

## **CASE 5-2**

*The Community Shelter Board of Columbus, Ohio, created a program to alleviate homelessness along the city's riverbank. Exhibit 5-2a is part of a report to the community titled "Rebuilding Lives."*

Community Shelter Board: Building a Supportive Community to End Homelessness

Community Shelter Board with Edward Howard & Co.

### **Overview**

In 1998, forgotten parcels of land along the riverbank in downtown Columbus, Ohio, became the site of explosive growth, including upscale housing, a science museum, and an arena. Over the years, however, the riverbank also had become a place in which homeless individuals (predominantly men) lived and searched for food. These changes created the need and the opportunity to better serve homeless men, now threatened with displacement.

The effort began in the form of the Scioto Peninsula Relocation Task Force, facilitated by the Community Shelter Board (CSB), a leader in providing homeless services. Months of study and public debate resulted in a visionary plan to reduce homelessness and replace a patchwork system of emergency shelters with permanent housing and support services. The five-year plan proposed ultimately locating 800 apartments for homeless men in virtually every zip code in the county, constructing a shelter in an inner-city neighborhood, and building a facility for alcoholic homeless men. Throughout the country, opposition to affordable housing has a long history, and Franklin County, while more tolerant than some parts of the country, has experienced its share of "NIMBYism." The challenges were great: How could CSB get people to accept living next door to formerly homeless men, many of whom have mental illnesses and addictions? How could CSB raise the money for this unpopular cause?

In summer 1998, CSB hired Edward Howard & Co. to assist with an aggressive community relations effort to generate broad-based support for a remarkable new way to end the cycle of homelessness.

## Research

Five sources of primary research were used to develop CSB's community relations program: (1) a comprehensive community needs assessment that included surveying community leaders; (2) twenty-one community forums attended by approximately 300 people; (3) a community survey; (4) community input sessions on the final plan; and (5) interviews with thought leaders. Other research involved a review of community relations efforts in other cities that had sited supportive housing, results from a public opinion poll that showed residents supported a new facility to help alcoholic homeless men, and a market analysis revealing an affordable housing shortage.

Open discussions in community forums and surveys showed that crime and safety were foremost concerns. Residents emphasized the need for community education and addressing homelessness as a community-wide problem, not a neighborhood problem. As a result, CSB named the initiative "Rebuilding Lives"—to change the language of the debate from "what to do about those homeless men by the river" to creating a new community structure that enables homeless people to rebuild their lives.

Opinion leaders suggested that an assertive, strategic effort to communicate with leaders and residents in affected neighborhoods was critical to the success of the housing initiative. Avoiding open and honest communications would result in CSB's inability to deliver on its promise and in its failure to obtain funders' financial and moral support. Initially, many leaders were not convinced that all the housing could be built as planned. From that feedback emerged another key strategy: talk about and document important successes and milestones to strengthen support for the initiative among public and private funders.

## Planning

CSB's goals were twofold: build community acceptance for Rebuilding Lives and ensure that the Columbus City Council passed a resolution to fund the project. CSB had to reach four key audiences: (1) funders such as the Columbus City Council, Franklin County Commissioners, and United Way; (2) business leaders who influence public policy; (3) residents affected by the siting of new housing; and (4) media, including reporters who had to interpret a complex and potentially volatile issue, and editorial board members.

Based on the research, key objectives were defined, including informing neighbors where housing would be located and dispelling myths about the negative impact supportive housing may have on a neighborhood. CSB also understood that it had to educate the media about the Rebuilding Lives process and siting. To turn skeptics into

supporters, CSB had to report its success on the number of men in job training or school, those in treatment, and those who did not return to emergency shelters.

Strong and focused key messages were developed from research: (1) that supportive housing connects homeless people to job training and other services, enabling them to become self-sufficient taxpayers and productive employees; (2) that supportive housing is the most cost-effective way to solve the homeless problem in Franklin County; and (3) that Rebuilding Lives is a sensible approach to the problem of homelessness—without this plan, Columbus would be plagued with the same homelessness problems as other urban areas.

A community relations plan emerged that included public affairs and funder relations, which emphasized briefings and ongoing communications to seek and maintain support; media relations, which included periodic editorial board visits and publicizing successful developments of Rebuilding Lives; and siting strategies, which addressed how CSB and partner agencies that are responsible for managing housing and services would build neighborhood support. The community relations budget was about \$150,000 over three years.

## Execution

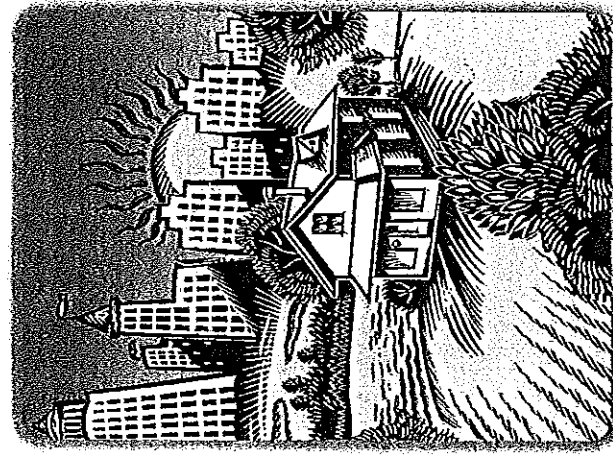
- Building community acceptance for Rebuilding Lives began with two community input sessions in fall 1998 to unveil the draft plan. A concise "Community Summary" was prepared to simply and powerfully communicate the 100-page plan. In 1999 and 2000, aggressive media relations included scheduling media interviews and editorial board visits, placing op-eds, and preparing CSB officials (who were used to "flying under the radar") for intense media scrutiny in light of the controversial issue and large funding request. The following actions also were taken.
- A public presentation was produced and CSB officials were scheduled for one-on-one, high-level briefings and thirteen community meetings.
- A public opinion poll was commissioned and the results—widespread support for supportive housing—were publicized.
- CSB's annual report and fundraising event became vehicles for promoting Rebuilding Lives.
- A "Report to the Community" was mailed to keep key audiences informed of progress.
- A community advisory committee was formed.
- A speakers' bureau was created and groups were encouraged to schedule presentations.

- Community relations protocols were created to assist CSB-funded agencies that provide services and manage property, and providers attended media training and community relations sessions.

**Evaluation**

The community relations program generated an outpouring of support: today nearly 100 apartments are open, standing side by side with traditional housing. With a bipartisan and unanimous vote in 1999, the Columbus City Council approved funding to start Rebuilding Lives, paving the way for substantial contributions from Franklin Commissioners and United Way. The strength of unanimity and a \$9 million investment bolstered community consensus. Rebuilding Lives received repeated editorial endorsements. The shelter for inebriated men received funding and virtually no opposition. Following intensive community relations in 2000, the city council approved zoning changes for the new emergency shelter. Based on demonstrated support, the Corporation for Supportive Housing, a national organization with expertise in affordable housing, established an office in Columbus. The U.S. General Accounting Office recognized CSB for its leadership role. CSB's fundraising event raised a record \$800,000—a 25 percent increase in contributions over 1995, the fundraiser's inaugural year. In addition, the city council approved funding to build even more units. The key strategy proved correct—communicating openly and honestly about controversial issues built understanding, acceptance, and success.

**Community Shelter Board**



**REBUILDING LIVES:  
A REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY  
FEBRUARY 2001**

**Exhibit 5-2a**

*Rebuilding Lives*

**"This safe permanent housing will foster an environment of hope so tenants can address recovery and change at their own pace to focus on issues such as substance abuse and unemployment...in many ways the building's contribution to the community has come full circle...the building will provide permanent housing and employment training, and supportive services for formerly homeless men who, like the immigrants and migrants of an earlier day, are also working to rebuild their lives."**

**Parsons Avenue Open House - Mayor Michael Coleman**

**About Rebuilding Lives**

Rebuilding Lives is a community-based initiative to end the cycle of homelessness in central Ohio. Developed as a result of the work of the Scoto Peninsula Relocation Task Force in 1998, this collaborative program will help ensure that no one is left behind as our city grows and prospers. Rebuilding Lives is a solid strategy to end dependence on emergency shelters. The job of the task force was to recommend ways the community could use resources more wisely. Their accomplishment was a plan that does more than just relocate homeless men; it rebuilds lives. There are two distinct categories of homeless individuals — those with short-term, immediate housing crisis and those with long-term needs. Through our research, we found that 15% of homeless men with chronic needs use over 50% of the shelter services. These individuals require a different approach to address their long-term circumstances.

Through Rebuilding Lives, CSB is poised to make unprecedented gains on the goal of ending homelessness in Franklin County. The Rebuilding Lives initiative will:

1. Reconfigure the emergency shelter system to more effectively care for the short-term emergency needs of homeless men.
2. Develop supportive housing — permanent, affordable rental housing linked to a range of support services — for those with long-term needs.

The overarching goal of Rebuilding Lives is to end the cycle of homelessness by providing supportive housing and programs that help homeless people get on with their lives. We are making progress toward that goal. We invite you to look at the variety of initiatives we have underway.

**Rebuilding Lives Private Sector Supporters**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Bank One, NA                            | The Limited, Inc. and Intimate Brands, Inc. |
| The Columbus Foundation                 | Nationwide Foundation                       |
| Columbus Medical Association Foundation | The Sumner Family Foundation                |
| Crane Plastics Company                  | Wolfe Associates, Inc.                      |
| Ingram-White Castle Foundation          | The Walter and Marian English Foundation    |
| Hattie and Robert Lazarus Fund          |   |

# Rebuilding Lives

...year two

## Promises Made... Improving The Shelters

An Anchor for Homeless Men  
The private sector has pledged \$750,000 as part of a \$1.5 million capital campaign to purchase and renovate the Anchor building as a new shelter for homeless men. The Mayor and Columbus City Council approved \$600,000 to support the facility.

The new shelter is a key component of the *Rebuilding Lives* plan that links homeless people to employment, community services and permanent housing.

The operator, Lutheran Social Services, has begun meeting with the Milo Grogan community, where the shelter is located, to create positive working partnerships.



The Resource Center is equipped with eight computers, four telephone lines and 30 private voice-mail boxes for clients, many of which was donated.

## Faith Mission's Resource Center

Since opening its doors in November, more than 100 men and women have logged over 600 visits to Faith Mission's Resource Center. Landing jobs and housing are the goals of the Center's clients. Searching the classifieds, telephoning for job

interviews, creating and updating resumes are all functions made possible through the high-tech Resource Center. The Resource Center grew out of

Faith Mission feeding the *Rebuilding Lives* report and conducting an internal survey of clients who said they needed assistance in finding jobs and housing.

Soliciting assistance from Center of Vocational Alternatives (COVA), the two agencies began planning to address the issues of job-placement and training needs for homeless men. The outcome is the Resource Center, an on-going partnership between the two agencies.

## ...Promises Kept Developing Supportive Housing

### National Church Residences

National Church Residences (NCR), a Columbus-based national developer of senior and affordable housing, has announced its plan to develop 50 units of supportive housing for chronically homeless men and women. The 100-unit downtown apartment complex will also provide affordable housing to downtown workers.

NCR intends to operate the building as a "clean and sober" environment and provide on-site services. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recently announced a \$250,000 grant for the new construction.

### Building Capacity - Rebuilding Lives Workshops

The Corporation for Supportive Housing and CSB provided technical assistance workshops to agencies that are implementing *Rebuilding Lives* initiatives. "City Council 101" gave partner agencies an understanding of City Council and the Housing, Health and Human Services and Zoning committees, and provided information on area commissions.

The workshop, "Legal Issues in Supportive Housing", offered insight and information about the regulations governing supportive housing. The workshop included information on federal, state and local laws. Carole Heyward of the Metropolitan Strategy Group of Cleveland and Joseph Maszkovak of the Legal Aid Society of Columbus, were the presenters.

A workshop on "Consumer Empowerment" led by Julia Tippi, a former consumer of Shelter services and a nationally recognized advocate, provided information on advocacy and capacity building at the consumer level.

Mayor Coleman, clients and staff on opening day at the Polson Avenue apartments. Community Housing Network, friends of the homeless and Sounness, Inc collaborate on the project to help those in need make a fresh start.



## Our Work Continues

### Listening to Consumers

In December, CSB Board of Trustees heard feedback from current and former consumers of CSB-funded emergency shelter and supportive housing. These who shared information were typical consumers: a young man who had floated between the homes of friends and family; a veteran, new to town who needed a hand; and, a mother with five children. This is some of the information they shared:

Glenn is a former client of Faith Mission who now works there. During his stay at the shelter, he received meals, housing, transportation, referrals to employment and veterans assistance, and transition assistance to move him into housing. The single biggest problem he identified during his shelter stay was "lack of motivation" among others staying there. As an agency employee, Glenn says he is "impressed" by the coordination of services that CSB and its partners provide.

Faced with personal challenges during his teenage years, Nathan floated from house to house. Now, as an active member of Coalition on Housing and Homelessness in Ohio's Youth Empowerment Program, Nathan advocates for young people who are experiencing housing crises. Within two weeks of his stay at Friends of the Homeless, Nathan had found a job. He is currently saving money to establish a bank account so that he can become eligible for assistance from the Transition Program to get into housing.

Nancy is married and has five children. The Volunteers of America's transitional housing program linked her to Lutheran Social Services. Now her family has

### Community Shelter Board

The Community Shelter Board (CSB) was created in 1986 to respond to the growing problem of homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County. Since that time, CSB has allocated over \$34 million to programs that provide services to families and individuals experiencing a housing crisis in our community.

### Vision

CSB and its partner agencies, combined with the full support of the community, will provide meaningful solutions and alternatives to combat -- and eventually eliminate -- homelessness in our city.

### Mission

The Community Shelter Board, by coordinating community-based efforts, fostering collaboration, and funding services, assists families and individuals in central Ohio to resolve their housing crisis.

### Primary Goals

To develop and implement a strategy that will increase community awareness about the causes of and solutions to homelessness and ultimately decrease the demand for emergency shelter.

To provide open access to emergency shelter for all families and individuals experiencing a housing crisis through the combined resources of the Community Shelter Board and its partner agencies.



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