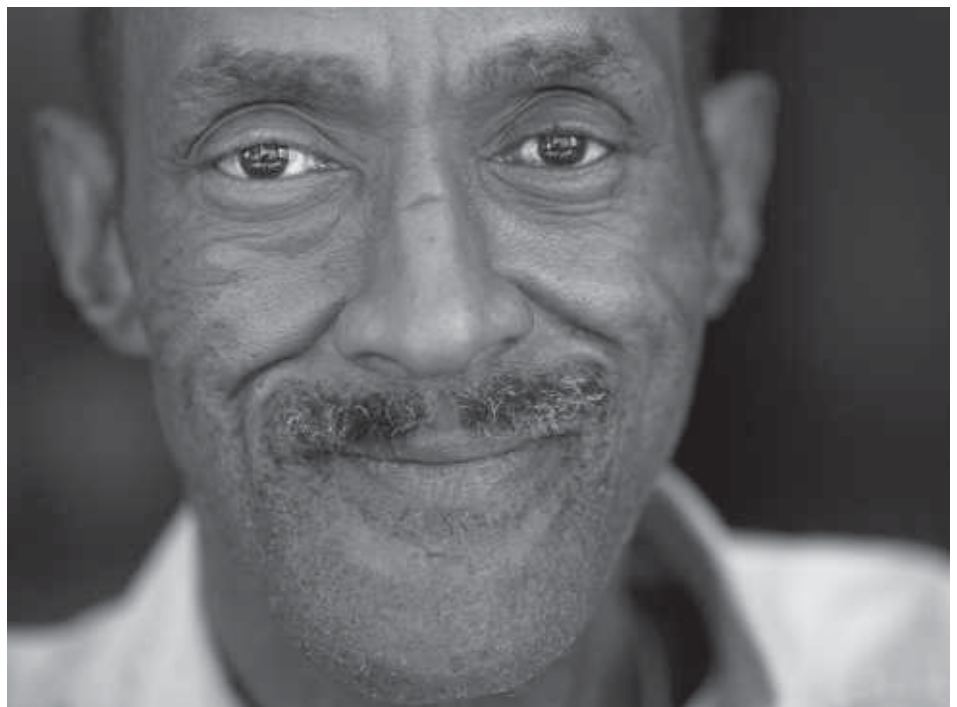


Photo courtesy of Skid Row Housing Trust.

- **Rapid re-housing:** People who fall into homelessness are better able to stabilize their lives when living in their own homes rather than temporary shelter. The goal of our interventions should be to move people who are homeless into housing as quickly as possible, while providing supports to help them remain there. While stable, safe, permanent housing should be the goal for every homeless person and family, this does not mean that shelters and transitional housing are unnecessary or irrelevant. Access to some level of emergency shelter always will be needed in every community; the key is to ensure that people recovering from homelessness stay in shelter settings no longer than is absolutely necessary.
- **Tailored services:** Providing at-risk and homeless individuals and families with the right supports, at the right time, for the right duration offers the opportunity for both the most effective (for individuals) and efficient (for systems) interven-

tions. People who are homeless are strong, resilient and often powerfully independent. Just like people who are not homeless, most prefer getting on with their lives with minimal levels of interference from the government. For *individuals*, the goal of our efforts should be to provide the amount of assistance that is needed and no more – from a little help with the rent or training for a better job to the more intensive intervention of permanent supportive housing. For primarily public sector *systems* struggling in an era of recession and diminishing resources, getting this right is essential to maximizing the reach and effectiveness of the limited funds available for this work.

At Funders Together, we don't promote any single response to homelessness. Complex problems rarely have simple solutions, and Funders Together doesn't believe that there is a single pathway or model to which everyone must subscribe. We support funders across the country to engage actively

and collectively with their local stakeholders – providers, governments, advocates, concerned citizens and people who themselves are homeless – to craft a diversity of solutions suited to their own unique environments.

That said, we do believe that decades of research and practice point us toward housing with appropriate supports as the key. Learning from the experiences of individuals and programs that have met success in their efforts to end homelessness offers us the best hope of not repeating the errors of the past. There are a few key principles to which Funders Together subscribes to help support the efforts of our members. These include:

- **Fund what works:** Proven solutions to homelessness include interventions focused on prevention, diversion, coordinated entry and housing linked to an array of tailored services.
- **Support research:** Even as we've learned much about effective strategies that can end homelessness, we need to learn more. Applying principles of scientific inquiry to our efforts won't always point immediately to the best solutions, but from every careful study of efforts to end homelessness we learn more about what works, what doesn't work and how to do better with the next set of investments and programs. We shouldn't shy away from less than promising results, but use those results to continuously improve our next steps.
- **Gather quality data:** Inaccurate and incomplete data hinder our efforts to get the best possible results. Partial data will produce only partial solutions. To gain the full attention of funders – public and private alike – data are required not only to "make the case" effectively but to inform the best real-time interventions in the field. Knowing the true scope and nature of the problem as best

People who are homeless are strong, resilient and often powerfully independent. Just like people who are not homeless, most prefer getting on with their lives with minimal levels of interference from the government.



we can will help us move the right resources into position and sustain the work that needs to be done over the long haul.

- **Align with community efforts:** No one system alone can resolve the crisis of homelessness. Government systems need to increase collaborative efforts that reach across the multiple silos of public sector funding. Private funders cannot be effective if they act in isolation from both their public sector and community partners. Working together provides us with much greater chances of success.

#### AMPLIFYING PHILANTHROPY'S VOICE ON HOMELESSNESS

While working to link our sector better with the broad-based local and regional coalitions seeking to end homelessness is a core goal for Funders Together, we also are seeking to align the voices of foundations, corporate giving programs and United Ways to create a more effective profile at the national level.

Much of the work of ending homelessness depends on the alignment of large streams of public funding. While most private funders focus their efforts at the local level, we believe that making effective use of our collective voice at the national level also is essential to our success. The philanthropic sector can help raise the visibility of the issues, educate public officials and other stakeholders, and promote integration at a systems level to improve the likelihood that funding will be directed toward what works to end homelessness. We are not afraid of calling this component of our work an advocacy agenda. That's precisely what it is.

There is, of course, the risk that Funders Together will be perceived as a private club for philanthropic sector entities that insulates us from

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the harsh realities of homelessness and creates artificial barriers among funders, the issues and the communities in which we work. We must remain ever vigilant about the inherent risks that accompany the comforts of working in philanthropy, and Funders Together to End Homelessness exists to help counter isolation and insulation. Funders Together to End Homelessness connects funders to each other, increasing our knowledge of the issues and our ability to engage with our communities meaningfully and effectively. Our responsibilities to our many partners in this movement – especially those who struggle every day with housing instability and homelessness – demand nothing less. ■

*David Wertheimer is board chair of Funders Together to End Homelessness. He also serves as deputy director of the Pacific Northwest Initiative at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle, where he oversees the foundation's grantmaking activities to end family homelessness in the local region. For more information about Funders Together, visit [www.funderstogether.org](http://www.funderstogether.org).*

## Notes

1. Sean Dobson, "A Number Every Grantmaker Should Memorize: 0.1%," Keeping A Close Eye ... NCRP's Blog, 26 September 2011, <http://blog.ncrp.org/2011/09/number-every-grantmaker-should-memorize.html>.

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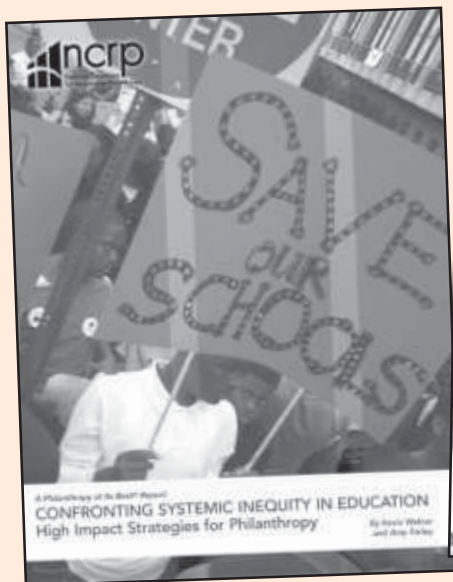
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# Appleseed Network

Washington, D.C.

[www.appleseednetwork.org](http://www.appleseednetwork.org)

Est. 1993



The Appleseed Network was founded by a group of classmates from Harvard Law School's class of 1958 at their 35th reunion in 1993. Seeking a new approach to pro bono legal organizations, the group planned to focus on systemic social initiatives instead of providing free legal services to individuals. "I don't think any of us in that original group could have anticipated that Appleseed would have developed this way. It was a group of friends who had an idea of how to utilize the talents of accomplished lawyers for the public good," said co-founder Arthur R. Miller.

Since its founding, the Appleseed Network has dedicated itself to "building a society in which opportunities are genuine, access to the law is universal and equal, and government advances the public interest." The organization identifies and researches social injustices and barriers to opportunity, and advocates for lasting solutions through its national network and 17 Appleseed Centers. The extensive network also enables Appleseed to take on a vari-

ety of issues. Executive Director Betsy Cavendish says, "We have legions of pro bono attorneys and partners who are willing to help, and from those legions, we usually can find expertise in the area that we need."

There is a commitment to an interdisciplinary approach through Appleseed's network, although the core of the organization's work is in the law and policy realms. "That's where rights are either vindicated, ignored or abused and I think that one of the great strengths of this country is our commitment to the rule of law and making sure that we live up to that commitment and the promise of opportunity," says Cavendish. The organization looks both at where new laws may be needed and where laws already exist to protect rights or policies it wishes to see, and it plays a role in holding policymakers and other actors accountable.

The legal approach to advocacy has a systemic effect on social injustices, and Appleseed believes it deserves a closer look from grantmakers.

"It's not a Band-aid approach, but a structural, long-term approach, and I think funders do well when they're looking at fixing systems," says Cavendish.

Although Appleseed finds all strategies to advocating for social justice equally important, the organization is determined to focus on laws, making them work for the people they were intended to serve. Cavendish says, "We really believe that the law is where rights and the highest and best ideals of the United States find expression. We owe it to ourselves to live up to those ideals, and we're falling egregiously short in many areas."

*This member spotlight was written by Meredith Brodbeck, communications associate at the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP).*



Betsy Cavendish



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April 2011

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