



Resident Edward Clark with Angela Smith, his housing navigator.



# New Lease on Life

BY LAUREN BOSTON

*Apartment owners and managers nationwide are helping to solve homelessness with a variety of programs.*

**R**obert McMurtry lived inside of a cramped storage unit for three months with no toilet or running water. The 49-year-old former construction worker bathed in a stream by the side of the road, simultaneously receiving treatment at Vanderbilt University Medical Center for HIV, Hepatitis C and throat cancer.

And yet he'd been through worse, having spent the previous three years living on the streets.

"I never imagined I'd ever be homeless, because I worked really hard my whole life," McMurtry said in a "60 Minutes" television interview with Anderson Cooper. "[When I lost my job and got sick] it was devastating because I never thought that I would be in this condition."

The apartment industry didn't think he should be, either.

As part of the 100,000 Homes Campaign—a nationwide program that addresses the most vulnerable in the homeless community first—the Greater Nashville Apartment Association (GNAA) became involved with How's Nashville and encouraged its members to donate vacant apartment units to homeless men and women in greatest need.

The local campaign targeted the chronically homeless (those with one year of continuous homelessness or four episodes in three years) and/or those who were vulnerable (a higher risk of mortality) or had high acuity (many complicating and severe life stressors). McMurtry fit the profile.

Thanks to these efforts, he is now living in a one-bedroom apartment, with the understanding that he'll contribute 30 percent of his wages to rent once he finds employment. Most important, he is no longer on the streets.

Kirby Davis, Chief Operating Officer of Freeman Webb Companies, first brought How's Nashville to GNAA's attention in 2013 and asked fellow apartment owners to donate units. There are 150,000 multifamily units in Nashville, and at least 660 people there who are experiencing chronic homelessness.

"I believe in the 1 percent solution," Davis says. "If those of us who can afford to set aside 1 percent of our units did so, we could solve homelessness."

With this goal in mind, Davis called Will Connelly—an outreach worker who left Nashville to work on the 100,000 Homes Campaign in Washington, D.C.

"He was a really bright guy and I said, 'You have to come back,'" Davis recalls.

Connelly did just that, forming the initial team and introducing them to the 100,000 Homes Campaign.

"Will is our leader, and without him and the credibility he has in the homeless services community, we could not have accomplished what we have," Davis says.

With Connelly at the helm, Davis' next challenge was convincing other apartment owners to follow suit, despite concerns regarding liability, the community's reputation and fear that How's Nashville participants could bother other residents.

"The biggest hurdle is that most chronically homeless individuals have criminal records that would preclude them from getting an apartment," Davis says. "We had to set up a separate screening procedure, as they are not a protected class. Our two stipulations are no arsonists or sex offenders."

Davis says his company housed 40 homeless men and women in 2013, with the most vulnerable given highest priority. Today, that number is up to 55. Overall, 733 people experiencing chronic and/or vulnerable homelessness obtained permanent housing in Nashville since June 2013—46 per month, on average.





## YOUR NEW MOP

The new Maximizer Mop's built-in cleaning efficiency makes even the biggest jobs seem small.



# 30%

MORE FLOOR  
COVERAGE



25% LESS  
WEIGHT

PHOTO © 2011 RUBBERMAID COMMERCIAL PRODUCTS LLC. RUBBERMAID IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF RUBBERMAID COMMERCIAL PRODUCTS LLC. 10-000008



[rubbermaidcommercial.com](http://rubbermaidcommercial.com)



## Home Supportive Home

It was 18 years in the making.

After being homeless for nearly two decades, Edward Clark moved into his own apartment last month.

The transition won't be without its challenges, but Clark finally has odds in his favor. Davis says the How's Nashville campaign has seen a 78 percent retention rate in the past year.

Similar programs nationwide have experienced the same success. Researchers at University of Pennsylvania found that when homeless people in Philadelphia were given housing and support, more than 85 percent were still in housing two years later, and were unlikely to become homeless again.

"There are several challenges in housing the most vulnerable of the homeless population, but none of us have gotten where we are in life without taking a risk," Davis says. "How about taking a risk for somebody else?"

Although the program caters mostly to single men and women, families have also been connected with apartments. Some men and women have also requested that they be paired with friends who are also homeless, and have been placed in two-bedroom units.

With a focus on permanent, supportive housing, How's Nashville and its apartment industry participants follow the principles that housing remain affordable (households should not spend more than 30 percent of their adjusted monthly income toward the cost of rent and utilities) and is permanent and without any time limits for the length of stay. Additionally, residents sign their own lease and have the same rights as any other resident.

A case worker assigned to each resident checks in frequently and acts as a liaison with the property manager if any issues arise—a role Davis says is "absolutely critical" to the success of the program. Supportive services designed to assist a resident to work toward self-sufficiency are also provided with the housing, but are voluntary.

As part of its supportive services offerings, How's Nashville now hosts a monthly residents' meeting on the third Wednesday of every month. Participants meet for breakfast, education, socialization and giveaways, and each person receives a one-day bus pass.

GNAA has also hosted meetings for participating apartment owners at its affiliate training center. Additionally, the association has held events in partnership with other organizations for families who are still homeless, such as a spring carnival and a fall trip to a pumpkin patch.

"Our association has become passionate about this because that's what our industry is all about," says Diane Carter, Executive Director of GNAA, which donated \$12,370 to How's Nashville in 2013-2014. "We're about providing safe, affordable housing, and it's just a really great fit. It's important to give these people a chance."

## Faces of Homelessness

Johnesha is a 23-year-old single mother who works in data management for a Boston health agency. In 2012—a newborn son in tow—she had nowhere to go.

For every stereotype that hangs over the homeless population, there's a family facing a health crisis that fell behind on medical bills; a single mother who recently got divorced; a father making \$40,000 a year.

"There are people out there with normal paychecks who are homeless because of the current housing market," says Larry Curtis, President and Managing Partner of WinnDevelopment. "It's crazy that this can exist in Boston. It's unacceptable in a city of such wealth."

So crazy that WinnResidential joined other organizations in Boston to do something about it.

In 2012, Curtis met with Howard Cohen of Beacon Communities, Richard Henken of Federal Management, Karen Fish-Will of Peabody Properties and Lisa Alberghini of the Planning Office for Urban Affairs in Boston to discuss a way in which they could assist Massachusetts in solving the homeless issue.

"Everyone goes to charity dinners and committee meetings, but when we got



together, we said, 'We have something better than checks and goodwill. We have buildings,'" Curtis says.

With that in mind, the housing organizations co-founded New Lease, a Boston-based non-profit that provides a clearinghouse of affordable housing units for the more than 3,700 families staying in state-funded shelters and motels throughout Massachusetts. The state is currently spending over \$40 million a year to house these families.

Johnesha and her son, Andrew, were one of the first families housed in a Winn Companies apartment through the New Lease program. Johnesha was originally living with family, but had to move out when the house became overcrowded. Faced with extremely high market rents that forbid her from affording an apartment, she stayed in a state-funded motel room before being transferred to a family shelter.

A year later Johnesha's name moved to the top of Winn Companies' New Lease list. A month later, she moved in—other housing lists she applied to were estimating a wait time of several more years.

"If you are a homeless family in Boston and show up at a service agency, there isn't a central clearinghouse of information or unit availability," Curtis explains. "You had to fill out multiple applications for subsidies to a variety of housing agencies. There was no one-stop-shop. We wanted to create real-time unit and subsidy availability."

Curtis says the program focuses on helping those who are



Johnesha

recently homeless—families like Johnesha's who are typically two paychecks away from affording their own apartment.

"This is a stepping stone to one day owning my own home," says Johnesha, who has since set her sights on becoming a Certified Nurse Assistant. "I love my apartment. It's warm, comfortable, and my baby has a home."

"These are families such as Johnesha's where unfortunate setbacks and challenges have sent them over the edge," Curtis says. "With the stability of a home and proper support, they can overcome their past troubles and get back on their feet."

## Fresh Start

New Lease is the first program in the country that is exploring a novel way of addressing the homeless problem through government programs already in existence, according to Curtis. The program also partners with the Department of Housing and Community Development and other non-profit service providers to support the families as they transition to permanent housing.

"What makes us different—and ultimately successful—is that we were started by owners who brought their time, energy and dedication into a partnership with shelters and service agencies to build a model that works," adds Thomas Plihcik, Executive Director of New Lease. "It's been a pleasure to witness their efforts to address the human and fiscal crisis of family homelessness and see it transform into real-life success stories."

# TROUBLE MANAGING YOUR TRAFFIC?

ResMan's Lead Management Tools  
makes it easy to keep track of your prospects.



**We Don't Do Multi-Family, We Are Multi-Family.**  
[www.resmancloud.com](http://www.resmancloud.com) | 1.855.ResMan1

Property Management Software • Accounting Suite • Operations Suite • Resident Portal • Online Leasing • Maintenance

# LEADS



# LEASES



**DOGIPOT™**

The **Green** Solution to Dog Pollution.

20 Years of Premier Service, Quality & Value  
Providing Aesthetically Pleasing Eco-Friendly Products

**Junior Bag Dispenser**  
1002-J

**Header Pak Dispenser**  
1002HP-4

**Poly Junior Bag Dispenser**  
1007-J

**Pet Station**  
1003-L

**Header Pak**  
1402HP

**Roll Bags**  
1402

**Poly Pet Station**  
1010

All Dispensers & Trash Receptacles Include FREE Standard Preloaded Liner Pick Up Bags & Liner Trash Bags. Hardware and Specification/Instruction Sheets Included.

**DOGIPOT.com** • **800.364.7681**

Ask about the all inclusive DOGIPOT DOGVALETS! 

With thousands of housing units across Massachusetts, affordable housing owners have a critical asset that can be tapped. Their affordable housing units paired with housing support services can end homelessness for many area families.

However, Curtis says the program is not without its challenges. For example, many communities are mixed-use developments, and include high-quality housing. Owners are conscious of ensuring incoming families are properly screened and transitioned, and that their issues are only financial, not behavioral.

“With New Lease we are able to help those who face barriers to housing while still maintaining the well-being of our developments and other residents,” Curtis says. “Owners retain the right to reject a family, but the intent is to have looser provisions—such as a different standard for credit checks.”

New Lease’s goal is for affordable housing owners throughout the state to offer between 10 percent and 15 percent of their vacant units per year to the families coming out of motels, hotels and shelters. Ideally, 200 or more apartments would be offered each year.

WinnResidential manages 16,000 units in Massachusetts, and has 14 developments with units dedicated to housing the homeless. Participants are required to use 30 percent of their income on rent; the rest is funded by the government for a year. Curtis says it also costs approximately \$2,500 per family to cover the coordination of services.

Although homelessness won’t be solved any time soon, Curtis says New Lease aims to get struggling families back on their feet as seamlessly as possible.

“By providing high-quality apartments that are undifferentiated from the rest of our units, our hope is that it will become permanent housing for these families, and that they can develop roots,” Curtis says. “That 9-year-old kid who’s been living on the street with his mom will have a great place to live. His life will be better.” ■

*Lauren Boston is NAA’s Staff Writer and Manager of Public Relations. She can be reached at [lauren@naabq.org](mailto:lauren@naabq.org).*

A resident from How’s Nashville is pleased to have found comfortable housing.

