

by Jean-Michel Giraud, President and CEO, Friendship Place 02/26/2018

Employment First: A Powerful Tool for Ending Homelessness

We have made tremendous progress in the work to end homelessness over the past 10 years. Much of our success can be attributed to the shift to Housing First and away from the belief that people need to achieve an often-arbitrary level of “readiness” before they can be connected to permanent housing. But in order to ensure that people are successful in that housing, most will need a job, and they’ll need it quickly. That’s why I believe the next paradigm that needs shifting is on the employment services side of our work. We need to embrace “Employment First” in the same way that we have so strongly embraced Housing First.



Photo Courtesy of Friendship Place

We practice Employment First at Friendship Place alongside our Housing First approach. The basic principle that drives our job placement program, AimHire, is simple: we assume employability. We believe that all of us have a skillset that makes us employable, a skillset an employer will pay us for. When job seekers meet our team of staff and volunteers, this belief fuels their self-confidence and fires up their rebuilding process. It is truly empowering to hear from other people that they believe in your ability to get a job after a period of homelessness or severe housing instability.

When a client comes in seeking our services, we immediately attempt to stabilize their financial and housing situation. For example, that might mean a call to the mortgage company to negotiate a grace period so that our client can stay stably housed while focusing on a job search. Our staff and team of volunteers then expedite soft skills training, rehearse interviews, update resumes, and provide people with opportunities to get in front of employers as quickly as possible.

Like for-profit job placement agencies, AimHire focuses on developing strong relationships with employers and matching their needs to our clients’ skillsets. We find that our clients have skills and job histories across many different sectors. We have helped people land positions as technicians, lawyers, retail workers, teachers, and even paid interns. Applicants receive at least minimum wage, and though the Washington D.C. metro area has a high cost of living, we have relationships with landlords who offer shared housing and options for affordable housing solutions.

On average, AimHire helps people get jobs in 90 days. Following the hire, we offer up to a month’s rent to help job seekers stabilize their housing situation. A job and a month’s rent using this formula costs less than \$6,000

per participant. It is effective and cost-effective. And it focuses on the outcome we are seeking – income that supports housing stability – rather than just checking off the activities that go into helping someone with a job search.

Empowering and person-centric, Employment First’s effectiveness rides on the quality of the relationship between the job seeker and the team. It is crucial to train staff and volunteers to be service-oriented, empathetic, and non-judgmental. The team’s role is to explore options and offer possible solutions, not to decide what path the job seeker should take on the rebuilding journey. This relationship continues for as long as the person wishes to maintain the connection to AimHire. Even after job placement, we offer support, mediation, and guidance to program participants.

By shifting to Employment First, I believe that we can all develop the capacity to help our clients quickly move from homelessness to housing to employment. Ensuring people have living wage jobs is the surest way to make homelessness rare, brief, and one-time. The Employment First model can help us get there.

If you are interested in talking to us about our AimHire model, please contact info@friendshipplace.org.

posted in:

[**Setting a Path to End All Homelessness**](#)