

Sparking Solutions: Q&A With Bia Vieira, Vice President for Philanthropic Services at The Philadelphia Foundation

By Christine Fisher

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As part of our partnership with the Delaware Valley Grantmakers we are profiling individual issues. In an email correspondence with Bia Vieira of the Philadelphia Foundation she breaks down their work, the key players and what solutions are currently working to reduce and prevent homelessness in the Greater Philadelphia region.

How is the Philadelphia Foundation involved with reducing homelessness and aiding our homeless population?

The Philadelphia Foundation has a funding strategy that supports the infrastructure development of organizations servicing at least 33% of low income communities. In addition, the Foundation supports organizations that are involved in strategic partnerships addressing system change and service delivery changes. Through this funding strategy, started in 2007, The Philadelphia Foundation has supported most organizations working to end homelessness in the Greater Philadelphia region.

What are some of the barriers to fighting homelessness in Philadelphia, both on the ground and at the level of public policy?

- Lack of adequate affordable housing for individuals and families and youth in the region.
- Lack of employment providing livable wages for individuals and families that are working and/or underemployed.
- Chronically underfunded public programs addressing issues of homelessness; education, shelter, housing and employment programs.
- Chronically underfunded nonprofit organization working with the homeless community.
- Diverse systems impacting the lives of homeless individuals and families; child protective services, public housing, schools, behavior health and health department. Need for coordination of services.

What are some of the widest gaps in services?

- Programs and services for homeless youth, specifically LGBT youth.
- Programs and services for survivors of domestic violence.
- Programs addressing specific barriers for individuals and families to move into permanent housing (when available), like security deposits, gas and electricity arrearages.
- Programs and services addressing needs of homeless children.
- Programs addressing single men and men with dependent children.

What are some recent innovations or bright-spots in how homelessness is being addressed?

- Increased cooperation and collaboration between public sector and nonprofit service providers.
- In Philadelphia: New funding for an additional emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence and their children, (100 new beds); Project Home's new permanent housing program for emancipated LGBT youth; Collaboration to End Chronic Homelessness (partnership between Project Home, Bethesda Project, Pathways and Covenant House.)
- In Montgomery County the partnership between the County, North Penn Community Health Foundation, Genuardi Family Foundation and the homeless service providers to transform the intake process for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.
- Delaware and Bucks Counties are in the process of evaluating their homelessness systems.

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Could you tell us what are some of the other key players and organizations working on the issue of homelessness?

- Philadelphia Office of Supportive Housing
- North Penn Community Health Foundation
- Scattergood Foundation
- Jon Bon Jovi Foundation
- Homeless Assistance Fund
- The Connelly Foundation
- Project HOME
- Depaul USA
- People's Emergency Center

Are there any major misconceptions about homelessness that you would like to clear up?

- Most individuals and families who are in shelter or transitional housing programs are working.
- The majority of women who experience homelessness have experienced intimate partner violence.
- The majority of the homeless youth identify as LGBT and have been kicked out of their homes.