

## **Boise, ID, 150,000-500,000, Project CATCH**

### **2008 Awards for Municipal Excellence**

# **Project Summary**

Charitable Assistance To Community's Homeless (CATCH) is an unprecedented, community-wide, collaborative effort initiated and administrated by city government, and supported by local congregations of faith, area businesses, and the United Way. CATCH was developed to address the burgeoning, complex problem of family homelessness. By rapidly housing families first, then providing resources, services, and case management, CATCH is unique in its approach. The verb *catch* means to "keep from falling", which best captures the spirit of this program.

Previously in our community, the only option for homeless families was overcrowded emergency homeless shelters, with long waiting lists. Also, there were challenges to keep families together, such as certain shelters having policies which separated women and men, or prohibited children older than twelve staying with their parent of the opposite sex. Finally, there was simply not enough capacity in the community to address the growing problem, and not enough families were successfully transitioning from homeless shelters back into permanent housing. Across the country, a similar story can be told. As the lack of affordable housing continues to perplex America's "working poor", the need for innovative partnerships and creative solutions in communities across this country has never been more critical.

Today, CATCH accepts referrals from the same inundated homeless shelters, and offers eligible families hope and a wealth of community resources to access and maintain permanent housing. Working with independent congregations of faith and local businesses who sponsor the rent for CATCH participants, CATCH has distinguished itself as a unique program making a difference for homeless families in Boise. Further, by being the first program of its kind to broadly collaborate within the community to privately fund housing costs for up to six months for homeless families, CATCH represents an effective model which can be readily shared with communities across the country.

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## **Project Description**

### **Introduction**

Transitioning from homelessness and the despair it fosters, into self sufficiency and a promising future, can be a tremendous leap for families. CATCH is not “just another government program”, but a collaborative effort spanning all segments of our vital community. For thirty-seven families since its inception, CATCH has provided a helping hand up and out of difficult circumstances, and a gentle nudge into a better future.

In order to determine the success of CATCH in any given year, we primarily look at the following three measures: 1) the number of families housed; 2) the number of families served by case management and connected with appropriate community resources; and 3) the number of families exiting the program into self sufficiency (i.e., able to pay their own rent).

Regardless of how many families will ultimately become self sufficient, a key goal of the CATCH program is simply connecting families with safe, stable housing again. Though the program is designed to prevent subsequent homeless episodes, providing a family with a maximum of six months in their own home, rather than in an often crowded and unsafe emergency shelter, immediately and positively affects their outlook and restores a sense of dignity. Often, this transition from shelter to housing cannot be made without advocacy and intervention, as many families run into difficulties with a standard housing application. Often their credit is poor, their income insufficient, or they have made a variety of poor decisions that haunt them on a background check. CATCH helps families make this initial step, and allows them to transition from survival mode into stability, giving them a taste of what “normal” life can be again. In addition to housing, CATCH families are often given beds, dressers, and other furnishings. It is easy to forget that, in simplest terms, the cure for homelessness is a home.

In order to ensure that a family is equipped to maintain housing beyond their program tenure, a licensed social worker is assigned to each family. The social worker has weekly contact with family members, and helps keep them accountable with reasonable and mutually agreed upon goals. The initial goals may include finding a job, following through on appointments with agencies that can help them, initiating a plan to address debt, saving money, upgrading skills, preparing a résumé, attending parenting classes--and the list goes on. CATCH considers it progress when a family is connected with a variety of services and resources that leave them in a better state than they were found to be in at their initial referral and intake. Even though five families did not graduate into self sufficiency (four due to non-compliance, and one, incarceration), all were greatly assisted.

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Finally, the ultimate measuring stick of CATCH is how many families are able to pay their own rent within six months. We believe these results not only validate CATCH's unique approach, but also encourage the community to continue to invest in a charitable program which helps families become self sufficient, rather than continue to drain valuable community resources. As noted earlier, since the launch of CATCH in November of 2006, thirty-seven otherwise homeless families have been rapidly housed and connected with appropriate resources. Out of the twenty-seven families which have exited the program, 82% (twenty-two) were able to pay their own rent and be self-sufficient.

### **Public/Private partnership**

As a model, what really makes CATCH work is the community collaboration between city government, local congregations, area businesses, and the United Way. Faith leaders, representing congregations from diverse denominations and faiths, are participating by agreeing to have their faith community sponsor the rent for at least one homeless family. Since the City of Boise primarily covers all of the administrative costs of operating the program, along with some assistance from the United Way, all community donations go directly to impact the lives, and immediate needs of participating families.

With this kind of return on charitable investment, several local businesses have also been attracted to CATCH, and have partnered with the program as well. For example, Mountain West Bank partnered with CATCH by matching dollar-for-dollar all money saved by families while in the program. This effort helps sustain families after they exit CATCH, and ultimately helps them gain greater self sufficiency. In addition, Mountain West Bank also provides Financial Literacy training and one-on-one mentors as needed.

Families are identified and referred by local emergency shelters such as the Salvation Army, Boise Rescue Mission, Women's and Children's Alliance, City Light Home for Women and Children, and Sanctuary. Occasionally, a family in crisis has been referred by other outside sources, such as a partnering congregation, a school, or another agency serving people in need.

### **Target population**

The target population served by CATCH is homeless families with children. This may include intact families with children or single parents with children. Though the 2007 "Continuum of Care" report estimated there were 194 homeless families in Ada and Canyon counties, it is extremely difficult to determine what percentage of homeless families are in need in Boise, and eligible for CATCH. For example, there may be many families staying with friends or family members ("couch surfing") who would probably much rather move into an apartment and have their rent paid for six months, but CATCH considers only

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families who are “homeless with no other resources available”. Often, families and friends can provide a natural safety net for temporary episodes of unemployment or crisis.

If a referred family member has an active, untreated pattern of drug abuse, or has been charged with a crime of violence against person or property in recent history, they are ineligible for CATCH. The CATCH eligibility criteria has been carefully crafted to be as inclusive as possible, without jeopardizing the sustainability of the program or being irresponsible with the charitable funds from community sponsors. To date, CATCH has been able to serve every family *eligible* for the program, which has also been referred to the program. In other words, no family has yet to be turned away because CATCH did not have program capacity.

### **Conception**

In late December of 2005, CATCH was originally conceived and drafted in the form of a proposal by the City of Boise’s ADA/Fair Housing Coordinator. The initial impetus for the proposal was an apparent gap in services for families experiencing homelessness within the Boise community. At the time, there was only one, small emergency shelter serving intact families which was maintaining a long waiting list every winter. The City had recently come under fire from local homeless advocates, but the Mayor and City Council had promised to stay engaged and demonstrate leadership on the issue of homelessness. By May of 2006, the internal proposal had the support of Planning and Development Services Director, Bruce Chatterton, and Theresa McLeod in the Office of the Mayor. Mayor David Bieter gave his wholehearted support to the proposal in June, giving CATCH the political support it needed for broad, community engagement. CATCH was first announced and launched by Mayor Bieter in September 2006 at his State of the City address, followed by a more detailed press conference in November 2006 just prior to the first CATCH family being housed.

The original idea was to engage the faith community first to see if there was willingness for individual congregations to support one family at a time. The Mayor hosted a breakfast and invited faith leaders from all over Boise to hear a presentation on the CATCH strategy. Initially, over fifteen congregations expressed interest in supporting a homeless family. Since then, interested congregations continue to partner with CATCH. Also, several local businesses, banks, corporations, the United Way, and even landlords have become partners with CATCH by donating funds and resources to primarily house families, help out with power bills, security deposits, beds, dressers, food, clothing, etc. In this way, CATCH truly represents community collaboration.

### **Budget**

CATCH’s total operating budget for 2008 is an estimated \$343,902. This breaks down into two, separate parts: 1) administrative budget; and 2) community budget. The administrative budget, funded by the City of Boise and the United Way, totals \$133,902, and pays for all administrative costs such as personnel, office space, supplies, etc. The

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community budget, totaling approximately \$210,000 is funded by donations from local congregations, businesses, foundations, and individuals. One hundred percent of the community budget funds directly benefit CATCH families through rent payments, and miscellaneous expenses such as food, clothing, utilities, furnishings, car repairs, etc.

To date, CATCH receives no federal, state, or county funding. The City of Boise funds approximately twenty-six percent of the total budget (\$88,100); the United Way funds approximately thirteen percent (\$45, 902); and the community, primarily congregations of faith and local businesses, fund approximately sixty-one percent (\$210,000) of the total budget.

### **Media coverage**

The following is a list of local and national media coverage during CATCH's first year and a half of implementation:

**FOX, Channel 12 (local)**- Fox 12 has reported a total of four stories on CATCH: a report on the initial, community press conference explaining the program (November 2006); a report on the first CATCH family to move in the week of Thanksgiving 2006; a report on the CATCH one year mark, interviewing a recent success story (October 2007); and report coverage of the first annual CATCH Me If You Can 5K fundraiser (November 2007).

**NBC, Channel 7 (local)**- Channel 7 has reported a total of two stories on CATCH: the first report following the Mayor's State of the City address (September, 2006); and a report on the initial, community press conference explaining the program (November, 2006).

**ABC, Channel 6 (local)**- Channel 6 has reported one story on CATCH: the initial, community press conference explaining the program (November, 2006).

**CBS, Channel 2 (local)**- Channel 2 has reported two stories on CATCH: a report following the Mayor's State of the City address (September, 2006); and a report on the initial, community press conference explaining the program (November, 2006).

**Idaho Statesman newspaper (local)**- The Idaho Statesman newspaper has highlighted CATCH over the last year, most notably: an article introducing the CATCH program entitled "City seeks sponsors for homeless", the morning after the Mayor's State of the City address (September 16, 2006); and an article highlighting CATCH entitled "Future looks brighter for Boise's homeless", detailing first year statistics and the CATCH Me If You Can 5K fundraiser (November 2, 2007).

**Idaho Business Review (state)** - The Idaho Business review published an article submitted by Greg Morris, CATCH Program Manager entitled "Cutting Edge Charity CATCHes On" (August 27, 2007).

**Chronicle of Philanthropy (national)**- The Chronicle of Philanthropy (Washington D.C. based) highlighted CATCH in an article entitled "Fund-Raising Strategies for Troubled Times" (February 7, 2008).

**National Public Radio, Boise State Radio**- Boise State radio has highlighted CATCH twice: by airing a community panel discussion on homelessness hosted by First Presbyterian Church of Boise, featuring Greg Morris, CATCH Program Manager (December, 2007); and provided coverage and radio interview of Greg Morris at a press event hosted by Mountain West Bank, to launch a new partnership between CATCH and Mountain West Bank called "CATCH Match". This program component, seeded with a

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\$7500 grant from Mountain West Bank, will match dollar for dollar money saved by CATCH families while in the program, to further propel them into self sufficiency.

CATCH can provide copies of each local news story recorded in DVD format, as well as copies of newspaper articles and radio transcripts.

### **Conclusion**

There are homeless families in every major city in America. There are also influential mayors, caring congregations, thriving local businesses, crowded homeless shelters, and well-established United Way chapters. CATCH is a tested model that could be easily replicated in every major city in America, with the proper strategic planning. With the increasing lack of affordable housing, and more families with young children falling into homelessness, now is the time for collaboration between government, faith communities, and businesses to address an issue which transcends political partisanship and denominational differences.

When government demonstrates true leadership, and provides some, if not all, of the operational resources for a program like CATCH, then many segments within a community can respond with support. In fact, it has been our experience that congregations and faith leaders desire to respond and be proactive on the issue of homelessness, but do not always know how to enter the community dialogue.

CATCH represents an innovative approach, at an opportune time. Over the last several years, "Ten Year Plans" to end chronic homelessness have been developed in city, county, and state jurisdictions throughout the nation. Thus, in almost every major city in America, government officials have been educated on the complex problem of homelessness, along with other community leaders and stakeholders. CATCH offers a reasonable way to invite the broader community to become involved, and for roles and resources to be shared, in order to address family homelessness on a local level.

For more information, including a short video presentation, please visit CATCH online at [www.cityofboise.org/CATCH](http://www.cityofboise.org/CATCH).