



# cornerstone

From DESC | Issue 31 | Spring 2016

## Remembering Bill Hobson The Man Who Put Housing First

**T**wo sayings come to mind when people remember Bill Hobson: “there is no such thing as a throwaway person,” and “the solution to homelessness is not rocket science. It’s a home.” Two brief, frequently repeated quotes capture his determination to help those who need it most, and his impatience with anyone who would set up or defend barriers between housing and men and women experiencing homelessness.



*Bill Hobson, 1940-2016*

The former longtime Executive Director of DESC passed away on Friday March 4th. He was 76.

Bill retired from DESC in June of 2015, having worked at the organization for 31 years, including 27 as the Executive Director.

He began in 1984 as an entry-level counselor after a career in academia where he had taught classes and served as Chair of the department of Political Science at the University of Puget Sound.

DESC was a far smaller organization at that time, operating a single overnight-only shelter in the Morrison Hotel. The organization’s commitment to helping the people most in need, and especially those who were not being served by other shelters, was a founding principle of DESC – one that Bill would embrace and push forward over the coming decades.

His leadership and vision transformed that small shelter into the most comprehensive homeless services provider in the region,

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Daniel Malone

## From the Executive Director

You may remember Bill Hobson as someone who liked to argue. This week as I reflect on his passing, I'm not sure that's entirely right. He certainly liked to talk, and he argued plenty, but long ago he traded a search for universal truth in academia for a career where he could produce meaningful justice for real people. He remarked that too much discourse had no greater relevance to real problems than "13th century schoolmen debating how many angels could dance on the head of a pin." When he did argue, it was because he had determined a particular outcome needed to be reached, and he was determined to get there. Whether he relished the act of

arguing or not, he undoubtedly held to his convictions. "It helps to be right," he said more than a few times.

As a homeless advocate, Bill was aided greatly by his facility with words. He loved words and aimed to use them deliberately. In one of the first DESC staff meetings I ever attended, he reviewed the etymology of the word "client" (from the Latin and related to being dependent). He didn't want to promote our clients being dependent on us, so he thought we ought to know where that word came from.

But his real talent was in how he strung words together in service of his ideas. A few favorites out of a long list show how

# cornerstone

### DESC

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DESC works to end the homelessness of vulnerable people, particularly those living with serious mental or addictive illnesses. Through partnerships and an integrated array of comprehensive services, treatment and housing, we give people the opportunity to reach their highest potential. At DESC, uncommon efforts produce uncommon results that eliminate homelessness, one person at a time.

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Daniel Malone

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### Supportive Housing

1811 Eastlake  
Aurora House  
Canaday House  
Cottage Grove Commons  
Evans House  
Interbay Place  
Kerner-Scott House  
Keys to Home  
Lyon Building  
The Morrison  
Rainier House  
Scattered Site Housing  
The Union Hotel

### Clinical Services

Chemical Dependency Services  
Crisis Respite Program  
Crisis Solutions Center  
Employment Support  
HOME—Outreach and Engagement  
HOST—Outreach and Engagement  
PACT—Assertive Community Treatment  
SAGE—Outpatient Mental Health Care

### Survival and Entry Services

Connections  
Drop-in Center  
Emergency Shelter  
Rapid Rehousing

He dedicated himself to eliminating homelessness by building up the housing and services people needed to thrive ...

he boiled things down to their essence. For example, with regard to ideas for doing things without the resources to pay for them, he said, “You can wish in one hand and pour water in the other and see which fills up faster.” His reaction to the overprocessing of issues was to ask: “Now are we gonna remove our shoes and socks, touch toes, and sing kumbaya?” And he had a variety of ways to offer a quick assessment of an idea he found lacking, my two personal favorites being “that’s nonsense on stilts” and “we need that as much as a pig needs a silk purse.”

As memorable as those phrases are, the ideas that really stuck with those of us who worked closely with Bill are the ones that showed why he was in the work in the first place. When faced with a difficult decision, Bill would ask, “Which choice mitigates to the advantage of our clients? Pick that one.” And as proud as he was of the outcomes our programs produced and the lives improved, that was never enough. He continued to challenge us to improve our work, leaving us at the time of his retirement in 2015 to better help our clients integrate into the life of the community and find a way to garner the resources needed to discover what our clients are capable of achieving.

Bill was unendingly clear in his view that homelessness is a public social problem and as such should be addressed with tax dollars like other public needs. His stock first response when people asked him what they could do about homelessness? “Vote for politicians who promise to raise your taxes.” His conviction on this extended to what he said to well-heeled private donors: “You should be paying more in taxes.”

Give him points for consistency and transparency. Those were his trademark instincts. A chameleon he was not. He said that if you stick to your values and “expose your warts,” you will succeed more often than not.

He dedicated himself to eliminating homelessness by building up the housing and services people needed to thrive, and even though he thought emergency shelter was a poor reflection on society’s regard for people experiencing homelessness, he was practical enough to recognize that it did a lot of good when society was too slow at making enough homes for everyone. “Job security for social workers” was how he summed up his frustration at our collective failure to end homelessness.

He gave me and others so much practical wisdom. It’s a huge loss not to be able to call on him for more.



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Employment Services

# Helping Veterans Overcome Barriers to Employment

Most people are surprised to learn that when veterans are transitioning out of service they are more likely to experience homelessness than the average citizen.



While veterans face the same economic difficulties as the general population, they also have to overcome incredible internal and societal barriers to securing employment.

While the Department of Veterans Affairs does offer support, some of the clients DESC sees have difficulty receiving VA services due to ineligible discharge status or complexities of working through VA requirements. According to research at the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV), up to 75% of injured veterans

found transition into the general public extremely difficult.

These returning veterans often find that the skills they perfected in military training, military occupations and combat are not aligned with the skills needed in a civilian workforce. Compounding this, many veterans are likely to suffer the substantial risk factors of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), the lack of a strong support network in their civilian life, have trouble adjusting to living without 24/7 support, and are attempting to enter a work force they don't believe understands them.

NCHV discovered that 76% of pre-9/11 veterans and 86% of post-9/11 veterans believe that the public doesn't understand their problems. Sadly, they are right. According to the same study, 71% of the general public identifies as not understanding veterans.

This lack of understanding leads many conventional vocational and employment programs to consider chronically homeless veterans "unemployable." Employers are reluctant to hire them and lack the information, training, and ongoing on-site supports needed for vulnerable veterans to succeed and thrive in the workplace.

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Housing First

# Housing First Partners Conference held in Los Angeles

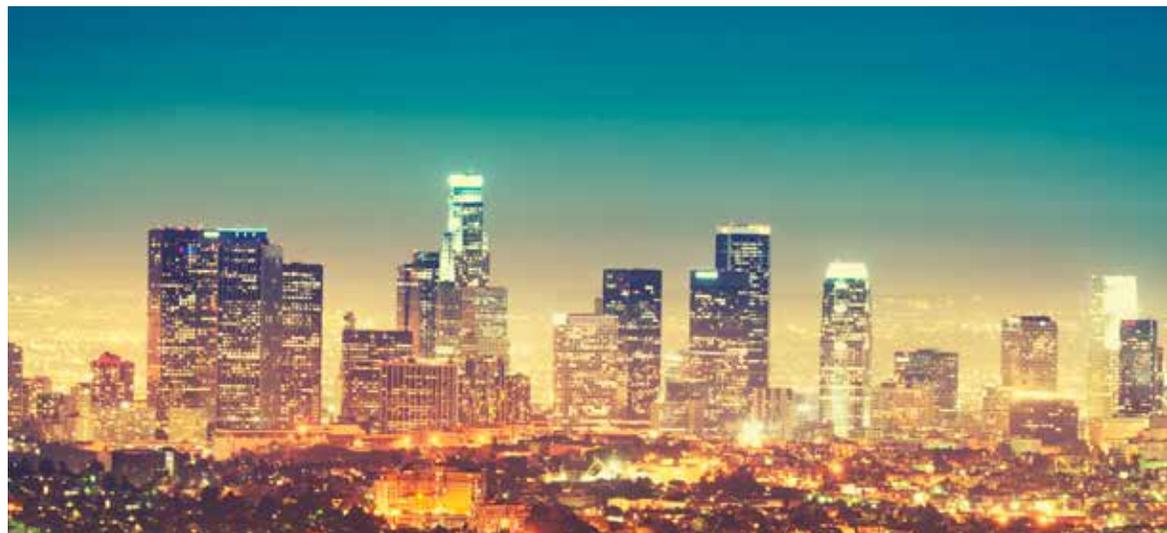
Following the enormous success of our first two Housing First Partners Conferences, we held our third in Los Angeles from March 22nd to the 25th. DESC co-convenes this biennial conference to help continue building the movement to end chronic homelessness.

This year's theme was "Taking Housing First to Scale." More than 800 participants from across the US, Canada, and beyond explored the expansion of Housing First and best practices for implementing Housing First principles across many different intervention types. The conference featured 150 presentations and workshops, and great plenary presentations by national leaders.

Highlights included a panel on criminal justice and housing issues with Chiraag Bains of the DOJ and Mike Thompson of the Council of State Governments,

and keynote addresses by VA Secretary Bob McDonald, LA Health Services Director Mitch Katz, Columbia University psychologist Carl Hart, and US Representative Maxine Waters. We also had a nice tribute to Bill Hobson at the opening plenary session.

You can learn more about the conference and the Housing First movement that began here at DESC at [www.hfpartnersconference.com](http://www.hfpartnersconference.com).





Innovation

# DESC Shapes Technology to Meet Its Mission

**D**ESC is well-known for innovation in service delivery through our crisis intervention, shelter, support, clinical and housing programs. But there is also continuous innovation going on behind the scenes.

Fourteen years ago, DESC invested in the technology expertise to build a comprehensive, integrated client information management system using open-source software. CHASERS (which stands for Client Housing and

Services Entry and Reporting System) tracks services provided, case notes and demographics for each one of the more than 8,000 unduplicated DESC clients served annually, and coordinates information across DESC's 15 locations and among more than 25 distinct programs.

Because it is developed and maintained by a talented and experienced team of in-house software developers, CHASERS is continually being refined to meet shifting program needs and can remain flexible in the face of expanding program directions. DESC's leadership uses CHASERS data every day to analyze emerging needs, make sound financial and programming decisions, and evaluate and ensure the effectiveness of client services.

In 2014 and 2015, DESC undertook a major upgrade to CHASERS by building in EHR (Electronic Health Record) functionality to the existing software. CHASERS, with the expanded EHR functionality, can now track complex client health data and health improvement outcomes, and can share data with other EHRs in order to more effectively coordinate client care.

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*Making Electronic Health Records part of our data system allows DESC to spend more time focusing on client care and less time managing paperwork.*





March 11, 2016

Downtown Emergency Service Center (DESC)  
515 Third Avenue, Seattle, WA 98104

To the DESC Board, Staff and Program Participants:

It is with great sadness that we at HUD and USICH learned of the death of Bill Hobson. We collectively wanted to pause and both offer our condolences for this loss, and celebrate an extraordinary human being whose life and work mattered – and will continue to matter - to so many, and to each of us personally.

The work we do here in Washington D.C. is often informed by innovators in the field. Each one of us knew Bill not just as an innovator, but as a fearless leader and a giant in the quest to end homelessness. His work and energy to ensure that everyone experiencing homelessness is treated with dignity and that everyone has a safe place to live is the foundation of our work, and of the work of all those across the country who have taken up the cause to end homelessness. Housing First – Bill’s legacy in Seattle and across the country – is fundamental to our progress.

From our perspective, perhaps the most important legacy he leaves us is the positive impact on the lives of all those served by DESC and by programs inspired by Bill’s work.

Any one of us would be proud to have a legacy such as his. Every one of us will work to make sure his legacy continues to light the way as we pursue ending homelessness.

Sincerely,  
The Team at HUD and USICH

Jennifer Ho

Matthew Doherty

Bill Block

Ann Oliva

Richard Cho

Katy Miller

Norm Suchar

Beverly Ebersold

Marcy Thompson

## Remembering Bill Hobson *continued...*

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now serving more than 8,000 individuals a year across an array of survival services, behavioral health treatment, and permanent housing programs.

DESC's supportive housing program began 22 years ago when the Union Hotel was opened to residents. The program at first used some of same typical practices employed by other landlords to screen out people deemed "not ready" for housing.

"This loss hits hard. Few advocates have been able to do so much for so many who have so little. He was kind, but unwavering, unapologetic and unafraid to speak up for those who have no voice."

—Dow Constantine, King County Executive

Tracking the progress of DESC's new tenants, however, showed a finding that nobody expected. Predictions about who was "housing ready" and who was not turned out to be deeply flawed. Some tenants were successful despite everyone's fears, and some that had been thought of as "housing ready" were unsuccessful. What mattered most of all was that each person was given the opportunity for housing regardless of personal backgrounds or other characteristics.

Over the next ten years, Housing First would take form as DESC dispensed with criteria that would keep people out of housing and instead prioritized the most vulnerable men and women for housing. Successful outcomes were achieved through the care and compassion of DESC

staff bringing in people who were hard to reach, and keeping them housed after they received their keys.

DESC's 1811 Eastlake building, which opened in 2005, brought prominence to Housing First as an unconventional intervention for people with addictions. The highly controversial project was targeted to people with the most severe alcohol addictions who were also extreme users of public crisis services, and the housing provided to them was not conditioned on abstinence or any other required change. The project faced widespread opposition, but Bill was steadfast in his determination.

Years later, we know that Bill was right. 1811 Eastlake has become a national model and has won multiple awards for its effectiveness.

Just a short time ago, Housing First was considered a radical and controversial idea. Now, in 2016 this humane and effective approach to ending homelessness has become the dominant service approach promoted in national policy.

As a result of this work, Bill and DESC have been recognized many times both locally and nationally, with awards such as the Municipal League of King County's "Citizen of the Year" and the National Alliance to End Homelessness's "Non-profit Sector Achievement Award." The full list is too long to include here!

An impassioned leader, Bill's voice was always the first to decry the injustice and indignities suffered by homeless people considered too difficult or treatment resistant to be offered the right to their own homes.

In his commitment to vulnerable, homeless women and men, Bill's impact on the city of Seattle and beyond was tremendous. We join his family in their grief as we mourn the loss of one of the city's greatest advocates.

## Barriers to Employment *continued...*

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Finding and maintaining gainful employment in the face of these combined challenges can feel like an insurmountable task for a homeless veteran to overcome alone.

In addition to housing the most vulnerable and disabled veterans throughout our permanent supportive housing programs, we are also helping many to overcome barriers they face when trying to find employment.

In the effort to end homelessness among veterans, DESC utilizes the approaches we have pioneered with the most vulnerable chronically homeless people overall.

In addition to housing the most vulnerable and disabled veterans throughout our permanent supportive housing programs, we are also helping many to overcome barriers they face when trying to find employment.

Our supported employment program, led by Michael Donegan, is working every day to challenge assumptions that veterans dealing with homelessness, mental illness, or addictions are 'unemployable.'

Donegan's team at DESC has been working to ensure veterans are able to seek meaningful employment through our Supported Employment Services. Donegan explained, "Merely taking

someone off the streets and providing them a place to live is not a viable long-term solution...long-term unemployment is not healthy for anybody. Alcoholism, smoking, all kinds of different physical ailments have been proven to grow, including depression and psychiatric problems when you have long-term unemployment."

Through the Supported Employment Services at DESC, Donegan sets up our most vulnerable veterans for success. "We help them get a realistic view of what a job is, then keep on going until we find a job that matches what it is they want," said Donegan. "We keep visiting them and their employer once a week, or, if needed, all day the first couple of days that they work to give some extra job coaching....When you hire one of our people, we communicate with the person's doctor, their nurse, case manager, and their housing person. We make things work so that person can be successful at work. That's what supported employment is all about."

The supported employment model for homeless and formerly homeless veterans who have mental illness or other disabling conditions has been successful for those individuals we have been able to serve. One of our biggest challenges is the limited resource available to extend this approach to more veterans and others with similar needs. One of our goals in 2016 is to acquire new resources to expand the reach of our supported employment work to be able to serve more veterans this year and into the future.

## DESC Shapes Technology to Meet Its Mission *continued...*

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Over the coming years, DESC is planning to significantly increase the amount of direct healthcare services we are able to provide our clients.

DESC is proud to be one of just a handful of nonprofits in the nation to design a “home-grown” EHR that, at the end of last year, was awarded complete ambulatory EHR certification from the ICSA Labs ONC Health IT Certification Program (2014 Edition), a rigorous program covering 41 functional areas, including security, interoperability, confidentiality, and integration with national data codesets.

The recognition that health and homelessness are tightly linked has grown tremendously over the past decade, and DESC is responding by providing basic primary care services in the main downtown survival shelter and several of our supportive housing apartment buildings.

Through partnerships with Neighborcare Health, and Harborview Medical Center and its affiliated Pioneer Square Clinic, DESC is able to meet immediate and emerging primary care needs of clients, which reduces the costly use of emergency interventions and allows access to health care services for people who cannot or will not, for a variety of reasons, use conventional health system resources. Over the coming years, DESC is planning to significantly increase the amount of direct healthcare services we are able to provide our clients. Obtaining EHR certification for CHASERS is one step toward supporting that work.

One of the goals of the Affordable Care Act was to improve health services through the use of technology. Many other organizations, without the technology resources and creativity of DESC, are purchasing “off the shelf” EHRs, which can be inflexible, can require costly customization to meet agency needs, may entail double data entry by staff trying to work between the new and old systems, and may not support existing service, billing, purchasing or other workflow and record-keeping processes.

This is just one more way that DESC innovates when it comes to client care, less publicly visible but no less crucial in the goal to eliminate homelessness.



# DESC

Downtown Emergency Service Center  
*opening doors to end homelessness*  
515 Third Avenue | Seattle WA 98104

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It's not one meal or one sheltered night that changes a life.  
It's a **web of integrated services** that can be accessed,  
**without barriers**, by those who need them most.

DESC provides integrated care, helping the most vulnerable  
homeless men and women **re-claim their lives**.

**You make it possible. Thank you.**