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Laidlaw Scholars Program

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**From Case Study to Sustainable Implementation:
An Analysis of Successful Housing-First Models**

Housing is an essential ingredient to human dignity. This is something I have learned repeatedly from talking to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Housing, interviewing a previously homeless University of Toronto student for my article in *The Varsity*, reading *Evicted* by Matthew Desmond, and walking through the streets of downtown Toronto. The utter destruction that a lack of housing can wreak on someone's life has fascinated me and convinced me that further research is required to most effectively eliminate homelessness, especially in the United States.

Communities across the world have proven that solving homelessness is not an impossible goal. Through the "Housing First" approach, in which homeless individuals are given permanent housing without preconditions of sobriety or therapy, localities and cities around the world have taken significant steps towards eradicating chronic homelessness (Byron). But most of these programs began as an experimental step, a case study, or a pilot project. What helped transform these pilots into sustainable and successful solutions?

Through my research I will seek to answer two questions: (1) What are the prevailing historical, economic, cultural/sociological factors of successful Housing First programs? (2) How can more Housing First initiatives be successfully established throughout the United States?

In pursuit of these answers, I will follow a research methodology of literature review and interviews. I will dedicate a lot of time to reading various Housing First case studies. The most prevalent case studies I have come across are based in Los Angeles ("Permanent"), Salt Lake

City (Byron), Manhattan (Tsemberis), Austin (“Community”), Helsinki (Pleace), Toronto (Raine), and Vancouver (Gaetz). I would like to examine as many successful programs as possible, but I will start my research with these cities. While I read, I will also be conducting a series of interviews with individuals involved with these Housing First programs, government officials, and academics. To conduct these interviews, I will need to apply for and receive Ethics Review Board approval as I plan to use these interviews for data collection and may even talk to individuals who have personally experienced homelessness and have been helped by Housing First. I plan to reach out to the following individuals and organizations to request remote interviews:

- Y Foundation’s CEO, Juha Kaakinen
- Y Foundation’s researcher, Saija Turunen
- NYU professor and author of *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives*
- NY’s Pathways to Housing Founder, Sam Tsemberis
- University of Pennsylvania professor and researcher for *The Finnish Homelessness Strategy* report, Dennis Culhane
- Finland’s Ministry of the Environment
- Co-author of *Housing First in Canada*, Tanya Gulliver-Garcia
- The People Concern’s CEO, John Marceri
- Utah Housing & Community Development’s Division Director, Johnathan Hardy
- Mobile Loaves & Fishes’ Alan Graham

As I delve into both my literary and in-person sources, I will be looking for answers to my research question by breaking down the prevailing historical, economic, and cultural

characteristics of each program. I will try to understand what aided these programs in their success, and what challenges each overcame. If programs are currently struggling to sustain themselves, such as Utah's program, I will deeply analyze what is impeding their progress (Byron).

After gathering this widespread information on various programs, I will attempt to come up with an ideal description of a Housing First program and what factors are necessary for its establishment. This description may vary between rural and urban centers, different countries, and different levels of homelessness. I do not anticipate a clear-cut list that will perfectly describe how any community can successfully create its own Housing First program, but I hope to analyze and describe the variables that localities should consider in this pursuit.

By providing this information, I hope my research will enhance our understanding of what steps the United States should take to decrease chronic homelessness through Housing First initiatives. I foresee myself taking these findings to my local government and various nonprofits in Wilmington, Delaware in hopes of establishing programs to help our local homeless population. At the very least, my research will enhance the conversation surrounding homelessness and how best to alleviate the human suffering it causes.

My faculty advisor, Dr. Connor Ewing, will aid my research by connecting me to relevant individuals and sources, meeting with me remotely throughout the eight weeks, and providing feedback on my work. Specifically, he has advised me to look at Mobile Loaves & Fishes' "Community First!" initiative in Austin, Texas as he is familiar with some of its organizers ("Community"). Additionally, he is helping me obtain ERB approval for the interviews I hope to complete. Furthermore, his expertise in American policy and development

will be indispensable to my research as my goal is to analyze and improve Housing First policy in the US.

The key goal of this research is to move more communities towards the lofty achievement of eradicating chronic homelessness, a status almost attained by areas in Finland (Henley) and Utah (Byron). Ultimately, I want to make it clear to local governments and nonprofits that there are concrete steps which they can take to solve homelessness, and if certain variables are accounted for, a world without homelessness can become a reality.

Throughout the Laidlaw Scholars Program, I hope to produce university-level research that I am proud of, while also becoming a more confident scholar in general. I think it is easy to feel out-of-place amongst such an accomplished, ambitious group of students, but I hope that after both years of this program, I emerge confident in my abilities and more certain of research and academia as a future career path.

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