



CSH Speak Up! Advocacy Program

Everyone has a story to tell and no two stories are the same

The Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) Speak Up! program empowers formerly homeless individuals to use their personal stories as an advocacy tool in the fight to end homelessness. Importantly, people who have experienced homelessness can help to inform and improve homeless services and systems, and through their stories communicate how housing ends homelessness.

The Speak Up! program lifts up the voices of these storytellers - the people who have moved off the streets and into supportive housing. The year-long curriculum combines monthly educational sessions on topics such as housing policy, advocacy, storytelling, narrative development, public speaking with individual coaching sessions, as well as numerous opportunities to advocate to local, state, and federal leaders.

In addition to the powerful experiences they bring, participants gain policy context about the broader social service systems they once navigated to clearly communicate the most effective methods for battling homelessness. As leaders and advocates, their stories of lived experiences reframe public perception and are critical to building the public and political will necessary to end homelessness.

ADVOCATE STORIES

By the time **Dorothy** was identified by an outreach team as one of the 25 most vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness in Pasadena, she had been on the streets for seven years. It was no surprise she was determined likely to die without intervention - after a long history of substance abuse, mental illness, and domestic violence. Once the team got her into supportive housing, her case manager helped her access treatment for depression, substance use and post-traumatic stress disorder. Today, Dorothy lives in a one-bedroom apartment, with her dog Ziggy, and serves on the CSH Board of Directors where she uses her life experience to advocate for housing and educate others about the experience of homelessness.



Mildred was living on the streets for five years before she finally accessed services through a psychiatric facility, which assisted her with finding housing. Decades of domestic violence, beginning in her childhood, untreated mental illness, and lack of a support system were significant contributors to her homeless experience. Millie was able to secure permanent supportive housing through A Community of Friends and find support through working with a case manager and accessing community services. Today, she focuses on breaking the cycle of dysfunction and finding forgiveness for her father and others who have caused her pain. In addition to sharing her story in Washington D.C. and at numerous community events, Mildred volunteers at the Downtown Women's Center and is working with other survivors of domestic violence.



“When we went to Washington D.C. I was just so impressed about everything. I just walked in, tried to catch my breath, remembered what I needed to say which is that supportive housing works... I live today because of successful supportive housing.”

— VIKKI VICKERS

Speak Up! Advocate Class of 2015

CSH Speak Up! collaborates with a wide array of partners to educate, advocate and advance supportive housing solutions. In addition to an ongoing partnership with system leaders such as the **United Way of Greater Los Angeles**, Speak Up! partners with:

- **Big Citizen Hub:** The mission of Big Citizen Hub is to expand the social capital of youth through civic engagement with critical issues and community partnerships. Speak Up! advocates work to educate program participants about the causes of homelessness and its solutions.
- **Downtown Women's Center (DWC):** Speak Up!, in partnership with the DWC and the Domestic Violence Homeless Services Coalition, is collaborating with survivors of domestic violence who have experienced homelessness to build an advocacy program tailored to their specific concerns.
- **Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA):** Speak Up! advocates participate in LAHSA's forums, presentations and other community outreach efforts. Additionally, the program advises in the development and facilitation of an advisory group of individuals with lived experience of homelessness who help inform and shape LAHSA's work.
- **Residents United Network:** Speak Up! advocates joined forces with a cohort of affordable home residents, community leaders, housing developers and housing advocates throughout California to advance housing affordability in state and local policy-making.
- **University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine Professionalism and the Practice of Medicine program:** Through sharing their personal stories with medical students, Speak Up! advocates demonstrate the unique health issues specific to the homeless community to help inform the students' clinical work.

WHAT'S NEXT

Speak Up! is collaborating with several supportive housing providers, including the Downtown Women's Center and LA Family Housing, to incubate advocacy programming tailored to underrepresented and marginalized populations including survivors of domestic violence and youth.

CSH plans to advance the Speak Up! model across regions, systems and populations to amplify the significant benefits of partnering with those impacted by homelessness and embracing their expertise within supportive housing. CSH is in the process of creating an Operations Playbook to ensure fidelity to the success of the program and guide the replication and expansion of Speak Up! nationally.

In September of 2013 CSH launched the Speak Up! program in partnership with A Community of Friends, Housing Works, Skid Row Housing Trust, the Coalition for Responsible Community Development, Clifford Beers Housing, Survivors' Truths, and with generous support from the United Way of Greater Los Angeles and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

For more information visit csh.org/speakup or contact **Ann English at ann.english@csh.org**

