Community Partnership Award

The City of St. George has led the way in addressing the community needs of its roughly 77,000 citizens. Gary Esplin led the charge in assessing the growing homeless population early in 2013 when he decided to take a more proactive and involved part towards finding a solution instead of just throwing money at the problem. Mr. Esplin recruited Mayor Jon Pike and City of St. George Community Development Director, Matt Loo to take up the challenge of solving this issue.

Assessment - The shelter that was in place in 2013 was found lacking resources, funding, accessibility to services and was just plain too small. Finding a suitable space, agency and team presented a challenge. The City hired an executive director and began the process of collaborating with a nonprofit to form a model that met the challenge. The assessment over the year showed an ineffective model that did not provide support outside of shelter. The team initiated the model of Switchpoint as a complete community resource center where an individual experiencing homelessness could not only have a place to sleep but have meals prepared, case management for every individual and resources that address the underlying barriers to self-sufficiency.

Challenge-After several years as a coordinating body for several human service organizations in Washington County, the City of St. George opened Switchpoint, an emergency shelter, food pantry and community resource center in September 2014, to meet the needs of those residents in Washington County most vulnerable and economically challenged. Switchpoint has become the largest food pantry and largest emergency shelter in Southern Utah, and the only homeless shelter in Washington County. The challenge faced was getting twenty-two agencies to work together towards a continuum of care for vulnerable individuals and families. The key element was the strength of the support of the City of St. George.

Need-The need in St. George was assessed through market studies, assessments and public forums which showed that more than 1,800 households are extremely overburdened with housing expense, more than 250 individuals suffered chronic homelessness, and an extremely high percentage of the homeless suffered from dual diagnosis (mental illness and substance abuse). The resources available were fragmented and the community was disconnected. A community resource center provided a space for all social service agencies to meet and work with clients. Most clients in this situation have significant barriers with transportation. Traveling to many different agencies is overwhelming for most clients. Bringing the agencies to one location have been very effective and proven to assist clients faster to overcome their barriers to employment, housing, and stability

•   Program implementation and costs

The City of St. George purchased a facility for $1,500,000 and then the nonprofit entitiy wrote grants for all of the programming costs and operations costs. The grants awarded were a combination of federal, state and private foundations.

Switchpoint’s model works with the motto that **“It Takes All of Us”** to overcome poverty and homelessness. Clients who stay with Switchpoint are provided a hot meal, a clean bed, and a roof over their heads. These basics of human need help in the short term but more is needed. The journey back to stable and decent housing begins as soon as new residents arrive. Each person meets with a case manager and receives a comprehensive needs assessment. Individualized plans of action are formed to get them marketable, employed, housed, and equipped with the skills necessary to regain stability in their life, and help them obtain permanent housing.   
  
Switchpoint offers a hand-up not just a hand-out**.** Switchpoint offers each person the best opportunity for success, over 20 local non-profit agencies on-site to provide resources such as educational training, employment placement, and housing assistance. To give each person the best opportunity for success, local non-profit agencies are on-site to provide resources such as educational training, employment placement, and housing assistance.

Switchpoint offers assistance and resources for the following:

* On-site case management for every client
* Help obtaining lost or stolen identification
* Access to employment assistance programs
* Help obtaining educational assistance (GED)
* Access to substance abuse cessation classes
* On-site showers for both residents and non-residents
* On-site laundry facility
* Nutritious meals served daily
* An on-site computer lab for obtaining GED, job searching, building employable computer skills and resume building
* Access to employment searching programs
* Transportation vouchers
* Assistance with applications and eligibility processes for Food Stamps, Medicaid, etc.
* Assistance with obtaining affordable housing
* Food assistance through on-site food pantry
* Access to Veteran housing programs
* Access to mental health services
* Clean, safe emergency quarters

The shelter houses approximately 80 residents at any one time, and since opening over two years ago, Switchpoint has provided emergency shelter to over 2,000 individuals and families. During its first two years, the food pantry distributed over 2 million pounds of food to an average of 2000 food pantry clients per month. In early 2016, Switchpoint also opened a thrift shop, accepting donated items from the community for resale. In addition to providing revenues to support Switchpoint’s day-to-day operations, the thrift shop also provides on-the-job training opportunities for Switchpoint residents and a source of low-cost donated clothing, household goods and furniture available to the entire community.

The Switchpoint Community Food Pantry works with the Utah Food Bank and serves 3,200 low-income individuals and families throughout Washington County. Because Washington County has such a high senior population, the Switchpoint Community Food Pantry has a special senior day to accommodate this specific population and works to educate seniors on the dangers of Medicare fraud and elderly abuse. Over the past two-and-a-half years, the pantry has given out 2,672,000 pounds of food to individuals who are low-income families desperately trying to make ends meet.

Switchpoint has only been open for two and a half years and currently the community food pantry serves over 3,200 households using 2.672 m pounds of food. We received $2.298 mm in grant funding, have received $994k in monetary donations, $4.4mm in in-kind donations, $148k from income from thrift store operations. Switchpoint has been successful in great part because of the community support with over 160,584 volunteer hours being donated.

When the community sees the City officials support of Switchpoint they are more likely to give time and money to the valuable program that assists other community members.

* Lessons learned during planning, implementation, and analysis of the program.

Community Resource Centers work best with a private public relationship. Strong collaboration with social service agencies and city support are imperative for the success of such a concept. Nothing like this has been done before in the nation. Switchpoint and the City of St. George have produced a formula for the nation to follow. The City of St George was not afraid to break the mold and establish a new best practice. We have found success with our model and are happy to share it with the nation. A current Switchpoint resident and homeless veteran commented that because of his case manager and the Switchpoint model he “received more assistance and made further progress in his first 72 hours at Switchpoint than he has received in 7 years with other programs or agencies in the nation”.

Planning- By coordinating with 22 other human service agency partners, Switchpoint caseworkers provide individual assistance to each resident, focused on that resident’s personal goals and the barriers they face in achieving those goals. Our Switchpoint facility hosts 17 classes per week to meet specific client needs related to cognitive skill building, parenting, life skills, health and wellness, budgeting and financial education, parenting, obtaining literacy and GEDs, and addressing issues related to substance abuse. These classes are open not only to residents of Switchpoint’s emergency shelter, but to all in the community who can benefit from the support and assistance of participating human service agencies.

Community support is required for initial and continued support and the success of the Switchpoint to assist clients to overcome barriers.

Implementation- Switchpoint Community Resource Center is a one-stop social service facility located in the heart of St. George, serving all of Washington County. To families and individuals experiencing homelessness or poverty situations, it is imperative to have all the services available in one location especially due to transportation challenges for most of these individuals. Our mission is to empower families and individuals in need by addressing the underlying causes of their poverty and providing each client with a personalized, comprehensive plan that supports them on their journey to self-sufficiency. We have seen many individuals who, once they reach that self-sufficiency, they then give back and contribute to their community. Our goal is to serve people transitioning from generational poverty, incarceration, domestic violence, and other challenging and disadvantaged situations. “It takes all of us” to break the cycle of poverty and end homelessness.

It has become apparent that to have the Mayor, City Manager and other City officials involved publicly with Switchpoint at different times has proven to help community members see the importance of supporting Switchpoint and its mission. Community member are more anxious to donate time and/or money when they see the support from the City and the community support is crucial to the success of being able to continue the programs and efforts for the underprivileged people that are served.

Analysis

The City of St. George took a risk to purchase a facility, open a community resource center, emergency shelter, emergency food pantry and partner with a nonprofit to put together a best practice model of breaking the cycle of homelessness and poverty. The City manager implemented a service delivery that most cities don’t get involved in. The desire to help the most vulnerable was at the forefront in the investment of property and resources.

•   How the program raises awareness of the contributions of Local Government Managers

Best practice model on partnership between private and public entities. The ability to write grants as a nonprofit and use city resources such as CDBG funds and city facilities. Proving that a private/public partnership is most effective, the City of St. George also donated three acres of land to this partnership to develop a 55 unit affordable housing complex. Other cities in Utah have looked at this partnership to improve the model of shelters and resource centers.

The City of St. George has set the pace collaborating with community agencies to leverage funds and facilities. The best practice model has proven to be a partnership between private and public entities. The ability to write grants as a nonprofit and use city resources such as CDBG funds and city facilities became crucial to the success of the model. Further proving that a private/public partnership is most effective, the City of St. George also donated three acres of land to this partnership to develop a 55 unit affordable housing complex. Other cities in Utah have adopted this partnership idea to improve the model of shelters and resource centers.

The executive director recently toured 19 homeless shelters across the nation and has found that the City of St. George and the Switchpoint model have set the pace collaborating with community agencies to leverage funds and facilities.