

# Solving the Homeless Issue in St. Petersburg

Dr. Ed Carlson, *et alia*, 2/26/07

The Summit on Homelessness, over 300+ people including homeless people, was a further education for me.

55% of the homeless in Pinellas are in St. Petersburg's 22% of county area – far more than our “share”.

Magnet: “Two weeks after the illegal tent city opened, our downtown homeless count saw a 30% increase.”

Mayor Baker, St. Petersburg Times, 1/10/07.

\$15,000,000.00 per year specifically goes to homelessness in Pinellas County, conservatively.

This does not include police costs, hospital costs, and other infrastructure costs.

\$2,500,000 in '06 by St. Pete. Added support for programs providing hundreds of new beds, drug treatment, medical care, mental illness care, one-stop services center and outreach team over the last 5 years.

21 Organizations in St. Petersburg are Homeless Service Providers, plus church programs and dollars.

Police: Increase 670% Calls; 650% Reports; 700% Arrests, Feb. over Jan. 2007 in area with comparable data.

Growing: “Many (major cities) have poured in substantial resources only to see the problem get worse.”

Mayor Baker, St. Petersburg Times, 1/30/07.

241 beds for chronic homeless or homeless with disabilities, NOT counted in stats below.

424 Emergency and Transitional Shelter Beds are available in the county.

3.25 persons/ bed/ per year statistic in Tent City Model = at least 1,378 homeless ALREADY served.

NOT 1 “SUCCESSFUL” person transitioning out of homelessness was presented, nor any “transition” data.

Advocate stated: “90% success rate” transitioning out of homelessness with the Tent City Model.

10% is 138 per year, 276 in 2 years. 90% is 1,240 per year, 2,480 in 2 years. “**Show us Success**”.

Current programs appear to be failures – providing only a hand-out – rather than a hand-up.

NO MODEL of Success was even acknowledged. Google: Homeless + Successful Programs yielded many.

Over the last year the number of street people in Atlanta has declined 8.5%.

Impressive declines since 2003: 50% in Philadelphia, 30% in Miami, 28% in San Francisco, 26% in Dallas, 21% in Nashville. N.Y. City a 13% decrease since 2005. [Wall Street Journal, attached.]

Composition: Homeless by Choice, prefer “houseless”; Unintentional, including women and children.

Florida Statutes 823 has Nuisance penalties including “... **tents... which tend to annoy the community.**”

F.S. 790 specifies “Vagrants and other undesirable persons.”

**QUALITY of LIFE** for the Citizens of St. Petersburg. In the big picture, our regular citizens count too!

Born, living and working in St. Pete for 66 years, the City never “gave” me anything, even appreciation.

The City DOES provide a fine Quality of Life – as long as I pay – or they will take it away.

Everyone must contribute to the Quality of Life – not detract from it – thus we have effective Codes; 24 hour Graffiti, Skateboard and other ordinances; Street Sweepers and debris cleanup in Parks, Sanitation pickup, etc.

**SUMMIT:** each group came up with 3 issues, then 3 solutions. Our group of 3 men, 5 women, including Afro-Americans, homeless advocates, business and neighborhood representatives began very volatile . . . then gradually developed a common ground and vision.

Issues: 1. Balance firmness (Quality of Life) with integrated Services/Infrastructure.

2. Quality of Life includes employee safety, effective law enforcement, loitering, negative economic impacts, negative esthetic impacts, negative tourism impacts.

3. Integrated infrastructure of services to move people into independence.

Solutions:

1. **STRINGENT:** More stringent than other cities to prevent becoming a magnet.

A. Strengthen City Ordinances

B. Strengthen Enforcement

C. Prevention: Do our share -- without exacerbating the problem.

2. **SUPPORT** the “Flow-Through Temporary Housing Model” like the Tent City proposal.

A. Specific Place, Maximum Time Limit, Signed Contract, Case Plan for each person.

B. Responsible: Education & Brochure “Responsible Program Participant Behavior”.

3. **ZERO TOLERANCE** once this thorough process has been offered, or completed.

**VALID PHOTO ID** required, including helping them obtain ID, for services and for tracking results.  
If no photo ID and cannot obtain one, turn over to Homeland Security as a possible security risk.  
St. Pete recreation has a Photo ID resident and non-resident; plus an annual fee for non-residents.  
Salvation Army and other shelters require valid Photo ID.  
Law Enforcement: “The Homeless by Choice often PURPOSEFULLY DESTROY and REFUSE TO HAVE ID – they do not want their past behavior known.  
ARREST PHOTOS as ID are accepted by the Salvation Army to get around this.”

**RESULTS are MEASURED** – move beyond “throwing money at the problem” and seeing no results.  
There ARE successful models. See attached “R,W&A” and Wall Street Journal Article, in which

**New York's Mayor Bloomberg gave a speech calling on mayors and communities to free themselves from the tyranny of the advocates.**

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and

Los Angeles has **encampments of 5,000-plus homeless** people.  
Elegant new downtown skyscrapers look out on block after block of tents, shacks and cardboard.

**SUCCESS** is defined as “Transition out of Homelessness”, NOT as “feeding” and “sheltering”.  
REAL “**Help and Performance Standards**” to prevent mismanagement by agencies.

**MYTH:** Homeless people want to work and have a home.

**TRUTH:** A very large percentage, possibly the majority, are “HOMELESS BY CHOICE.”  
*Easy Street*, a two year documentary of St. Pete homeless. St. Pete Times, 2/9/07  
“We always hoped at least one person would beat the odds and give the film a happy ending.  
Unfortunately, none of them really did.”

**HOMELESS by CHOICE:** Law Enforcement: “The vast majority I contact are by CHOICE.”  
“In my 19 year career, I actually was able to help 2 or 3 groups/families who were in REAL NEED and not homeless by choice.”  
A recent news articles about a family is indicative of the problem. The husband stated things like “need to take a couple of days rest” from job hunting because of stress – give me a break – if my family is homeless, I’m not stopping for anyone!! His “rest” just happened to follow a ‘helping’ hand by a church that gave them temporary place to stay – a hand-up that he turned into a hand-out.

**COMPUTERS** of major Florida cities are accessible to prevent redundant serve to Intentionally Houseless.

**BROKEN WINDOWS theory**, ignoring little problems -- graffiti, litter, shattered glass (homeless)—creates a sense of irreversible decline that leads people to abandon the community or to stay away.  
Two major claims: 1) further petty crime and low-level anti-social behavior will be deterred, and thus 2) major crime will be prevented. *Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in Our Communities* by [George L. Kelling](#) and Catherine Coles is a criminology book published in [1996](#), about petty [crime](#) and strategies to contain or eliminate it from urban neighborhoods.

## **DO What is RIGHT**

St. Pete must do what works, without being intimidated by the ACLU or other limiters.  
In the rare possibility of going to the Supreme Court in 5 or 10 years, the problem will already be solved.

## **Ready, Willing & Able**, New York City

[http://www.doe.org/help/?utm\\_source=google\\_nat&utm\\_medium=ppc&utm\\_term=homeless\\_programs](http://www.doe.org/help/?utm_source=google_nat&utm_medium=ppc&utm_term=homeless_programs)

### OUR RESULTS

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More than **2,250** drug-free, permanently employed and independently housed  
Permanent jobs secured by graduates paying **43%** above the minimum wage\*  
Over **150 miles** of city streets and sidewalks cleaned every day  
New, positive public perception of homeless people and their ability and desire to work  
National model for combating homelessness and criminal recidivism

*\*Average starting wage: \$9.66/hr, 43% higher than current minimum wage of \$6.75/hr in N.Y.*

**Ready, Willing & Able** program offers life-changing opportunities to homeless individuals through paid work, transitional housing and comprehensive support services. The beloved “men in blue” who clean more than 150 miles of New York City streets every day have become integral to the quality of life in our city. They are supported by thousands of community residents who recognize and respect the hard work they do to rebuild their own lives while making N.Y. City a cleaner, safer, more humane place for everyone.

### OUR GOALS

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Break cycles of homelessness, incarceration, substance abuse and chronic poverty  
Empower individuals to become self-sufficient through paid work and training  
Keep city streets clean and safe, improving quality of life and communities  
Empower participants to secure and maintain full-time employment, self-supported housing and sobriety  
Build social-entrepreneurial businesses that provide paid vocational training and diversify program funding

## **Homeless in America, January 18, 2007, by Julia Vitullo-Martin**

Can urban street homelessness be ended? The White House argues that the answer is yes -- and is putting over \$4 billion annually into proving it. Philip Mangano, executive director of the White House's U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, cites impressive declines in street counts since the White House started their big push in 2003: 50% in Philadelphia, 30% in Miami, 28% in San Francisco, 26% in Dallas, 21% in Nashville. New York City has seen a 13% decrease since 2005, the first year in which a citywide street census was taken.

Those who've lived on the streets for more than a year ("the chronics") make up about 10% of the two million or so Americans regarded as homeless. They regularly consume a disproportionate amount of public resources -- sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars per person. They also often wreak disproportionate havoc on both commercial areas and residential neighborhoods -- inducing compassion fatigue.

Traditional homeless advocates seldom pay attention to the destructive effects some street people had on neighborhoods. That's changing at the insistence of mayors, who fund most homeless services, and corporate leaders. New York's Mayor Michael Bloomberg, calls street homelessness "intolerable" on both humanitarian and economic grounds. Not one to shy from a fight, he gave a speech in July calling on mayors and communities to free themselves from the tyranny of the advocates.

Over the last year the number of street people in Atlanta has declined 8.5%. The plan seems to be working, says A.J. Robinson, executive director of Central Atlanta Progress. "The business community will rally around strong political leadership that offers solutions on this thorny issue."

Atlanta and other cities build on the findings of University of Pennsylvania Prof. Dennis Culhane, who pointed out in the 1990s that a \$12,000 per-year supportive housing unit was far more effective in keeping people off the street than a \$35,000 per-year shelter bed. But the homeless industry remained oriented to the big shelters created in the mid-1980s. Mr. Mangano calls them "old status quo response of ad hoc, uncoordinated, well-intentioned, but ineffective crisis intervention." A bowl of soup and a blanket was thought the best we could do.

Armed with Mr. Culhane's data, Mr. Mangano approached his job zealously. Believing in the political will, partnership and 10-year plans, he traveled the country relentlessly, working with states, counties, cities and the private sector to coordinate systematic approaches. "No one level of government can get the job done alone," he says.

The ideas for the most successful 10-year plans -- revolutionizing the long stagnant field of homeless services -- originated in New York, once the epicenter of street homelessness and now the model to be emulated.

Rosanne Haggerty, executive director of Common Ground Community, which builds and manages supportive housing in Manhattan, say it is right to shift the emphasis from private to public behavior. "We don't ask our lease-holding tenants, any more than any landlord asks, whether a tenant is drinking in his or her apartment. But we're very strict about behavior. If someone behaves badly, we get on it quickly -- figuring out what needs to be changed. We have few rules, but we enforce them vigorously." From the neighborhood's point of view -- and Ms. Haggerty runs buildings in once-notorious Times Square -- it is the public behavior that matters.

Atlanta's Mr. Sibley agrees, "What appeals to us is that once a person has a decent place to live, he can get life in order step by step. Each individual still has to take responsibility for [his] own future." Atlanta's model was a New York employment program -- **Ready, Willing and Able**. [www.doe.org](http://www.doe.org) George McDonald, founder and former businessman, estimates that "The vast majority of homeless single adults in our program," says Mr. McDonald, "are coming out of prison or jail, don't have an education, and do have substance abuse problems."

Well over half of every cohort of new RWA clients succeed the first time they try to live and work on their own after graduating from the program. In Atlanta, Mr. Sibley says the RWA model has helped 60 formerly chronically homeless people move into housing and employment, at a savings to the city of about \$1 million.

Mr. Mangano lives with one huge failure: Los Angeles, entangled in bureaucratic wrangling among government agencies, the city has made virtually no progress in ending the encampments of 5,000-plus homeless people on the former Skid Row. The high floors of elegant new downtown skyscrapers look out on block after block of tents, shacks and cardboard, a sight reminiscent of the Great Depression.

"Los Angeles is doing phenomenally well economically," says Mr. Mangano. "While we're doing this for moral, spiritual and human reasons, it's the economic reasons that drive the political will."

Will economics eventually end homelessness in America's wealthiest cities? It's about one-third of the way there.