

# The New York Times

EDITORIAL

## Home for Good

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Los Angeles County is often called the national capital of homelessness, with more than 51,000 people lacking shelter on any given night. Homelessness there has proved to be a very tough problem to solve, especially with governments so short of revenue. But Home for Good, a collaboration by governments, businesses and charitable groups announced last month that it was making progress toward the goal of ending chronic and veteran homelessness in the county by 2016.

The program was begun in December 2010 by the United Way of Greater Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce. Over the last year it has found permanent supportive housing for 2,273 chronically homeless people and placed 874 veterans in permanent housing.

What makes those numbers so impressive is that Home for Good focuses on the hard-core homeless. Those troubled individuals are only about a quarter of the homeless population, but are a disproportionately heavy drain on public resources as they cycle through emergency rooms and jail cells.

Home for Good's initial success seems to be another validation of the "housing first" strategy, in which people battling addiction and mental illness are not required to sober up before being given shelter and services. It has been shown to be more effective — and far cheaper — to stabilize lives first, and then treat their many problems.

The group has fallen short of its own goals in some areas. It hasn't been able to build or convert as many units of permanent housing as it had hoped. While many politicians and others speak approvingly of Home for Good, of the 88 cities in Los Angeles County only seven, including Los Angeles, have so far joined in.

The co-chairman of Home for Good, Jerry Neuman, said he is often asked about how it will ever scale up to match the magnitude of the problem. He says the answer is "scaling down," having each community take responsibility for the chronically homeless in its own neighborhoods. The homeless population, he said, is far less transient than many people believe. Reaching out to them, he said, thinking small, is the way to make a large dent in a huge problem.

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<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/02/opinion/home-for-good.html>