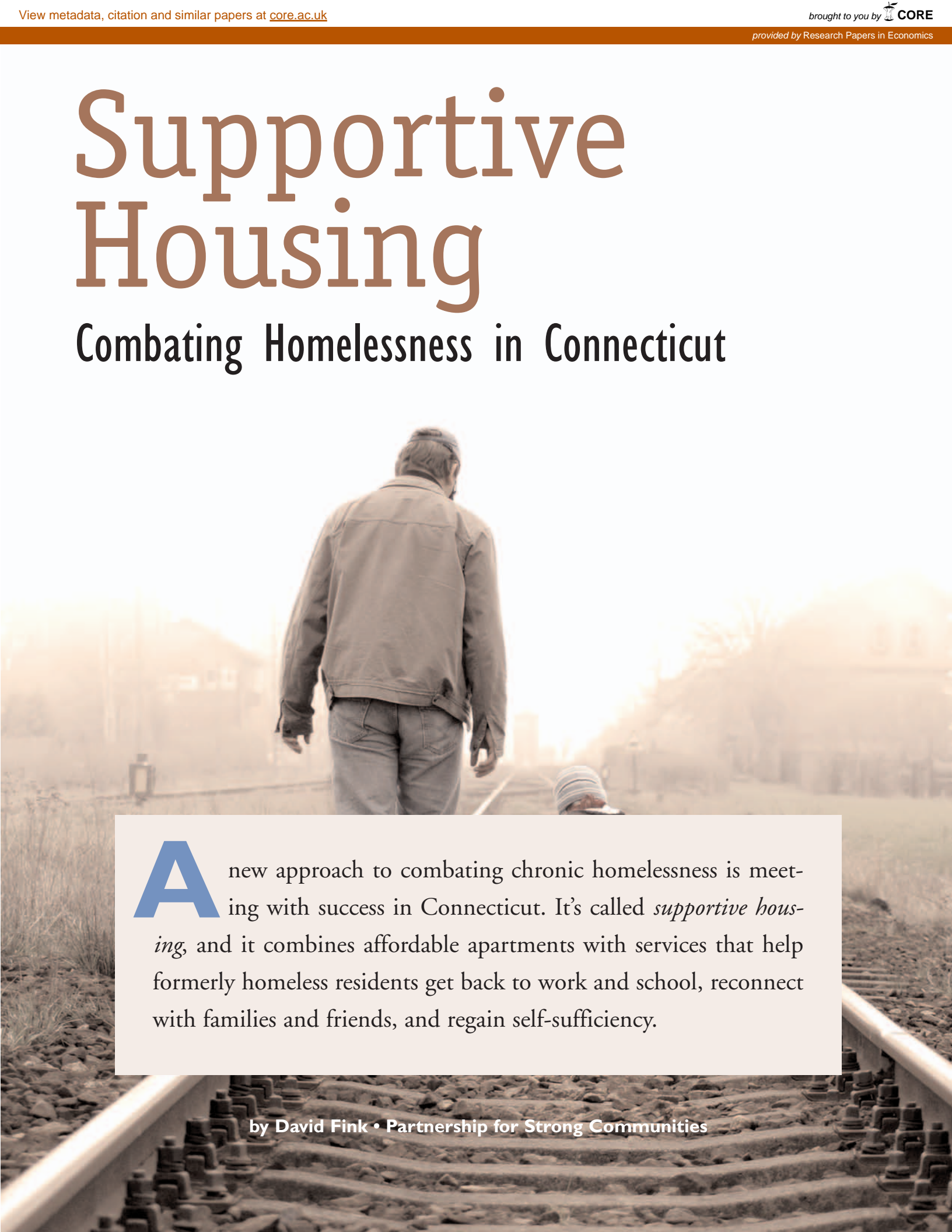


Supportive Housing

Combating Homelessness in Connecticut

A person wearing a jacket and jeans is walking away from the camera on a train track. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, hazy atmosphere. The tracks lead into the distance, flanked by grass and some buildings in the background.

A new approach to combating chronic homelessness is meeting with success in Connecticut. It's called *supportive housing*, and it combines affordable apartments with services that help formerly homeless residents get back to work and school, reconnect with families and friends, and regain self-sufficiency.

by David Fink • Partnership for Strong Communities

Most of us have support networks of some kind, but for people who don't, supportive housing fills a gap, offering counseling, employment advice, help with balancing checkbooks, and more. In a 2004 video, produced by Connecticut's "Reaching Home" Campaign and funded by the Melville Charitable Trust, University of Connecticut men's basketball coach Jim Calhoun told how, on recruitment trips, he sometimes met with families living close to the edge. He expressed deep concern about homelessness and nudged a basketball-crazed state to open its eyes to the problem and ways to fight it economically.

But Calhoun is only the latest catalyst in a statewide success story. Since the early 1990s, a public-private alliance—of state agencies, experienced nonprofit housing developers, social service professionals, bankers, philanthropies, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)—has been collaborating to implement a detailed plan to address homelessness in a new way.¹

In 1999, the CSH published an evaluation of the Connecticut Supportive Housing Demonstration

largest supportive-housing programs in Connecticut also have been able to return to full- or part-time school and work—and to paying taxes.

Success Began Slowly

The demonstration program produced 281 supported apartments in six cities between 1996 and 1998. The Corporation for Supportive Housing provided predevelopment funding and technical assistance to developers and helped social service providers that had never developed real estate find development partners, property managers, and long-term financing. Critical assistance also came from five government agencies and a host of nonprofit developers and service providers.

Thanks to the success of the demonstration program, Connecticut launched the Supportive Housing Pilots Initiative in 2000, with a goal of 650 units (in addition to the 281 in the demonstration), to expand the reach of supportive housing. As of December 2005, 367 of the 650 units had been completed.

Even with hard data from the University of Pennsylvania, a strong public-private alliance, and the backing

also enlisted business leaders and bankers, who appreciated the bottom-line value of the effort.

According to Diane Randall, director of the Partnership for Strong Communities, which coordinated advocacy organizations, participants "truly cared about solving the problem of homelessness. ... Even someone less sympathetic couldn't quarrel that supportive housing was an investment that not only worked effectively but also saved money."

A Lease of One's Own

Connecticut's supportive housing has used both a scattered-site approach (leasing existing apartments that have rental subsidy programs) and a development approach (creating new or rehabilitated housing).

With the development approach, each apartment building is owned and operated by a local nonprofit organization and provides permanent homes. Buildings may have several units or dozens. Social service staff provide services tailored to the needs of individuals. Some tenants need intensive counseling, some are ready to participate in workforce training, some get help balancing their checkbooks, some need transportation to a doctor appointment, and others simply need someone to talk to.

Because moving to self-sufficiency involves having both support and independence, residents have their own leases, and although most residents use the services, they are not required to. Today, there are more than 2,300 units of supportive housing in 26 Connecticut communities.

"We finally have found a model that works for a good many people who have been homeless," says Meghan Lowney, executive director of Fairfield's Operation Hope, which offers both emergency shelter and supportive housing. "It's less expensive than shelter or other alternatives, and it's better for them."

The successful demonstration program has spurred two more advances: the "Reaching Home" campaign's deci-

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Program. Conducted by the University of Pennsylvania and funded by Connecticut and the Melville Trust, the research showed that supportive-housing services cost less than alternatives such as inpatient hospitalization or substance-abuse treatment and could lower Medicaid costs. It also showed that supportive housing had enhanced property values in urban neighborhoods where it had been tested. And for every \$1 spent, \$3.43 had been created—thanks to construction, materials, and service employment.

Nearly half of the residents in the

of the governor and budget director, many other elements were necessary. For example, community foundations and the Melville Charitable Trust underwrote soft costs related to housing development and capacity building, while state investment leveraged federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits and State Housing Tax Credits.

Given the financial complexity, other individuals were essential for forging clear messages on benefits and cost effectiveness. Advocacy from state senate president Kevin B. Sullivan, for example, was indispensable. Planners

Services for Residents of Affordable Housing

by Heidi Sawyer, The Caleb Group, Inc.

Nonprofit groups that focus on empowering the disadvantaged have recently been expanding the concept called *service coordination*. About a decade ago at affordable-housing communities, service coordinators began helping residents who had aging problems or disabilities to determine which agencies were best for which daily needs. They provided a margin of safety for people wishing to remain independent.

Today, service coordination has expanded to help struggling families remain in stable housing. A variety of organizations provide affordable-housing service coordination. One-on-one budget counseling, conflict resolution, crisis management, and housekeeping guidance help prevent evictions, which often mean relocation to a homeless shelter and more cost to society.

The nonprofit groups delivering service coordination often own or operate the affordable housing where their clients live. And many are moving beyond crisis prevention to promoting opportunities—through homeownership education, disease awareness and prevention, after-school activities, job training, and computer-skills development.

Joanna's Story

The Caleb Group, which is based in Swampscott, Massachusetts, had a client called Joanna who in 2001 moved to the group's affordable community in Saco, Maine. Joanna was a single mother with a little girl. A service coordinator helped guide her to an educational program called Parents as Scholars (PAS). PAS provided the support Joanna needed for child care and transportation so she could continue college. It also provided some tuition assistance to supplement her loans. She worked, raised her daughter, and attended school full time.

Nevertheless, costs of tuition and books kept mounting. With encouragement from the service coordinator, Joanna applied for and received a Caleb Scholarship to help cover some college costs in 2003. Through the Caleb Community Newsletter, Joanna also learned that an *individual development account* could match dollar for dollar all the money she saved toward her education. She applied for one and was accepted.

Throughout the region, mission-driven housing organizations are providing services beyond housing to promote economic self-sufficiency. And they keep developing new services. Caleb Opportunity Centers, for example, currently collaborate with school districts, Boys and Girls Clubs, banks, and health organizations to open up many kinds of possibilities for residents: employment possibilities that come with computer training, job-search training, tutoring, scholarships, and resume-writing assistance; educational possibilities that come with after-school homework clubs and assistance in math and English; self-sufficiency possibilities that come with financial-planning courses, home-buying seminars, and savings programs.

Collecting Data

Evaluating the impact of service coordination on residents' lives is a work in process. In one instance, NeighborWorks (<http://www.nw.org>) has been collaborating with the Enterprise Foundation (<http://www.enterprise-foundation.org>) on developing indicators to measure the success of their Learning Centers. So far they are finding that youth participating in after-school programs have improved grades. Other national and regional groups also are working toward quantifying the benefits of after-school programs for youths in affordable housing. Meanwhile, residents keep working on skills that could lead to jobs that could lead to saving money and moving into their own homes.

sion to set a goal of 10,000 units over the next 10 years; and the approval by Gov. M. Jodi Rell and the General Assembly of funding for 500 new units in the current biennium, with a promise of 500 more units in the next budget cycle.

That's the good news. The bad news is that there isn't enough supportive housing. In 2003, the Reaching Home Campaign estimated that 33,000 people were homeless in Connecticut at some point during the year, and 13,000 of them were children. As Calhoun says in the video, "Children shouldn't be doing homework in shelters."

Homelessness, particularly among families, has been on the rise, and overcrowded shelters, meant to be temporary, are having to turn people away. Permanent supportive housing offers the stability and long-term support that gives people the opportunity to rebuild their lives and function independently.

Coach Calhoun got that point right away. Noting that most people get support from neighbors, friends, and family, he observed, "In a sense, then, we all live in supportive housing." Today, Connecticut is helping those who lack support to get it through a new kind of housing and is at the same time benefiting the local and regional community.

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¹The national nonprofit intermediary organization, the Corporation for Supportive Housing (<http://www.csh.org>), helps communities create permanent housing with services to prevent and end homelessness. Its core services are delivered primarily through eight geographic hubs: California, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, and Southern New England (Connecticut, Rhode Island).