

# Redefining the Margins

## **Tennessee Housing Development Agency**

Special Needs Housing: Housing for Persons with Special Needs

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## NCSHA 2019 Annual Awards Entry

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### Background

What happens to youth after they age out of the foster care system and ex-offenders upon release from incarceration? Many find themselves homeless and living on the street. Similarly, many veterans who have proudly served in the United States military often find themselves sleeping on park benches and living under bridges. These are marginalized populations living on the edges of society – people who live and move among the general population, but who frequently do not have anywhere to call home. THDA is answering the call to help by providing housing for these populations through its strategic plan goals, priorities for grant awards established under the Tennessee Housing Trust Fund Competitive Grants Program, and payments to landlords through the Re-entry Housing Program.

Two of THDA's strategic goals are:

- ***“Meaningfully expand or preserve the housing resources of hard-to-serve populations at risk for homelessness who are not otherwise served by other housing programs.”***

*This goal is focused on populations receiving services through the Tennessee Department of Children's Services or the Tennessee Department of Correction.*

- ***“Work to develop resources that would improve the stability of individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.”***

*This goal is targeted toward veterans either experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.*

The Tennessee Housing Trust Fund (THTF) Competitive Grants Program was established by THDA's Board of Directors through a \$4 million state appropriation and \$12 million in THDA funds. Over \$46 million in THDA funds has been allocated to the Competitive Grants Program through FY 2018. Grants are made available to non-profits, local governments, public housing authorities, and other State departments for serving the rental housing needs of very low-income, elderly, and special needs Tennesseans.

THDA also administers the Re-entry Housing Program in cooperation with the Tennessee Department of Correction (TDOC). With TDOC funds, THDA makes payments to landlords providing transitional housing to returning citizens following incarceration. Payments are processed for approximately 20-25 landlords on a monthly basis. During calendar year 2018 approximately \$631,000 was paid to landlords providing transitional housing for ex-offenders upon release from incarceration.

### Marginalized Populations:

#### Youth

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is difficult for many young people to navigate even with support and guidance from nurturing adults. The transition to adulthood for youth involved in the foster care system is mired with challenges and difficult circumstances. Former foster youth have experienced separation from their families and other positive support systems, they have encountered traumas in their

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own homes as well as in the foster care system, and they are not equipped with sufficient social, emotional, educational, and life skills needed to continue their education, find and secure employment and housing, and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Without adequate housing, services, and supports, a healthy lifestyle is difficult for anyone to maintain. An Annie E. Casey Foundation, June 2014 report asserts, “The back door to the foster care system is the front door to the homeless system”. The report further states, “At the national, state and local levels, it is vital that special efforts be made to build bridges between the child welfare, housing, and homeless, systems.” THDA is helping to build these bridges and improve outcomes for youth as they exit foster care by working with other state departments, public housing authorities, and non-profit organizations across Tennessee to jointly provide housing, services, and supports for these emerging adults.

### *Ex-offenders*

Upon release from incarceration, many returning citizens also find it difficult to secure employment and decent affordable housing. Similar to former foster youth, they may not be able to return to the homes of their families and they face many barriers in trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle. There is a need to establish new positive relationships and support systems that may be difficult to maintain without the help of others who want to help them succeed.

In recognition of the scarcity of housing programs dedicated to meeting the needs of youth aging out of the foster care system and ex-offenders, THDA established priorities in the THTF Competitive Grants Program to encourage partners to provide housing to help meet the needs of both population groups.

### *Homeless Veterans*

Upon return to civilian life, some who have served in the military face challenges including but not limited to alcohol and substance abuse, mental illness, family separation, post-traumatic stress disorder, and difficulty in securing and maintaining employment and housing.

In support of the state’s goal identified by the State Interagency Council on Homelessness to increase availability and access to housing for veterans experiencing homelessness, THDA has incorporated this goal into its strategic plan and employed two programs to address housing needs. These efforts include (1) establishing priority points since 2016 through the THTF Competitive Grants program for applications that set aside units for any of these populations and (2) setting aside a special allocation of THTF resources for Continuums of Care to participate in and complete the Built for Zero Technical Assistance Program designed to assist CoCs to create and implement a by-name plan to end veteran homelessness. The attainment of decent affordable housing coupled with the provision of supportive services are top priorities and core needs of all three groups.

### Successful Projects:

#### *Crossroads Campus – Youth Aging Out of Foster Care and Homeless Youth*

Crossroads Campus, a 501 (c)(3) organization in Nashville, was founded with a mission to provide hope and healing for vulnerable people and animals. With the assistance of a THTF Competitive Grant, Crossroads Campus is providing supportive housing for former foster youth or other at-risk youth facing poverty and homelessness. The program is an innovative pet retail social enterprise providing intensive group case management, job training, and employment opportunities for disadvantaged youth and adoptions for homeless dogs and cats at risk of euthanasia. Earned revenue from the pet shop helps to sustain the program. The THTF grant amount was \$159,877.

#### *Project Return – Ex-offenders*

With the support of a THTF grant, Project Return, also a 501 (c)(3) non-profit in Nashville, developed PRO Housing – Project Return Opportunities for Housing. Under this program, 10 units of permanent rental housing for ex-offenders were initially developed. Since its launch in 2017, a total of 16 units have

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been developed and leased. Project Return's expertise has traditionally been in assisting with employment and supportive services upon release from incarceration. PRO Housing was born out of recognition of the barriers many face when seeking housing due to their criminal background.

In addition to PRO Housing, Project Return has also established PRO Employment or PROe, a social enterprise to provide transitional paid employment after incarceration. Through this program, Project Return provides reliable work crews to local businesses while participants gain job skills, a recent work history, and a professional reference to help find permanent employment.

PROe work crews also provide rehabilitation and maintenance for PRO Housing creating a full circle of employment, skill building, and housing. Because of their unique approach to providing job readiness, employment, wrap around services, coaching, and a dedicated housing retention services coordinator, Project Return participants have a less than 18 % recidivism rate, far less than the 50% national average and a 75% permanent employment rate. The THTF grant amount was \$284,042.

#### *Helen Ross McNabb Center – Homeless veterans*

The Helen Ross McNabb Center of Knoxville has developed 10 units of permanent supportive housing for veterans who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness. The housing is adjacent to a new Military Services Outpatient Center for military personnel and their families providing easy access for those with mental health and/or substance abuse issues. HRMC has developed a continuum of care for veterans and military personnel on one campus where housing and services are easily accessible. The THTF grant amount was \$390,000.

#### *Tennessee Valley Coalition for the Homeless – Homeless veterans*

TVCH, the Continuum of Care serving the geographic donut around Knoxville, began its participation in the Built for Zero training program in June 2018, following the award of a \$10,000 grant by THDA. As a result of adopting Built for Zero strategies, TVCH has reduced the number of homeless veterans by 57%.

#### Conclusion

Through Competitive Grants, Re-entry Housing, and the Built for Zero technical assistance initiative, THDA along with other state departments, non-profit organizations, and public housing authority partners across the state are helping to bring youth, ex-offenders and homeless veterans from living on the edges of society to becoming self-sufficient fully functioning members of their communities with a place to call home.

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## See the Impact!



CROSSROADS  
CAMPUS 



PROJECT  
return 

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Middlebrook Gardens – Homes for Veterans