A JOURNEY HOME

This summer, UNITY and key partners set an ambitious goal: to house 200 chronically homeless people in 100 days. After an innovative, 100-day campaign, they surpassed all goals and achieved the highest per-capita rate in the nation of permanently housing the city’s most vulnerable people, including Trolean Tolliver and her young family.

Trolean Tolliver and her children walked from library to library last summer, seeking a little peace and cool air. Every day for several months, she and her little family took all-day walks to get the shelter vouchers they needed for that night.

They started out at the Salvation Army shelter at 6:30 each morning, when it closes for the day. Then they’d head to the Ozanam Inn on Camp Street in the Warehouse District to get shelter vouchers for the coming night, because she had no money to pay the nightly shelter fees.

The round trip was about six miles.

Along the way, they’d stop at parks and “every library we could find,” she said. Tolliver read books to her older children: Envy, 6 and Christopher, 5. “I love

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Dear Friends:

In 2011, New Orleans topped the nation in homelessness. Thousands of people with disabilities, including veterans, have no place to live. How can this be in a city renowned for its hospitality? We said, “Enough!” We changed it.

We have reduced homelessness by nearly 80 percent since the post-Katrina peak of 11,619 persons in 2007. And this summer, UNITY and its federal, state and local partners again set a new standard, through the national 100,000 Homes Campaign, a national initiative. In May, we boldly committed to housing 200 chronically homeless people in Orleans and Jefferson parishes within 100 days.

Through the tireless work of partners, I’m proud to tell you that we far exceeded our goal — we housed 244 people.

But we’re not finished yet. Galvanized by this success, we will push forward and house a total of 500 people by the holidays, a time of year when no one wants to see people suffering in homelessness. And with your help, I pledge to you that by August 2015, we will end chronic homelessness in New Orleans. No veterans disabled person should be homeless!

Please join us to make this vision a reality. Because of our ongoing successes, we know that our goal is possible. I look forward to updating you on our progress.

Sincerely,

Martha J. Kegel,
Executive Director

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reading and I have tried to pass that on to them,” she said. But the situation wasn’t ideal.

If the children fell asleep in a chair, she’d try to block public view of them with a stroller, because of library rules about patrons sleeping.* And occasionally, they’d have to leave suddenly, because her infant George would begin crying and Tolliver worried that he would disturb other patrons. Then they’d walk to a park or maybe to another library. Maybe to a McDonald’s with a play area, if it was busy and no one would notice that they hadn’t purchased a meal.

“Don’t say we’re homeless,” she’d tell them. “We’re just looking for a house right now.”

Partnership houses more people, faster

This summer, to house homeless people more quickly, UNITY helped lead the “200 Homes in 100 Days” campaign.

The “200 in 100” campaign aimed to house 200 chronically homeless people – disabled people who have been homeless for more than a year – through a partnership led by UNITY, the city of New Orleans, the state of Louisiana, and federal housing and veterans agencies. The partners found they were able to house people three times faster by targeting resources more efficiently and eliminating barriers to housing.

In the end, the New Orleans partnership greatly exceeded its goals, by housing 244 people during its original 100-day timeframe. The Washington Post noted that if the partnership continues housing people at the same pace, “the region will be six months early in meeting a federal goal of eliminating so-called chronic homelessness by the end of 2015.”

With support, UNITY is confident the partnership will be able to maintain its pace to eliminate chronic homelessness in New Orleans by August 2015, the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, says UNITY executive director Martha Kegel.

Other cities are also following UNITY’s lead in two ways. They’re creating outreach teams like UNITY’s that go out into the community, to where homeless people are, instead of waiting for sick and vulnerable people to come into an office and seek services. And they are, like UNITY, crafting and constantly updating registries of the community’s sickest homeless people — those most in need of housing.

* No librarian ever approached Tolliver about her sleeping children. One quietly offered the children a few books they could take with them and said that she is sensitive to the issue, because UNITY outreach workers work regularly with her staff to help house homeless patrons.
Walking miles with a newborn

The 200 in 100 Campaign allowed UNITY outreach workers like Laniker Hunter-Davis to act quickly to house the most vulnerable people. Hunter-Davis remembers the morning that she first saw Tolliver and her children leave the Salvation Army. In the afternoon, she saw the family again, at the Ozanam Inn.

Hunter-Davis was at the Ozanam interviewing a shelter resident. Then she saw Tolliver. “She walked up, she was sweating profusely. The kids were sweating. I said, ‘Ma'am, did you walk here?’” Tolliver said yes.

Hunter-Davis has seen an increase in homeless families. But that first image of Trolean Tolliver remains clear in her mind. “It was such a sad situation,” Hunter-Davis said, recalling how Tolliver had a newborn baby about three weeks old in the stroller and two other young children who were taking turns riding on the back of the stroller.

Hunter-Davis interviewed her, finding out that they were evicted along with Tolliver’s mother from an apartment after Tolliver’s mother lost her job and got behind on rent. They’ve been in touch ever since, said Hunter-Davis, who calls Tolliver “a success story.” The family also receives regular support through a UNITY partner agency, Responsibility House, which serves people with physical and mental disabilities.

More than 1 in 10 poor people become homeless each year

“I’m so grateful to Ms. Laniker for stopping me that day,” said Tolliver, who a few months ago began working at a referral center for the homeless.

She sees weary homeless people resting on chairs and benches and recalls how she sat in public places with her children, trying to keep her eyes open.

She remembers how every once in awhile, a relative or a friend gave her the money to pay for a shelter stay and so they didn’t have to walk all day. On those days, they would stroll to a park or to the nearest library until it was time to check back in at the Salvation Army shelter on South Claiborne Avenue at 4 p.m.

So every morning, the children would ask her, “Mama, are we going to be walking a long time or a little?”

These days, their walks are short, happy strolls to the neighborhood library. Often, they run into other families that they knew from the shelter. One morning, she waved at one family from her porch. That afternoon, a little boy from the shelter came up and hugged her.

National data has shown that roughly 10 percent of people living in poverty experience homelessness at some point each year. In New Orleans, the number may be closer to 12 percent, according to UNITY’s database of those who access the homeless-services system.

But now, thanks to UNITY’s partners and supporters, the Tolliver family can leave the shelter and walk home. On a recent afternoon, the two older children skipped ahead on the sidewalk while Tolliver pushed baby George in the stroller. “They’re happy. And I’m at ease,” she said.
Manuel Justin now has his own apartment. But the center of his world is still his metal grocery cart. When he’s done sleeping on his bed, he folds up his blanket and puts it neatly on the bottom tier of his cart. After he cooks grits, he washes the pan and puts it on the top of his cart, resting at an angle where it can’t fall off.

Still, his situation is vastly better than it was a few months ago. Justin had been homeless for at least 30 years and neighbors say that for the past decade he lived in a horse trailer next to a longtime stable in the city’s 6th Ward.

Most people are homeless for only a few days or weeks. Many end their own homelessness without much outside assistance. But some cases are harder than others. And in order to eliminate chronic homelessness in the city by 2015, UNITY must house all those with mental and physical disabilities who have been homeless for more than a year.

So it’s a major achievement that Justin’s cart now sits in the middle of his apartment, next to a couch. Inside the cart is a mix of things he’s accumulated. Books in weathered black garbage bags. A hubcap. A two-liter plastic bottle that he still fills every morning with water. He keeps his most precious belongings – his Bible, some photos, and the few clothes he owns – in a duffel bag embossed with a logo for a convention held in the city four years ago.

Every morning, while he eats breakfast, he listens to the news and some music on a radio purchased for him by his UNITY outreach worker, Clarence White III, 60. White bought him the radio because he’s long known about Justin’s passion for music. When White was a teenager, growing up in the Treme neighborhood, Justin was a well-dressed young man known throughout the community as one of the best dancers to hit the dance floor. Neighbors say that he had a
psychiatric break not long after his daughter was born and has been homeless ever since.

Earlier this year, Nicole Carthan, Justin’s daughter — who’s now a grown woman, living on the East Coast — reached out to homeless advocates about her father. White recognized the name. “We had been seeing him occasionally on the streets,” he said. But Justin’s daughter told White that her father was sleeping by a horse trailer, so White passed by the 6th Ward stables often, hoping to run into him.

One morning, White got there early and saw Justin coming out from behind the trailer. He hailed him down. Justin said that other people had tried to reach out to him. “He said he couldn’t trust them,” White said. The two then began talking about the past about growing up in the 6th Ward, where the two of them lived a block apart, Justin on Orleans Avenue and White on St. Ann Street.

Despite their shared past, Justin was still wary. But White began passing through to see him everyday. Sometimes White would call Justin’s daughter and the two would talk. “Our relationship got better and better,” White said. “And his daughter played a key part. ‘Let Mr. White get you into housing,’ she’d say.”

White started talking about apartments with Justin. Often, they would speak in chess metaphors, because Justin is an avid chess player. One day – several months after they’d started daily conversations – Justin agreed that he would go inside the next day. “Your move,” he said. “Meet me at Basin and St. Ann.”

White showed up as arranged. He gave Justin the key to his new apartment about 10 blocks away. Justin said he was grateful. “But I’m not ready just yet,” he said. It had been 30 years. But he needed another day. “How about tomorrow?” he said.

White came back the next day, at the same time. Justin was ready. The two of them lifted up the cart and put it in the back of White’s truck and they drove to the new apartment. “Welcome home,” White said.

Justin put the key in the door and rolled the cart in. He looked back and nodded toward White with a grin. “If I’m the king, he’s my bishop,” Justin said. “He’s got my back. He watches out for me.”
Like Trolean Tolliver (above) Manuel Justin (see page 4) is now housed. That means a lot to his daughter, Nicole Carthan. “In the past, I felt horrible at Christmas, because my father wouldn't let me help him. This year, I'm happy that he's inside,” she said. Carthan just graduated from college and so she sent a framed graduation photo for his new walls.

UNITY’s homeless clients and their families often struggle with hopelessness during the holidays. But with housing comes hope. Fueled by the success of the summer’s “200 Homes in 100 Days” campaign, UNITY and its nonprofit and governmental partners launched a new campaign, aimed at housing 500 disabled homeless individuals and families by the end of this year.

In the spirit of the holidays, please help us house the homeless by donating household goods — anything from toothbrushes to toilet paper to bath towels to blankets. You also can make a financial donation online at unitygno.org or by calling Frances Misenheimer or Shanda Jordan-Smith at 504.821.4496 extensions 109 or 102.

Help us house 500 of the city’s most vulnerable by year end!

You can help us gather new and gently used supplies. UNITY’s standard Move-In Kit includes:

- Kitchen supplies
- Cleaning items (new only)
- Toiletries (new only)
- Linens and towels

To donate, please call the UNITY warehouse at 504.483.9300 or email homelesswarehouse@unitygno.org
UNITY IN THE NEWS

The following is excerpted from Bill Capo’s piece for WWL TV about UNITY’s new Permanent Supportive Housing building on Louisiana Avenue:

“Marie and Willis were homeless 14 months, both with health issues, she in a wheelchair. “Waking up in the middle of the night, and there being some stranger nearby,” said Marie, remembering the tough life on the streets.

UNITY works to change lives by using case managers to find solutions for problems that led them to homelessness. “Help them get to their medical appointments, help them get to their mental-health appointments if they need that, help them get reconnected with families, help them get jobs,” said UNITY Executive Director Martha Kegel.

The building is expected to spur improvements in the neighborhood. “It was in bad shape, and now you can see the wonderful colors, and the fact that it’s on Louisiana Avenue and stands out with color and dignity will, I think, influence other development in the area,” said developer Pres Kabacoff.

This is excerpted from a Blake Hanson piece for WDSU TV:

“Out there you can get into trouble,” Bill Flair said. “You can get killed, someone can shoot you and hurt you. You name it.”

That’s why Flair sought out abandoned buildings. Like many dwellers, he walks the streets during the day and returns at night, trying often unsuccessfully to elude the notice of neighbors.

Martha Kegel, executive director of UNITY of Greater New Orleans, a coalition of 63 organizations that serve the homeless, said the number of abandoned buildings has dropped, but so too have the conditions of those left.

“I think the low moment in my career was the day [our team] discovered eight elderly men all living in an abandoned garage together,” said Kegel. “The oldest was 90 years old, it was just horrible.”

But as the conditions inside abandoned buildings continue to deteriorate, the number of dwell-

UNITY Hits Home Run in “Pitch-It” Contest

In late September, UNITY of Greater New Orleans won $25,000 in an “innovation challenge” sponsored by the Greater New Orleans Foundation and the Kresge Foundation. The event was framed as sporting challenge of sorts, with announcing done by the legendary Jerry Romig as spectators in stadium seats ate Cracker Jack and watched the competitors “pitch” their ideas on Tulane University’s Greer Field at Turchin Stadium in New Orleans.

Emily Danielson, UNITY’s director of research and public policy, won over the judges with her description of a “Super-Tool” that will standardize intake and referral processes. For years, in order to find open slots and qualify for programs, clients ran from agency to agency, answering the same questions repeated times. But the Supertool allows homeless people to go through one assessment and then be referred to available and appropriate services.

“The SuperTool allows us to coordinate services among our
In the News … from page 7

ers is beginning to drop sharply. According to numbers provided by UNITY, 2,784 people were living in abandoned buildings in May 2012. A year later, UNITY recorded 575 living in abandoned homes.

“We still have high numbers but they’re going down so much every year that we really feel good about the progress that’s being made,” said Kegel. “It’s really remarkable.”

UNITY is in the process of getting Flair a home now. UNITY calls it “Permanent Supportive Housing.” UNITY’s clients are expected to use a third of their income to pay rent. They also get support and counseling from UNITY workers.

While the numbers look good, Kegel says there is still work to be done.

“I mean, it’s just so tragic and so as long as it’s going on, we have to keep working on this,” she said.

This is an excerpt of a WWNO-radio piece by Eve Abrams:

“The first place that we’ll be stopping is at Washington Park. It’s off of Elysian Fields. We have a lady that’s in that park with her dog, and she can’t utilize the shelters because of her dog. So we gonna go check on her,” said UNITY outreach worker Laniker Hunter-Davis.

“They close the park at a certain time, and the people just move to the sidewalk with their blankets, and they’re usually lined up,” says UNITY outreach worker Joycelyn Scott. “So we’ll just make the block and see.”

Joycelyn and Laniker know the woman they’re looking for well. They worked with her to apply for permanent supportive housing.

And so when they don’t see the woman, or her dog, Laniker and Joycelyn start to worry.

Angela Patterson is the Deputy Director of UNITY of Greater New Orleans. She says by taking services to where the homeless are, UNITY’s Outreach team has created a paradigm shift.

“You are now housing those who are the most needy,” Patterson says.

Over the years, the work of UNITY’s outreach team has gone from managing homelessness to ending homelessness.

“(In the past) it brought cookies, crackers, water to people, and it visited with people on the street, but that’s where people were left: on the street,” says Patterson.

Pitch Contest … from page 7

60-member agencies while making it easier for homeless people to find help,” UNITY Executive Director Martha Kegel told The Times-Picayune. “With this tool, we can access precisely what level of service an individual or family needs in order to end their homelessness and immediately refer them to an appropriate agency for help.”

The process will also allow comprehensive data tracking that can be utilized statewide to evaluate program effectiveness in ending people’s homelessness most efficiently.

The other “Pitch It!” finalists were UNITY member agency Covenant House, which proposed an app designed for at-risk youth, and “Gentilly 6,” a partnership of five rebuilding agencies and Liberty Bank, which suggested an investors pool made into a blight-fighting tool that would purchase tax liens on blighted and vacant properties.