



Jericho Project: New Focus on the Long-Term Homeless

Jericho's organizational mission is "to help homeless men and women overcome struggles with substance use and restore their dignity, family relationships, and long-term stability as independent tax-paying community members." Recently, the organization has begun to re-focus resources on specifically serving those people homeless for the long term. A [photo tour](#) and [sample documents](#) from the Jericho Project are also available.

History

Founded in 1983, Jericho Project is nonprofit organization that owns, operates, and provides services for supportive housing in New York City. Jericho began its housing program by master leasing units from a single room occupancy hotel in Manhattan. Today, Jericho owns and operates four residential sites, all single room occupancy with shared kitchens and baths:

- Jericho House, in Central Harlem, was developed in 1991 and provides housing to 56 men and women.
- Jericho Residence I, located in the Bronx, is a 33-unit residence for women that opened in 1993.
- Jericho Residence II, a second 33-unit all-women residence, was developed in 1995 and is located on the same block as Residence I.
- Loring Place Residence provides housing for 52 men and women. Located in the University Heights section of the Bronx, this residence opened in 1999.

Each of these residential sites is located in a low-income residential community and all were rehabilitations of existing buildings.

New Focus on the Long-Term Homeless Population

While Jericho has been serving people who have been homeless for many years, Jericho began to focus on long-term shelter stayers as a result of a January 2004 mandate by the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) that one of every three openings in permanent supportive housing must go to a long-term shelter stayer.¹ (For more background on this mandate, see the profile of the [Hard-to-Place Task Force](#)). This one-to-three ratio must continue until the building has 25 percent of its population as former long-term shelter stayers. Jericho was aided in this endeavor by CSH's Moving On Initiative.²

Jericho was initially hesitant to serve this population, feeling that the population would require a deeper level of services than Jericho was prepared to provide. However, at the suggestion of CSH, Jericho staff analyzed tenants' histories and found that approximately 10-15 percent had been long-term shelter stayers, meaning that Jericho had been serving those who had been homeless for the long term all along.

Implementation

Program staff have received two trainings specifically on serving long-term shelter stayers, one from CSH staff and one from shelter staff and clients. These trainings addressed the similarities and

differences between long-term shelter stayers and other homeless people. Shelter staff highlighted the point that long-term shelter stayers have often had traumatic experiences with the homeless system. Many of them know the system well but are reluctant to accept any help. Significant training time was also spent on how to best help the new tenants make a good transition from the shelter to their new housing. The program staff has also instituted a peer mentoring program in which existing tenants are matched to long-term shelter stayers who are entering the project.

Before their specific focus on the long-term homeless population, Jericho had a very firm six-month sobriety requirement for their housing. The sobriety is reported by the referral source or by the tenant's treatment program. Previously, approximately six of 10 referrals were accepted into the program's housing. Currently, only one of 10 referrals are accepted, mostly due to the sobriety requirement. The long-term homeless population also rejects offers of housing at Jericho at rates higher than non-long-term shelter stayers. To deal with this challenge, Jericho has informally changed their six-month sobriety requirement. They still require sobriety but now have the ability to shorten the sobriety requirement period on an individual basis.

Service Model

Jericho combines an abstinence-only housing setting with a voluntary service model. Jericho does not admit residents to their program who are actively using and have taken special care to stress sobriety when working with former long-term shelter stayers. Jericho does not conduct random drug tests, however. If Jericho suspects a tenant has relapsed, staff confront them. At that time, the tenant may undergo a drug test. Program staff works with clients around relapse management and recovery support. If a relapse occurs, they refer the tenant to detox or, if necessary, to longer-term treatment. Jericho offers in-house AA/NA, weekly relapse prevention groups, and individual counseling. There is no limit on the number of relapses a tenant may have, but if someone frequently relapses, they are encouraged to move to long-term residential treatment. If a tenant is resistant to treatment or other help, Jericho staff may start eviction proceedings based on "nuisance behavior." Jericho has found that many clients who are actively using stop paying rent, and Jericho begins eviction procedures if the tenant refuses to follow a payment plan. The eviction process in New York City is very long, and very few residents actually get evicted. Jericho staff provide referrals to other programs or to independent housing to anyone who is leaving their housing and accepts assistance. Other active users leave on their own without assistance from staff.

In addition to Jericho's services supporting abstinence, other on-site services include a staff and tenant activities committee, independent living skills classes, psychiatric education, medication management, vocational programs, family reunification assistance, and planning for independent living. Jericho is the only on-site services provider. Off-site services include drug treatment, detox, and general medical services through formal or informal agreements with Jericho.

Jericho remains committed to their abstinence model of providing services, based on their past success serving homeless single adults. They "recognize that other groups are having success using a harm-reduction approach [to services], but feel that the majority of homeless substance abusers are eager to be free of substances and ready to work hard to stay sober, get a job, and move on."

Jericho places a great deal of emphasis on encouraging clients to move toward independence. For example, all buildings have shared baths and kitchens in order to promote a desire on the part of the tenants to move into the private market. Although the Jericho Project is permanent housing, the average length of residence is two or three years. Individuals successfully leave Jericho when they are employed or have a secure source of income, have maintained sobriety for a reasonable amount of time, have resolved child custody issues, and have secured appropriate permanent housing. Jericho has an Aftercare Counselor on site to help tenants prepare to move on. These staff have relationships with landlords and brokers that can help locate affordable housing. Tenants who do not have Section 8 may be eligible for the Rental Assistance Program operated by the Coalition for the Homeless.

Jericho's former residents can continue to utilize services of the Vocational and Educational Program, Family Reunification Program, Activities of Daily Living counselor, and other support for up to two years after leaving Jericho.

Lessons Learned

- Jericho has found that, after placement in housing, former long-term shelter stayers are working at the same rate as non-long-term shelter stayers.
- Informally reducing the length of sobriety requirement makes it easier to find residents to place.
- Similar projects should ensure adequate training on mental health issues, including Axis II personality disorders.
- Filling open slots is definitely more difficult when focusing on those who have been homeless for the long-term. Before focusing on this group, approximately six of 10 referrals were accepted into their housing; now the proportion is approximately one of 10. Most of those not accepted are due to Jericho's sobriety requirement.
- It appears that the former long-term shelter stayers have a more difficult time maintaining sobriety once placed in the program.

¹ DHS's definition of a long-term shelter stayer requires that at least 730 days of the last four years were spent in a shelter.

² In this program, existing tenants of Jericho's permanent housing received Section 8 vouchers upon moving out on their own. This created additional slots in Jericho's permanent supportive housing for long-term shelter stayers. CSH and other organizations aided Jericho by providing funding for support services ("aftercare") for these newly graduated tenants.