



## Harbor House recovers footing, is set to expand programs

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In early 2009, no betting person would have been inclined to put money on the Harbor House Collaborative, a Colorado Springs nonprofit that provides chronically homeless alcoholics and drug users with housing and treatment.

It was nearly out of money and gave up its headquarters. It retreated from a plan to start a new detox center after the only one in Colorado Springs closed. Its director resigned, and one of its key programs, Housing First, was taken over by another organization.

Today, the Harbor House Collaborative is back in a big way — so much so that oversight of the federally funded Housing First program was recently handed back. It's also embarked on an ambitious three-year plan that could make it one of the largest safety net organizations for several homeless populations, including two-parent families, families headed by single mothers and its initial base of hardcore homeless people with addictions.

"We went through some real struggles about the time we were in the paper for considering taking on detox and realizing we were in no shape to do that," said Steven Kidd, a psychologist with the Department of Veterans Affairs and a Harbor House board member since it started in 2004. "So this feels like a new day."

Kidd and Bob Holmes, another board member and executive director of Homeward Pikes Peak, give much of the credit to Lyn Harwell, a former executive with Springs Rescue Mission who became Harbor House's executive director in March. With Harwell at the helm, backing from the board and help from a Colorado Springs marketing company, Harbor House launched a \$5 million expansion plan in July that includes a revenue-generating cafe that would offer lunch to the community and provide its clients a place to learn a trade and take nutrition and related classes.

"Lyn has a vision for serving the homeless in our community that really extends us past the original vision in a direction that's very exciting," Kidd said.

So far this year, Harbor House has upped the number of board members from six to 14, started working with Pikes Peak Workforce on a plan for long-term employment for its clients in recovery, and expanded into a 1,500-square-foot space adjacent to its office on East Pikes Peak Avenue to add therapy rooms to accommodate more women in its addiction programs.

"We see about 140 women on our roster right now, and that will increase up to about 180, which is great," Harwell said.

In six to eight months, he hopes to have the Recipes for Success Cafe going, and make it a living lab for the clients who come aboard in the programs he envisions adding during the plan's second year: a "Safe Harbor for Women" residence, which would house 26 single women and their children, and Hope Home, for two-parent homeless families. He wants to put the cafe in the same building as Safe Harbor.

"We'll be teaching people in poverty and addiction healthy cooking classes — how to use money they have to go to the grocery store and plan a healthy meal. We're teaching them real-life skills that will affect their families generationally," said Harwell, who has an extensive culinary background, with restaurant work and management in New Orleans and Colorado Springs.

In year three, the plan calls for Harbor House to buy the buildings where its housing programs operate. By then, the agency hopes to have increased the number of people it houses from 30 to 300.

All this takes money, however, and money for a nonprofit usually comes from fundraising and grant-writing. Harwell is confident he'll meet his goals, but if not, he said, the plan provides flexibility. It has already increased Harbor House's annual operating budget from about \$600,000 a year to \$1 million for the fiscal year that began July 1. He said he wouldn't be surprised if it reached \$2 million by 2013.

Kidd is confident in Harwell's networking abilities.

"He's the best I've ever seen," Kidd said. "What I'm seeing with his leadership is that we have a wider variety of support that we can tap now than we have had in the past."

One concrete measure of support rests in Homeward Pikes Peak's transfer of Housing First management back to Harbor House. Housing First, an innovative program that started in New York, gives chronically homeless alcoholics a place to live without a requirement to stop drinking, as long as they agree to go into case management.

It started in Colorado Springs in 2006 under Holmes' lead, and Harbor House ran it until its finances nearly ran out in 2009. Holmes and Homeward Pikes Peak took it over, and grew it from 18 participants to 32. Federal funding for nine more slots was recently approved.

It was never Holmes' intent to run Housing First permanently, since he also runs the agency that awards federal money to it. But he didn't want to hand it off until he was sure it would be well-run.

"They (Harbor House) reached a level of fiscal stability that I was comfortable with, and they were interested in taking the program back, so it all worked," said Holmes. "I'm just happy to have it back with an organization that cares about it as much as I do."

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