

An occasional series of working papers prepared by the Downtown DC Business Improvement District to foster dialogue about critical issues relating to Downtown Washington’s economic, social and physical development.

Ending Chronic Homelessness in DC: A Unified Strategy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Downtown DC Business Improvement District (BID) issued its first leadership paper on homelessness in October 2008 (*Homelessness Downtown: Moving People from the Street to Independence*) and is issuing this second paper because of major progress achieved since then: 1) chronic homelessness has decreased significantly in the BID area, and 2) the BID’s ability to deal with short-term and chronic homelessness has improved due to new partnerships and initiatives and long-term relationships that continue to reach new heights. “The more the system works together,” says Chet Grey, the Downtown BID’s homeless services director, “the better it benefits homeless individuals and the community at large.”

A case in point is the Downtown BID Homeless Services Team’s role in identifying and reconnecting more than 700 homeless individuals to families and service providers since 2008. A January 27, 2010 homeless enumeration conducted by city officials, property manager volunteers and security company management shows 73 homeless people were living on Downtown streets at night, compared with 139 recorded in January 2008—a 47% decline.

The Downtown BID has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that solving social problems can also be good for business. Its data-driven strategy, combined with creatively leveraging its own resources with those of the District, were critical to DC housing more than 800 of the city’s most vulnerable people in less than 18 months.

BECKY KANIS, DIRECTOR OF INNOVATIONS,
 COMMON GROUND



PHOTO BY LINDA KAUFMAN

Anthony Blount proudly displays the keys to an apartment he obtained through Pathways to Housing DC and the DC Department of Human Service’s Housing First program. He is one of 250 homeless individuals the Downtown BID has helped to place in housing since 2007.

In addition, the DC government has placed 1,000 of DC’s most chronically homeless individuals and families in permanent supportive housing in less than two years, with assistance from both public and private sector partners.

“The Downtown BID’s goal is to reduce chronic homelessness through a unified approach involving other local BIDs, the city, service providers and nonprofit organizations,” says Richard H. Bradley, executive director of the Downtown BID. “Expanding our network of service providers, advocates, policy makers and government officials working on behalf of the homeless community can only lead to more and, we believe, improved strategies to confront homelessness.”



PHOTO BY KEVIN KOSKI

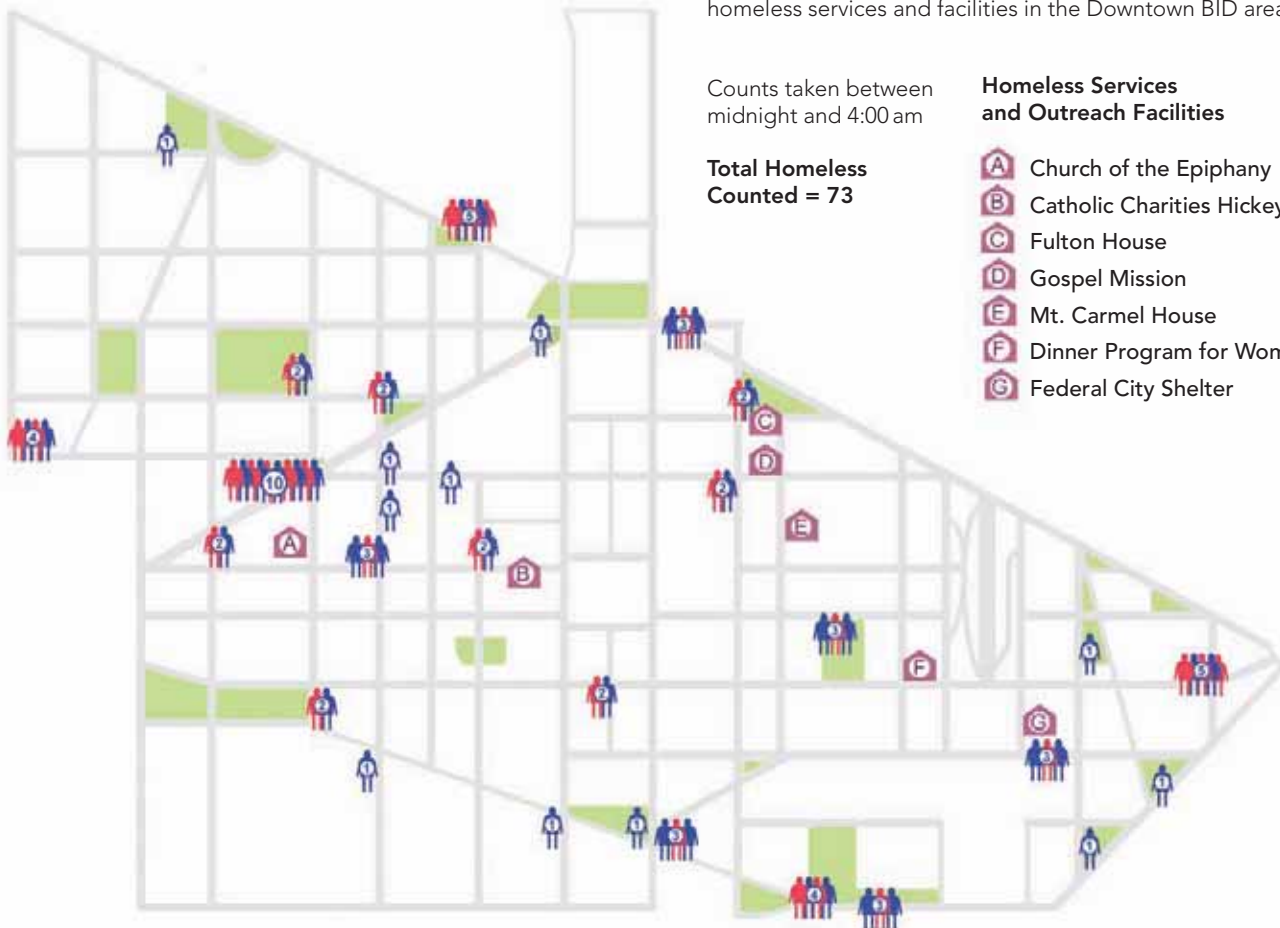
In January 2010, 73 homeless people lived on Downtown streets at night, compared with 139 in January 2008.

As hundreds of dedicated public, private and nonprofit entities across the country work to end or alleviate homelessness, it has become abundantly clear that no one entity can single-handedly tackle this pervasive issue. Ending homelessness requires collaborative local, regional and national partnerships. Public-private partnerships can be a powerful engine for dramatic change. “They significantly impact communities and fulfill very important public policy objectives,” says Andrew Haupt, a director at Common Ground, an international leader in developing solutions to homelessness.

“There’s no question that DC’s Downtown BID is an exceptionally strong partner in bringing the voice of the private sector to the table. Its leadership and staff consistently show an outstanding awareness about the importance of working together to create effective long-term solutions that will satisfy multiple stakeholders,” Haupt adds.

HOMELESS COUNT: JANUARY 27, 2010

This map shows where homeless persons were located in a homeless count taken on January 27, 2010 and highlights homeless services and facilities in the Downtown BID area.



To assess the number of homeless people living on the streets throughout the US, simultaneous enumerations take place on one day every year across the city and the nation, providing a Point-in-Time snapshot of the homeless population. Public and private sector volunteers, including Downtown SAMs, conduct the Downtown BID area count, implemented in 2002. Information is then registered with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Homeless individuals and families are well served when the agencies and organizations working on their behalf come together to solve common problems. This methodology has met with considerable success in places such as New York City and Louisiana, but it has not been lost on Washington, DC, which is recognized nationally for its aggressive and innovative solutions to homelessness.

Since October 2008, the Downtown BID has been working to create additional alliances that steer homeless individuals toward independent lives and away from the streets. They include working with or using:

- **The DC Public Library** to provide an innovative outreach program for the homeless
- **Martha's Table** to connect formerly homeless individuals to groceries and clothing
- **Common Ground** to create diverse housing stock for the formerly homeless and low-income residents
- **A Vulnerability Index** to identify and prioritize the street homeless population to qualify for housing

ACHIEVING A COMMON GOAL

Since its founding in 1997, the Downtown BID's approach to homelessness has been one of inclusiveness and accountability. "The BID's philosophy is that homeless individuals are part of the city's fabric, too," says Chet Grey, the Downtown BID's homeless services director. "And like every other citizen—Downtown workers, residents and visitors—we need to serve them. At the same time, we're not about maintaining homelessness or enabling the homeless; we're about finding solutions to people living on the streets."



PHOTO BY KEVIN KOSKI

The Downtown Homeless Services Team consists of a clinical director, two social workers, a certified addiction counselor, a licensed psychologist and a community support worker.

STAYING AHEAD OF THE CRISIS

- As of July 23, 2010, the DC government has placed 1,000 chronically homeless individuals and families in permanent supportive housing (PSH) since initiating a street-to-home model in fiscal year 2009 and adopting the Vulnerability Index.
- The city has added 225 family and 943 individual PSH units since 2008.
- A collaboration with the Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, which coordinates DC's "continuum of care," allows the Department of Human Services (DHS) to shorten the length of time—from more than six months to 30 to 45 days—it takes to get federal Housing Choice Voucher recipients signed leases.
- DHS directly funds or lobbies for funds to support the city's PSH agenda. In 2010, the city received \$17 million in federal appropriations for PSH; President Obama included another \$10 million in his 2011 budget.
- The DC Interagency Council on Homelessness's final plan of the city's Strategic Action Plan to End Homelessness (www.ich.dc.gov) was approved in April 2010. It outlines policies and strategies that will guide DC's homeless services over the next five years and includes an initial work plan and 10 outcome measures that DC will track to evaluate homelessness prevention and move individuals and families off the streets more quickly.
- DHS organizes an extensive program to address homeless people's needs during hypothermic season. DC's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency, the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), the Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Mental Health (DMH) also are involved.
- DMH's 24-hour/seven-days-a-week Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program provides mobile crisis services and extensive observation beds for individuals 18 years of age and older.
- The United Planning Organization, the city's designated community action agency, provides a fleet of vans to assist the homeless and transport them to shelters during hypothermia season.

DC HOMELESS FACTS

- 6,539 homeless individuals counted DC-wide in January 2010 enumeration (73 in Downtown)
- Homeless individuals rose by 5% from the 2009 count, primarily due to an increase in homeless families
- 2,097 persons were chronically homeless
 - Average age is 50
 - 1,596 suffer from chronic substance abuse and 1,145 are severely mentally ill
 - 12% have severe mental illness co-occurring with chronic substance abuse
 - More than one in five report a chronic health problem
- 4,602 formerly homeless persons—including 2,902 single persons and 473 families—resided in Permanent Supportive Housing, a 33% increase from the count conducted in 2009
- These increases were due largely to expansions in the Mayor's Permanent Supportive Housing Program, which resulted in the city's permanent supportive housing stock doubling in just two years

Source: *Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness*

Businesses across the country, and around the world, seem to agree. In the past two years, Grey has been invited to visit or host business leaders from Santa Monica, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Hollywood, California; New Orleans, Orlando, Memphis and New Haven; Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa; and London.

OUTREACH SERVICES

Nan Roman, president and chief executive officer of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, follows the Downtown BID's activities closely. "We commend the BID for seeking innovative approaches for ending homelessness in DC," she says.

Although the Downtown BID continues to form new partnerships, the root of its homeless services work is carried out through two coordinated programs:

■ **The Homeless Outreach Service Team (HOST).** Consists of 12 specially trained members of the Downtown BID's Safety/Hospitality and Maintenance team, known

as SAMs, who provide a reassuring presence on Downtown streets seven days a week and serve as the Downtown BID's ears and eyes, scanning the environment and providing consolation and support to homeless individuals. HOST members are trained to recognize and engage homeless individuals with psychological and addiction problems. They work closely with, and are trained by, a team of on-the-street professionals known as the Downtown Homeless Services Team.

■ **The Downtown Homeless Services Team.** Consists of six workers—clinical director Jonathan Ward and two social workers, a certified addiction counselor, a licensed psychologist and a community support worker—who the Downtown BID funds and helps manage. They are headquartered at Pathways to Housing DC, the nonprofit housing and services organization for chronically homeless single adults which contracts with the Downtown BID to develop strategies for assisting homeless individuals—including stabilizing these "consumers" and making them more receptive to services and organized relationships. The Downtown Homeless Services Team provides more extensive assistance than the HOST team.

The Downtown BID provides its services through a framework of the "Housing First" model developed by Pathways to Housing and implemented by the DC government. Housing First focuses on moving chronically homeless individuals from the streets and shelters to housing, and providing comprehensive services to address the issues that led to their ill-fated dilemma. "Not only is it important moving people to housing, but also providing them with services that will keep them in housing," says Laura Zeilinger, deputy director of program operations at the DC Department of Human Services (DHS). Zeilinger notes that the city has a 95% housing retention rate using the Housing First model.



PHOTO BY LINDA KAUFMAN

Downtown BID Homeless Services director Chet Grey and clinical director Jonathan Ward understand that the process of guiding a person from the street to independence often begins with a sympathetic ear.



PHOTO BY LINDA KAUFMAN

Officer Mark McConnell, Downtown BID Homeless Services director Chet Grey, Officer Chuck Sanders, and Downtown Homeless Services Team clinical director Jonathan Ward work together to confront homelessness.

Connecting the homeless to core services and housing also builds self-esteem and helps people reconnect with the broader community. The impact on the Downtown landscape is significant and helps improve the comfort and security of others who are in the Downtown BID area every day. Since 2008, the Downtown Homeless Services Team has identified and reconnected more than 700 vulnerable homeless individuals to families and service providers. The results of a homeless enumeration taken on January 27, 2010 show 73 homeless people were living on Downtown streets at night, compared with 139 recorded in January 2008—a 47% decline—and 93 recorded in 2009, during the recession.

The DC government has served as a leader in providing housing and services for homeless residents. It partners with the Downtown BID and other organizations to offer a variety of outreach and support services to homeless individuals, ranging from emergency services—such as distributing blankets on cold nights—to assisting those who might be in danger due to disabling health, mental health or substance abuse problems.

NEW PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to partnering with the city government, the Downtown BID collaborates with about 20 other partner providers to incorporate best practices to end homelessness. Recent developments include:

DC PUBLIC LIBRARY

In April 2010, the Downtown BID's Homeless Services Team partnered with DC's Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Memorial Library, the city's main public library where large numbers of homeless people congregate during daytime hours, to offer an innovative outreach program for the

SNAPSHOT: A DAY ON THE STREET

Success working with the homeless requires dedication and persistence, especially because most homeless individuals on Downtown streets balk at the goodwill. Enormous energy and plenty of good humor also helps.

Chet Grey, the Downtown BID's director of Homeless Services, and Jonathan Ward, clinical director of the BID's Downtown Homeless Services Team, achieve the unthinkable. Recently, both were bleary-eyed after spending the wee hours on a homeless count. "We just wanted to see who's new in the neighborhood," said Grey, a former Navy CDR Reserve Chaplain with a quick tongue.

A homeless man asks why Grey was out late the previous evening. "He told me that I was too old to be out so late," Grey recalled. "Although I think he's older than I am, he was worried about me."

Grey holds a master's degree in history and a Masters of Divinity degree. He has extensive experience advocating for people without homes and has developed emergency shelters for families, family transitional housing and housing for homeless people with HIV/AIDS. After nearly 30 years as a minister, he worked in the mental health field, specializing in addiction and recovery. Grey joined the Downtown BID in 2002 after realizing that the solution to homelessness requires collaboration among several entities.

Ward, a tall and sturdy Cornell University graduate, is a licensed, independent clinical social worker with a warm smile and an easy manner. One of the ten "new" homeless individuals that he and Grey found on the streets during the homeless count was nearby. Young and fragile-looking, she was found asleep in front of a church. Ward was busily locating a social worker, clothing and a hot shower for the woman, who came to DC for a new job but was allegedly abused by her employer and had nowhere to go.

Mark McConnell, a trained crisis intervention officer with the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), often accompanies Ward and Grey and is assigned to work with the Downtown BID's Homeless Services Team. In 2008, the bike-riding officer received MPD's Meritorious Service Medal for his work with the homeless, who often bombard him with epithets. It goes with the territory.

LU STANTON LEON, FREELANCE WRITER

homeless. Because homeless individuals frequently use libraries as a temporary refuge, members of the Homeless Services Team are stationed at MLK Library where they can engage the homeless directly.

It makes me proud to work in a community where downtown business owners recognize the value of helping people who are homeless find housing, receive treatment and become integrated into community life.

LINDA KAUFMAN, COO, PATHWAYS TO HOUSING DC

Working with the Downtown BID, the library has set aside office space for Homeless Services Team members, who now are on hand to help connect the homeless to social services and assist the library staff in handling daily crises and addressing concerns about individuals with mental health problems. While the office is not open to the public, the Homeless Services Team members who occupy it can respond immediately to the incidents, thereby discouraging library staff from contacting the police as a first recourse.

The Downtown BID uses established relationships with its partners, including DHS and the DC Department of Mental Health (DMH), to focus on client-centered services that can connect the homeless to adequate services that can begin the process of improving their lives. Over the years, the Homeless Services Team has proven to be a great asset in helping homeless individuals obtain medical attention and other social services.

"We're grateful for the partnership and believe our relationship with our customers without homes will improve," says Pamela Stovall, associate director of the DC Public Library. "Now, we can pick up the phone in order to get people connected to the proper social services."

In June 2010, the Homeless Services Team began training library staff and security in ways to help those in need. The city hopes to expand the training sessions to 23 library branches. Both Stovall and Grey shared the initiative's strategies and progress with more than 20,000 attendees at the American Library Association's 2010 Annual Conference in June. By spreading the news, the potential exists to encourage more cities to adopt similar strategies that are designed to alleviate the burdens endured by the nation's homeless population.

MARTHA'S TABLE

In April 2010, the Downtown BID connected Pathways to Housing DC to Martha's Table, a nonprofit organization that provides educational programs, food and clothing to at-risk DC residents. Working with Pathways to Housing DC, the organization now provides 80 to 85 food baskets

WINNING CONVERSATIONS

About 10 times a year, the Downtown BID's Homeless Services Team conduct training workshops about the homeless to get the public, property managers, elected officials and other decision-makers to help homeless people in a positive way. One such meeting, at the National Quality Forum (NQF), paid real dividends this year. NQF promotes change by developing and implementing a national strategy for health care quality measurements and reporting. The Downtown BID and Pathways to Housing DC spoke to the organization about several homeless initiatives while NQF conversed about local healthcare and ways its employees could contribute to homeless outreach efforts. In the end, 100 NQF employees, who were moved by what they heard and eager to make a difference, participated in an employee engagement project that collected more than \$1,000 for Pathways to Housing DC. This support is an example of how dialogue and outreach efforts, no matter how small, can have constructive results.

per month, on average, to former homeless individuals in the Downtown BID area who live in permanent supportive housing. During the first six months of this year, Martha's Table distributed 487 emergency food baskets per month to DC residents, compared with 220 baskets per month for all of 2008.

The partnership between the Downtown BID and the Metropolitan Police Department provides outreach services to the homeless that have drastically changed the lives of people and improved the Downtown area for all.

ASSISTANT DC POLICE CHIEF DIANE GROOMES

Downtown's newly independent apartment dwellers pay a \$5 stocking fee on the second Friday of the month to receive about \$50 worth of groceries, enough to feed three to four people. A second emergency food basket, which is available to individuals in dire need, also is made available to Pathways to Housing DC alumni every month to ensure that their basic needs are met as they assimilate to their newfound independence and homes.

All told, about 200 DC organizations refer clients to Martha's Table for food assistance, and another 250 distribute referrals to people looking to shop for clothing at Martha's

Outfitters store to become job ready or to purchase household items. Pathways to Housing DC, which has a 90% retention rate using the Housing First approach, receives \$100 vouchers from Martha's Table to distribute to each referral it sends to Martha's Outfitters, which sells items at substantial discounts.

Partnerships of this magnitude provide support to homeless individuals and families who have taken vital steps to transition from the street to permanent housing and independent lifestyles. "Prior to our entry, no one was supporting them with food," says Dominick Musso, director of facilities and food programs at Martha's Table. "By partnering with Pathways, we can be a part of the solution." With input from the Downtown BID, Pathways to Housing DC and Martha's Table are contemplating other ways to expand the partnership, including offering nutrition classes, hosting cooking demonstrations and creating a gleaning program, which would allow clients and volunteers to obtain leftover crops from farmers' fields.

COMMON GROUND

The Downtown BID is helping to create a variety of housing stock by supporting a collaboration between Common Ground, a New York-based pioneer that develops and operates supportive housing and promotes research-based practices to end homelessness, and Catholic Charities, a longtime Downtown BID partner. Both organizations plan to break ground on DC's first mixed-income permanent supportive housing building this year.

The building, as proposed, would include on-site social services space and will be built on vacant city-owned land, enabling about 66 formerly homeless persons with special needs to become fully integrated into the community. Common Ground and Catholic Charities are working with city officials to bring the proposal forward quickly, particularly given the emphasis on permanent supportive housing as included in DC's recently approved Strategic Action Plan to End Homelessness (see sidebar, pg 3).

"This is a tremendous opportunity to create a model permanent supportive housing program in the downtown area," says Chapman Todd, a former Catholic Charities housing programs director now serving as a consultant with the two organizations. "Common Ground brings extensive experience in developing permanent supportive housing around the country, and Catholic Charities brings a long history of providing comprehensive social services in the Washington area. That the partners are proposing to build a facility that integrates attractive design with onsite social services is a significant step toward fulfilling the goal to end homelessness in DC."

VULNERABILITY INDEX

The Downtown BID and other DC BIDs with homeless outreach teams work with the city to identify the chronically

homeless who now are prioritized for housing based on a Vulnerability Index that measures their length of homelessness and mortality risk. The index is a practical application—a person-to-person survey—that already is revolutionizing the speed at which DC's chronically homeless population is placed into permanent housing.

Common Ground is leading efforts for greater use of the Vulnerability Index as a means for prioritization. As a further step toward ending chronic homelessness, Common Ground, together with more than 15 national partners, officially launched the 100,000 Homes Campaign in July 2010, and the Downtown BID is signed on as a vanguard member.

The Campaign enlists and unites stakeholders from around the country who collectively commit to house 100,000 chronically homeless over a three-year period that began on July 12, 2010. Common Ground works with local and federal partners to refine and distribute the tools that will help expedite efforts to realign resources to begin housing the nation's most vulnerable citizens and reduce the institutional costs related to these activities. The Campaign was launched at the National Alliance to End Homelessness's annual conference in DC.

According to Common Ground, participating communities begin the process with a Registry Week that encourages volunteers to use the Vulnerability Index to create a by-name registry of everyone experiencing homelessness. The registry is broken down into sub-populations and prioritized by matching those with the greatest need for housing. Ultimately, the goal is to have participants consolidate best practices and influence policy.



PHOTO BY LINDA KAUFMAN

Downtown SAM Eli Jacobs and Downtown BID Homeless Services Team clinical director Jonathan Ward engage a Downtown man living on the street.

Since 2008, Common Ground has been working with 15 communities, including Washington, DC, to pilot the Campaign's methodology. By all accounts, the Vulnerability Index is an amazing tool that not only identifies chronically homeless individuals but also leads to results that ensure they are placed into housing expeditiously. As an early participant, the DHS has worked with Common Ground to design a street registry and train people to conduct the local survey. "DC designed a system to move people at lighting speed," says Becky Kanis, director of the 100,000 Homes Campaign. "The city is viewed as a model around the country."

Over the past two years, the 15 communities have housed 1,500 of their most long-term and vulnerable people. Now, Common Ground seeks to partner with 50 American communities, each of which has more than 1,000 unsheltered homeless persons, as well as other communities that seek to be a part of this bold new campaign to address chronic homelessness in America.

CONCLUSION

Ending homelessness in the Downtown BID area, the city and the nation will not happen overnight, and no one expects that it will. Such a persistent and pervasive problem will require the continued stick-to-itiveness that hundreds of local, regional and national organizations that are dedicated to eradicating or alleviating the dismal effects of homelessness have demonstrated.

Despite all that has been accomplished, many challenges remain. For its part, the Downtown BID will continue to work with the Mayor's Interagency Council on Homelessness, the Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness and its partner providers to move Downtown's homeless into services, make the system more consumer friendly, link the most vulnerable homeless to appropriate providers and assist individuals in reconnecting with family members.

Continued collaborations with partners will enable the Downtown BID to identify more innovative solutions to the homelessness problem. These significant partnerships will allow the Downtown Homeless Services Team to engage homeless people and move them from the streets into independent living, and help keep them there.

"The Downtown BID has been on the frontline of the homeless issue for more than a decade, providing

www.downtowndc.org/homelessness

The Downtown BID website offers an extensive array of resources for advocates of DC's homeless, including community meeting and event listings, contacts for emergency services and information on shelters and other service providers. There are also tips on dealing with panhandling, national and local news about homelessness, facts about homelessness in DC, and a detailed history of the BID's involvement in the fight against homelessness.

Materials for download include the Leadership Papers *Ending Chronic Homelessness in DC: A Unified Strategy* and *Homelessness Downtown: Moving People from the Street to Independence*

leadership and partnering with agencies, businesses and organizations that have, collectively and individually, made a difference," says Bradley. "We don't plan to abandon this cause. If anything, we will consistently seek to lessen the effects of homelessness and work diligently with all our partners, both old and new, to incorporate best practices to end this scourge. It's the right thing to do."

For more information about our Homeless Services Program please contact:

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Vibrant, inviting and smart, Downtown DC is Washington's premiere destination for exploring, creating and sharing ideas and experiences. The Downtown DC Business Improvement District (BID) is a private non-profit organization that provides capital improvements, resources and research to help diversify the economy and enhance the Downtown experience for all. This special district, where property owners have agreed to tax themselves to fund services, encompasses a 138-block area of approximately 825 properties from Massachusetts Avenue on the north to Constitution Avenue on the south, and from Louisiana Avenue on the east to 16th Street on the west. As a catalyst, facilitator and thought leader, the Downtown BID promotes public/private partnerships to create a remarkable urban environment. For more information, visit www.downtowndc.org.



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