



Housing First

A case study in economics and ethics

React to these statements:

“Cleaning up downtown by moving those homeless guys off the streets will be good for business.”

“It’s discriminatory to say someone can’t handle having their own housing just because they’re an addict.”

What is Housing First? A recap:



A brief history

The traditional approach: “linear” or “Treatment First” programs

Housing First: a complete reversal of that process

Chronically homeless individuals are placed in permanent supportive housing—no prior treatment or sobriety requirements

Support staff available on an optional basis

Purpose: sense of stability, safety, normalcy promotes a healthy environment in which to heal naturally (meets more than physical needs)



A brief history, continued

HF developed in 1992 by psychologist Sam Tsemberis in response to the unique needs of a specific population

Who are the chronically homeless?

Idea of shelter as basic human right

Having policies “requiring people with mental illness to cure their clinical condition before they could house them—there’s something quite discriminatory about that. There is no other population for whom this is required.”

Very marginal, until policy diffusion nationwide under the Bush administration



A new **perspective** (why is this odd?)



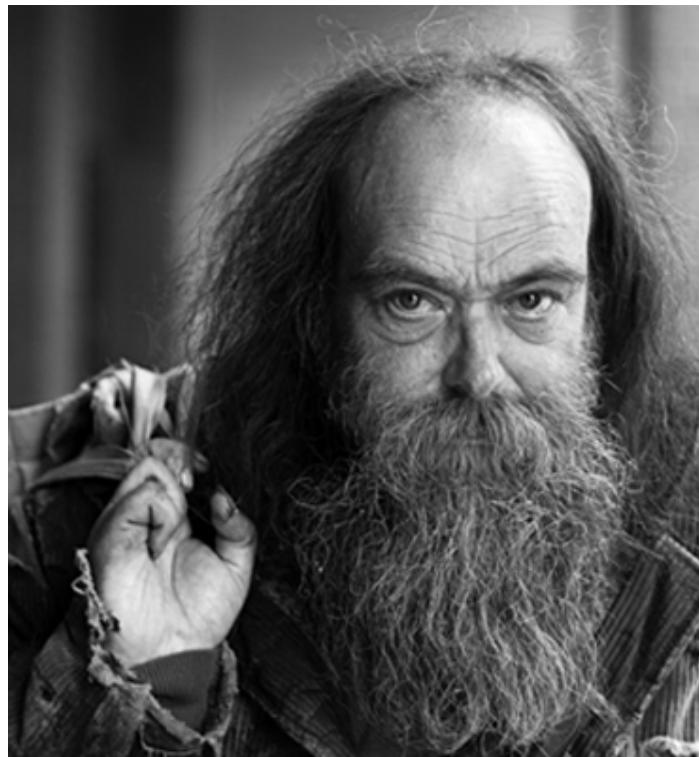
The norms of welfare

The deserving versus the undeserving; the idea of earning assistance (“Protestant work ethic”), versus basic rights to the essentials of life

Working to become “housing ready” versus housing allowing one to work on one’s self



Economics or ethics?



Housing First's ascent (McClatchy article)

The creation of chronic homelessness—Culhane 1998

10% of the population, 50% of the resources

From epiphany to policy—the 10-year plan

HUD secretary Martinez and ICH head Mangano

Policy diffusion to cities nationwide



“What matters is what works”: Stanhope & Dunn

The “heartening” but “surprising” story

The idea of evidence-based policy

Truly values-free?

By deciding what we mean by
“what works,” we insert a new
set of values into the process

Outcomes over process



Mangano: “this set of plans [should be] a business plan. The creation is around a management agenda that anticipates outcomes and results.”

“What matters is what works”: Stanhope & Dunn

“EBPol is especially problematic, charge its critics, because not only does it oversimplify a complex, value-laden process, but the values underpinning positive EBPOL are covert and therefore become givens rather than being subject to debate.”

“Compassionate outcomes must be congruent with market needs” (S&D); “both frugal governance and moral good” (Mangano)

“The selection of outcomes sets the terms of the debate”: justice and ethics notably absent from the discussion

Such research “is most compelling when it is narrow and decontextualizes to produce a clean problem and solution.”

Controversies

Mangano's approach

Selling to city managers, businessmen

*Good stories on a snowy day versus
cold, hard numbers*

Visibility and changing the face of
homelessness

Personal pathology or structural issues?

“Neoliberal biopolitics”—a population of convenience

*Culhane's suspect methodology, transforming a social
problem into an economic problem*



Controversies, continued

“The genius of Culhane and his colleagues' research is that they were able to mobilize neo-liberal discourse of cost and efficiency to advocate successfully what humanist or ethical discourses have failed to do—that people in need of shelter should be housed as quickly as possible. In recasting housing insecurity in terms of financial cost, their research provides an economic justification for permanent, long-term housing...the invention of chronic homelessness retrofits a social problem as an economic problem.”

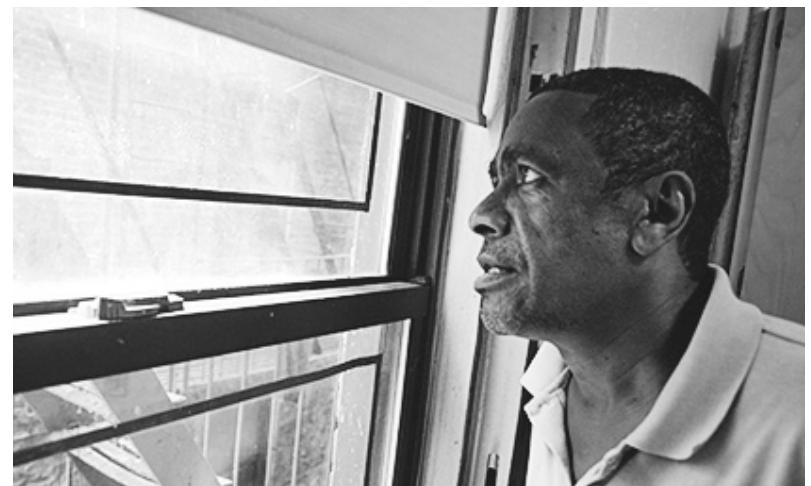
Craig Willse (2010)

The discussion today

The predominance of cost-savings over life outcomes

Does the policy actually benefit those most intimately involved?

Decline of chronic homelessness...increase of family homelessness



Discussion



What is the relationship between justifying something economically and justifying it ethically? Is there an appropriate time for each?

What dilemmas would you personally face if you had a moralistic view of poverty, but had to persuade someone using economic rationales?

What rationales do you think should guide our policies regarding social inequality?

How might addressing the needs of one group (the chronically homeless) take away from addressing the needs of others?

How does the story of Housing First show the tension between laying responsibility on individual people or on structural characteristics for personal outcomes?

Does it matter how a policy comes about, as long as it works in the end?