

**Root Causes, Prevention and Action:
A Look at Homelessness and Poverty**

Introduction

Purpose

In Spring 2001, Central City Hospitality House (CCHH) revisited its mission and articulated the guiding principles that form the foundation of its programs and upon which agency policy and development would be based. One of these principles was a commitment to a thoughtful analysis of the root causes of homelessness and poverty.

Process

To this end, CCHH created a subcommittee charged with the task of researching and developing this analysis. The committee consisted of staff and constituents who created and conducted a survey of more than one hundred constituents, staff and board members.

The survey solicited feedback about what people view as the root causes of homelessness and poverty. In addition, survey participants were asked for solutions that individuals, the community and CCHH could enact to provide exits from the streets and to prevent and eliminate systemic homelessness and poverty.

The surveys were tallied and results were synthesized through group process. The committee met over several weeks to ensure that each answer was represented in what became the Root Causes, Prevention and Action Statement.

Plan

This statement, combined with the agency's mission and guiding principles, will provide the foundation for on-going program evaluation, program development, and overall agency vision. In recognition of the issues voiced, CCHH has also committed to using the statement as a tool to inform and guide our advocacy and activist efforts.

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Causes

We, the community at Central City Hospitality House, comprised of constituents, staff, and the Board of Directors, believe that there are numerous and complex root causes of homelessness and poverty. We choose to present the following in no specific order, as we recognize that each factor is equally valid and important. We believe the following are all contributing factors to the continuing existence of homelessness and poverty:

- Poor public policy, which contributes to disproportionate economic distribution, the creation and proliferation of systems where it is easier to be poor than to work, and the lack of governmental spending
- Disenfranchisement
- The existence and proliferation of street drugs and alcohol and the lack of space in drug treatment programs
- The lack of safe, affordable housing
- The rising cost of living and the lack of a fair living wage
- Discrimination (including racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, and classism) and the cultural pervasiveness and acceptance of the existence of homelessness and poverty
- Human rights violations, including the corruption of government officials, illegal evictions, the lack of equal representation in the judicial system and the criminalization of homelessness.
- Being born into poverty
- Lack of education, lack of training and training opportunities
- The lack of access to, reasonable accommodations for, and provision of specialized services to people with social, physical and/or mental disabilities
- Illiteracy
- The lack of employment opportunities to match individual skill levels
- Domestic violence, as well as general family issues (including divorce and separation)
- Incarceration
- The lack of support from family, friends and community
- Mental illness, including the effects of trauma
- The general lack of hope, self-esteem and self-confidence
- The sum of misfortune and personal choices

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Prevention and Exits from Homelessness

We believe that the existence of the following would not only prevent people from becoming homeless, but would also allow those who are currently homeless to become housed:

- Ample, safe, affordable housing
- Fair living wages
- Elected leaders dedicated to promoting social change
- Quality education and equal employment opportunities
- Reduction of the availability and criminalization of drugs and alcohol in the community
- A supportive, inclusive community that encourages dignity, respect and equality regardless of economic status
- High quality, accessible and well-networked services including legal aid, peer advocacy, case management, support groups, educational and employment training, money management, drug and alcohol treatment programs, mental health treatment, outpatient services, medical treatment, eviction defense, storage facilities, hygiene facilities, shelters, and access to clothing and food

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Action

We believe that Central City Hospitality House should take the following actions to address the root causes of homelessness and poverty:

- Continue to provide quality services in a safe, clean environment where people are treated with dignity and respect
- Make a commitment to ongoing program evaluation and the exploration of expansion of services to meet the needs of our constituency*
- Support community activism and encourage involvement and leadership of homeless and low-income people
- Be active in community and public forums addressing the rights of homeless people
- Advocate for the right to safe affordable housing available to everyone
- Collaborate with other community-based organizations to increase services available to our constituency

*Suggestions for expansion include: added case management services, on-going housing clinics, additional program hours for current services, extended length of stay and additional provision of beds in men's shelter, services for youth, the creation of a woman's shelter, enhanced job training and employment support, and outreach to people on the streets.