

## Homelessness, addiction, family separation

Esther Ross feels empowered to help others struggling through homelessness – permanent supportive housing has given her the opportunity to do so. Five years ago, Esther was separated from her children by the Department of Children and Families (DCF). After a long struggle with addiction, Esther wound up homeless and her children were taken from her and placed in foster care.

Born in 1975, Esther had children when she was a teenager. The stress of poverty and raising multiple children on limited resources led her to addiction. For more than 10 years, she worked hard to piece together enough to provide her children with a safe, decent and affordable place to call home, but it wasn't enough.



After she lost her children and her home, an aunt living in Bridgeport suggested she enter a Bridgeport transitional housing program. In the transitional program, Esther had to follow very strict rules, which included finding a job and beginning her journey into recovery. She has now been clean for more than 5 years.

Esther's ultimate goal was to regain custody of her children, but she explains that "While going through the reunification process, I was told I needed a safe, decent and affordable place to live to meet DCF standards – I couldn't afford anything that looked like this."

## Supportive housing – opportunity and empowerment

While considering a number of different permanent affordable housing options, Esther discovered the Catholic Charities Permanent Housing Diocese supportive housing program. She quickly applied, knowing it was her ticket to getting her children back. She was accepted into the program and was soon reunified with her children.

"I was so happy to have my children back," Esther recalls. "But I needed the time alone to get my life back."

Since moving into supportive housing three years ago, Esther has been on a meteoric rise. She works two jobs – one at a local shelter and the other as a peer support specialist – where she uses her experience and struggle through homelessness as a way to inspire and connect with others going through similar struggles.

Once a month she convenes a consumer advocacy group, where she provides education on homelessness and other issues in Bridgeport and in Connecticut. She loves the empowering and uplifting nature of peer support and advocacy.

*"Your voice really does matter – supportive housing helped me find mine."*

**-Esther Ross**

"Your voice really does matter – supportive housing helped me find mine – but there are some people who don't know how to speak up for themselves. It's our job to help them."

## On the path to success

Homelessness can be costly: A small subset of individuals who experience homelessness utilize an array of high cost services, such as emergency room visits, ambulances, detox and intensive in-patient treatment.

In Esther's case, she also paid a high price, losing her home, her children and her job. But all she needed was a safe, affordable place to call home for her to stabilize, regain custody of her children and ultimately have a positive impact on her community.

Permanent supportive housing provides people with the stability and opportunity to attain their personal and professional goals.

Esther, winner of the 2011 Reaching Home Janice A. Elliot Supportive Housing Tenant Award, is an extraordinary example of this. There is a very low cost to supportive housing – roughly \$54/day – but the cost of not taking action while the lives of those around us suffer, is far greater. Given the right support, people like Esther can do amazing things.

### *What is Supportive Housing?*

**Supportive housing combines affordable apartments with on-site or visiting support and employment services.**

**A cost-effective solution for people with disabilities, mental illness, addiction and other issues, supportive housing provides its tenants with the support they need to stay housed and out of shelters, prisons, hospitals and other institutions.**

## The cost-effectiveness of supportive housing: how it works

Ending homelessness isn't just an ethical imperative, it's an economic imperative. The lack of a stable home damages a person's health and safety. For society, the costs are also high: treating homeless individuals in emergency systems that cannot address the root causes of their homelessness is expensive and merely continues the cycle.

Often, chronically homeless individuals access a wide array of high-cost systems – mental health, substance abuse treatment, prison, and health care – with little to no insurance. The costs of these systems are substantial: detox, \$588/day; hospital in-patient, \$1,089/day; psychiatric in-patient, \$1,187/day; emergency room visit, \$2,152/trip; ambulance, \$514/trip; prison, \$92/day. Worse, even after these services are utilized, homeless individuals still do not have a place to call home and often continue to suffer from illnesses that go untreated.

***Connecticut is a leader in the supportive housing movement, with over 4,000 units of supportive housing throughout the state.***

Supportive housing costs much less and is more effective.

For roughly \$54/day, or \$19,500 a year - \$10,000 for the rental subsidy that provides housing and \$9,500 for the case management services that provide support to the tenant – supportive housing can help an individual end his/her homelessness.