

\$1.2 million grant will help St. Vincent de Paul help homeless

St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore received a \$1.2 million grant, allowing it to double the size of its Home Connections program that provides permanent housing to the chronically homeless in Baltimore City.

Launched in October 2006, Home Connections currently houses 28 former homeless men and women in their own apartments and the \$1.2 million extra received by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) – spread out over a three-year period – will allow St. Vincent de Paul to increase that number to 60.

“We are excited to be able to expand this permanent-housing initiative that provides vital services to some of our most vulnerable fellow citizens,” said John Schiavone, executive director of St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore. “With the alarming rise in the number of homeless individuals in Baltimore City, coupled with the reduction in available shelter beds this past year, I am very pleased that we can continue to be at the forefront of providing long-term solutions to the problem of homelessness.”

Home Connections uses the “Housing First” approach to working with those defined as chronically homeless, providing immediate access to permanent housing and supportive services, said Kathleen Spain, director of the program.

The theory of the program suggests that by providing housing first, followed by supportive and therapeutic services, the homeless receive the immediate stability they need so they are prepared to address the issues that led to their lives on the streets, Ms. Spain said.

According to HUD, a chronically homeless person is someone with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

Before Susan Smith was provided with a one-bedroom apartment in West Baltimore through the program last March, she spent the previous seven years sleeping in abandoned homes, homeless shelters and often in jail.

"I haven't been arrested one time since I've been in my apartment," the 54-year-old Ms. Smith said shortly before Christmas. "This has changed my life."

A national study - conducted by the Institute for Research, Training and Technical Assistance at Beyond Shelter - found that 89.5 percent of 200 previously homeless families achieved and continuously maintained residential stability after the families received services from the Housing First Program.

Because the chronically homeless cycle in and out of homeless services programs, a Housing First approach saves money when compared to the cost of shelter, healthcare, criminal justice, and mental-health services regularly given to this population, Ms. Spain said.

According to the "Impact of Supportive Housing on Service Use for Homeless Persons with Mental Illness in New York City," each unit of permanent supportive housing saved \$16,282 per year in New York City.

"We are very excited that St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore received this grant from HUD, which will enable them to expand their successful Housing First project," said Diane Glauber, president of Baltimore Homeless Services. "Housing First is a key strategy in Baltimore's '10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.'"

Before Home Connections moved Clark Crane into his apartment in October 2006, his life was all about survival, moving from shelter to shelter just to have a roof over his head.

Since getting off of the streets, the 50-year old Baltimorean has worked with his case manager to treat his substance-abuse problem, receives physical rehabilitation and mental-health treatment and volunteers at Beans & Bread soup kitchen in Fells Point every week.

Bolstered by the stability of his new housing, Mr. Crane said he hopes to reunite with his young daughter and return to full-time employment. "I am surprised by what I have been able to do with a roof over my head."