

DowntownDC BID

INNOVATION

When overnight homeless shelters close in the morning, people experiencing homelessness often have no place to go in downtown DC. For years, the DowntownDC BID, the city and DowntownDC's business community saw individuals on the streets and in public space and wanted to do more to help. This is why the DowntownDC Business Improvement District (BID), together with the city and its partners, opened the Downtown Day Services Center (The Center) in February 2019. The Center is open Monday to Friday from 9am-5pm and serves as a single point of access to a wide range of services and amenities — from basic services like a hot meal, restroom facilities, hot showers and laundry to more specialized services, all achieved through a housing-first model meant to assist someone on the journey from homelessness to being housed. Vital services such as health care, case management, legal aid, veteran benefits, obtaining identification and computer access are provided and are necessary tools for individuals to qualify for housing opportunities. Approximately 125-160 individuals are served daily in the state-of-the-art facility. The Center is located in the basement of a church which was uniquely transformed into a warm and welcoming space where rows of hanging plants float over the community area, and visuals of inspiring quotes are spread out throughout the facility's walls. The Center gives individuals a meaningful place to go during the day that attempts to alleviate homelessness through a supportive journey to housing.

OUTCOME

The Center has largely impacted downtown DC. It has contributed to reducing loitering in areas of downtown DC, which helps reduce disorder, positively benefiting both businesses and visitors as well as the perception of safety. But The Center's greatest impact is demonstrated by those served at the facility. Forty-eight people have been moved into permanent housing since The Center's opening, the BID has hired three guests as ambassadors and individuals have secured employment, achieved sobriety, been reunited with their families, received medical care and much more. In the last year, the facility has served over 38,549 individuals, provided 7,406 showers, ran 3,188 loads of laundry, served 33,519 lunches, distributed 21,504 items of clothing and provided computer access over 6,728 times. The Center more closely ties the private sector community and local residents and the city to the DowntownDC population experiencing homelessness. It provides the public with opportunities to connect and give back via volunteering, donating and other annual service initiatives. The Center has a five-year property contract with the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, and relies on government funding to keep it running. The BID invests money, labor and staff to run The Center and actively works with the government and other city officials to ensure that The Center has the funding it needs to help those experiencing homelessness for years to come. Additionally, the BID established a 501(c)(3) Foundation to develop additional funding sources beyond what the BID and partners could provide.

EXECUTION

After years of working with the city, service providers and local brokers, the BID secured a location through a relationship with the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. The BID then applied and won a grant from the DHS. The BID was then tasked with getting The Center constructed and up-and-running in a four-month timespan. Before any discussions of design or staffing could begin, there were several government procedures that had to be completed to adhere to District policies. Some of these items included having permits approved and working with the city to meet zoning requirements. The BID and The Center also completed Memorandums of Understanding with their partners to ensure all parties were aware of their roles and responsibilities in making The Center a successful project. The BID enlisted Moya Design Partners with the task of transforming the basement of the 161-year-old church into an inclusive, welcoming space. They transformed the windowless basement into a sleek facility with comfortable furniture, tranquil wall art, an HD TV, laundry room, kitchen, conference rooms, medical rooms, etc. The Center was up and running in less than six months. The design, materials used to build it, appliances used, and services provided are top quality.

REPRESENTATION

The Center is a program founded on inclusivity. In addition to making individuals experiencing homelessness a direct focus of the community, The Center is inclusive to neighboring residents, businesses and anyone willing to help its mission. The BID partnered

with at least 11 organizations that have played a key role in maintaining The Center's success: Catholic Charities provides daily meals; Pathways to Housing DC offers case management; Unity Health Care provides medical services, including lab work; Department of Employment Services (DOES) provides employment assistance; Department of Motor Vehicles provides non-driver identification; DC Department of Health offers vital records services; Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless provides legal aid; and DHS' Economic Security Center helps with benefits eligibility. The downtown DC community also supports The Center via volunteering, monetary donations, and in-kind donations, such as clothing, games, books and houseware and appliances for individuals moving out of homelessness.

REPLICATION

There are approximately over 6,000 people experiencing homelessness in Washington, DC. The Center's primary goal is to help guests get into housing. To achieve this goal, The Center provides guests with all the tools and resources they need in one central location to help facilitate this process. The Center's model is one that can be replicated across the nation by locating space, securing service providers and funding. The variety of services offered at The Center can be modified by location and availability.

Recently, the BID hosted an event on February 18, 2020 where other BIDs and partners were invited to learn about the day center, ask questions and incentivized to take action by volunteering, donating items, funding the center or replicating this model in other BIDs or downtowns.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

There were two major challenges involved in The Center project—securing funding and a location in downtown DC. After several months the District made a grant available, the BID applied for it and was able to secure a \$1.7 million grant from DHS, which required the project to be completed in a four-month period. Moreover, the BID also secured a prime location in downtown DC in the basement of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. The windowless basement and its aging infrastructure presented another set of challenges which delayed the construction of The Center. The BID was able to overcome these complex challenges and transform the space into a state-of-the-art facility that offers multiple services and solutions to help end homelessness.