



Supportive Housing: Turning Lives Around for the Better

Willie's Story

For 14 years, Willie W. made his "home" on the grounds of a Palm Beach County cemetery, where he found a safe haven from the streets and the paranoia that often plagued him. A veteran of both the Army and the Navy, Willie's life had been torn apart by crack cocaine and mental illness. He was homeless but he "wasn't a bum," doing odd jobs to make money.

When new owners of the cemetery told Willie he'd have to leave, he at first considered suicide. Fortunately for Willie, he decided to camp out behind Oakwood Center for the Palm Beaches, where an outreach worker discovered him and invited him apply to the agency's Haven House supportive housing program.

Haven House uses the "low demand, high expectation" approach, and gives priority to those who fail to meet eligibility requirements of other housing programs—often because they are still using drugs or have a history of involvement in the criminal justice system and are resistant to treatment. Haven House offers outreach, case management, employment counseling, medication management, benefits assistance, group therapy and social rehabilitation services.

After two years at Haven House, Willie was able to eventually move into his own apartment through a HUD-funded program. Now reunited with his grown children, Willie says the best gift of living in his own home is that it provides a place for his family to visit him. He says often that he "can't believe people care so much."

Dave's House

After the death of her brother, Dave Jeffreys, Lin Wilensky and her husband wanted a way to honor his life and his 40-year struggle to overcome the disabling symptoms of schizophrenia. Diagnosed while in college, Dave was later hospitalized every three or four years until he was able to live in permanent, supportive housing.

Because permanent housing was a major factor in her brother's ability to recover and lead the maximum possible quality of life, the couple joined forces with Jerry Kassab, CEO of Lakeside Behavioral Healthcare in Orlando, to develop a supportive housing program. Owned and operated by Lakeside, Dave's House was the first of its kind in Orlando to provide permanent, supportive housing for people who are stable and ready for independent living.

Support is provided by staff who check-in on the residents regularly to be sure they are continuing with their individual recovery and to help ensure successful community living. Residents say support from Lakeside staff helps them stay on track with recovery. Until Dave's House opened, few existing housing options were feasible for them due to cost or qualifying requirements. For some, the only options were living with family, in assisted living facilities or living on the street.

Because of the success of Dave's House, Lakeside recently opened another house offering supportive housing and will be opening a third in the near future.



Mike's Story

During his battle with alcoholism, Mike Gurin was admitted for detox treatment nearly 30 times in less than two years, and was admitted four times to a crisis stabilization unit. For three years, he was in and out of homeless shelters or on the streets. That cycle changed in 2006, he told the *Daytona Beach News-Journal*, when he entered long-term services at Haven Recovery Center (formerly Serenity House) of Volusia. Haven for Recovery provides outreach, residential and outpatient treatment, employment and vocational preparation opportunities, and access to safe and sober housing for adults with serious substance abuse disorders.

Gurin was one of 22 people with a lengthy history of homelessness involved in a study by the Center that looked at the cost savings that accrue when people who are homeless receive treatment and/or housing. The annualized public cost for the participants during the period that they were homeless was \$21,057 per person. The cost for these same individuals after they had access to treatment and housing was \$1,236 per person—a 94.2% decrease in the need for services such as jail, shelters, ambulance services and hospitals.

Gurin is now a staff member at the Center and is seeking a college degree to become a full-time substance abuse and mental health counselor. He still resides in a permanent housing facility operated by the Center. "I would be dead without a doubt," Gurin told the *News-Journal*, if he had not received the Center's help.

Steve's story

Twenty years ago, "Steve" hitchhiked from Maine to Miami with nothing but the clothes on his back and a surfboard. Once a high-powered professional, he made his home on the beach, where he spent his days drinking and hanging out with friends and his nights sleeping in the dune grasses. Friends in the neighborhood helped him out with food and money. Lifeguards and local police made sure he was safe.

Although he was estranged from his family, his brother was able to track him down a few years ago after learning that Steve had been arrested. He traveled to South Florida and was able to reconnect with Steve. With encouragement from his brother and the help of the county's homeless program director and Citrus Health outreach workers, Steve was given a motel room and referred to a program that offers subsidized rental assistance to people who have been chronically homeless. Like many people who have been homeless for years, Steve resisted moving into permanent housing, saying he preferred life on the beach.

But his brother and outreach workers stayed in touch, continuing to seek options for him. Citrus uses a Relationship-Based Care model that has been successful in helping people with severe mental illnesses resist treatment and/or who are difficult to keep involved in treatment. The model creates ongoing relationships that engage individuals in therapeutic activities and help empower them to take responsibility for their lives. Access to housing — critical to ending homelessness, preventing re-arrests and reducing the need for expensive acute care services — is central to the program.

Recently, the Citrus outreach team leased an apartment and invited Steve to use it on rainy days. He was reassured that even though his name was not on the lease, he can come and go as he pleases. The team also helped him apply for Social Security benefits and a state identification card. Steve has now slept on a mattress in an apartment for a several consecutive nights. His brother and the Citrus staff are working with Steve to build his confidence and get him to move into the apartment on a permanent basis. The staff hope that other resources, such as food stamps, regular primary care and psychiatric treatment, will be accepted by him as a trusting relationship is built.