POWER has a work study position open!

Our beloved work study student, Sierra Brown, has had to leave her position mid-year and we are looking for the miraculous Evergreen student who has a work study award and needs a position. It is 10 hours a week as POWER's Outreach Coordinator.

Please contact POWER if you qualify and are interested!

POWER
Parents Organizing For Welfare and Economic Rights
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Find us on Facebook.

POWER is an organization of low-income parents and allies advocating for a strong social safety net while working toward a world where children and care giving are truly valued, and the devastation of poverty has been eradicated.

Hope to see you tomorrow at POWER's Annual Member Meeting!

Board Elections and Apple Pie Bake off!

Saturday, November 1st, 11:30 am to 3:30 pm

MIXX 96 Meeting Room, corner of State and Washington in downtown Oly

You can meet and hear from the Board Candidates, get to better know other POWER members, and help us vision our work in the upcoming year.

We encourage all POWER members to attend this meeting if at all possible. Bring a friend you'd like to introduce to POWER. We will provide transportation support to those who take public transportation, or carpool from their area. We will help you organize carpools if you call, 360-352-9716 or email, info@mamapower.org. Also, please let us know if you will need childcare.

Bring a potluck dish to share if you can and an apple pie if you wish to enter the apple pie bake-off. The winner gets a prize!

And on Monday eve!
POWER's Voter Roundtable:

Our November POWER Outage, which falls on Voting Day eve, will be a Voters Roundtable. Bring your ballot and share what you know about the initiatives and candidates. Learn what others know.

Monday, November 3rd at Darby's Café, 311 5th Ave, in downtown Olympia

We start with a potluck at 5:30. Bring something to share if you can. Discussion from 6 – 8.

Childcare will be provided by the fabulous Olympia Childcare Collective down the street at the POWER office, 309 5th Avenue.

Below:
3 interesting articles:

1. **It Takes a Village to Enforce Fair Wage Laws**
2. **Victory to the World – international social movement of the poor**
3. **It Would Actually Be Very Simple To End Homelessness Forever**

It Takes a Village to Enforce Fair Wage Laws

by Rebecca Smith Posted on October 24, 2014

Seattle made history in June when it became the first major city in America to pass a livable minimum wage of $15 an hour. Los Angeles, Chicago, New York and other cities around the country are taking steps in that direction, too.

But winning a robust minimum wage is only half of the battle.

Last month, Seattle again made history when Mayor Ed Murray announced the creation of a citywide Division of Labor Standards Enforcement to enforce its minimum wage law and other labor standards. A key feature of the new division is that it utilizes community groups as partners in outreach and to educate workers about their rights.

Because wage theft is so common in industries that employ minimum wage workers, only an effective, strategic enforcement system will ensure that workers receive the new wage they are entitled to. Fortunately, we know how wage theft happens and we know the kinds of enforcement techniques that result in low-wage workers being paid their due.

A landmark 2009 study of nearly 4,500 low-wage workers in three of the cities currently considering a minimum wage increase—Los Angeles, Chicago and New York—found that more than two in three workers experienced at least one pay-related violation during their previous work week. Of these workers, one in four was paid less than the minimum wage, and three in four were not paid their overtime wages. Wage theft costs workers and their families in these three cities an estimated $56 million every week—that's $56 million stolen weekly from workers' pockets instead of helping their families and communities.

We also know the people who are the victims of wage theft. Government statistics and private studies show that they work in restaurants and hotels, retail and grocery stores. They clean office buildings and care for our children and elders. They build our homes.
Relying on government alone to right these wrongs simply doesn't work—government has neither the resources nor the manpower. The U.S. Department of Labor has slightly more than 1,000 investigators who are responsible for protecting the rights of 135 million workers in 7.5 million businesses nationwide. Things aren't any better at the state level, where the ratio of investigators to workers is approximately 1 to 150,000.

We also know that enforcement doesn't work if it relies solely on workers filing complaints. A study of the largely complaint-based federal system found that for every one complaint received, there are more than 100 other labor-standards violations that go undetected, allowing unscrupulous employers to fly under the radar. One reason workers don't complain is that nearly half of those who suffer wage theft also face retaliation for speaking up about it.

The fact is that enforcement of existing laws is so poor that the average employer has a less than 0.001 percent chance annually of being investigated by the Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division. That doesn't exactly strike fear into the hearts of scofflaws.

But just as surely as we know the challenges to effective enforcement, we also know how we can change this status quo and secure compliance—through an enforcement agency that has strong penalties at its disposal to deter and correct violations. We also know from lessons learned in places like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Florida, and New York—in industries ranging from construction to hospitality to janitorial to agriculture—that community groups must play a critical role in enforcement.

Successful enforcement partnerships take advantage of the strengths of both government and community groups. City agencies have the power to file complaints, assess significant penalties, and take wage thieves to court. But even the best-trained investigator can't possibly know the

industries in every city and can't be in all places at once. Community groups do and are.

Non-profits—based in our neighborhoods and knowledgeable about their industries, languages and cultures—can help spread the word to both employers and employees about minimum wage protections and other labor standards. Community based organizations can also support victims of wage theft who—fearing retaliation—don't want to take a complaint directly to a city official. They can interview workers and witnesses and assemble the necessary proof in an atmosphere of trust.

Community groups also have vital information that supports strategic enforcement. It is an inefficient use of limited enforcement resources for investigators to wait for complaints to come in, or to investigate every industry equally. Existing violation data and the experiences of the US Department of Labor demonstrate that by focusing attention on high-violation industries and fractured employment relationships—like subcontracting and franchising—enforcement agencies are much more effective in discovering abuses and taking action to stop them. Community groups have contact with working people every day and can help city agencies investigate known violators. Business can play a role, too, by pointing out bad actors who gain a competitive advantage over responsible employers by breaking the law.

In short, through these partnerships, city enforcers are able to focus on correcting and deterring violations. They can assess penalties and award back wages to a degree that makes it very clear that our cities and states will no longer tolerate cheaters.
We can make the promise of a higher minimum wage a reality for millions of our neighbors and co-workers. By establishing a Division of Labor Standards Enforcement and funding community-based outreach, Seattle is moving in the right direction. Other cities should take note.

Rebecca Smith is deputy director of the National Employment Law Project and works in Seattle.

Jai Jagat! – Victory to the World

Story by Shailly Barnes and Daniel Jones

The more we learn about the problems facing our communities and others around the world, the clearer it becomes that there will be no solutions without a sustained global social movement of the poor. For this reason, we are always looking to build relationships with organizations of the poor in other countries that are coming to similar conclusions. In early September, we had the opportunity to take part in a powerful exchange with exactly this kind of group, when we were welcomed by Ekta Parishad and International Initiatives to their International Youth Program (IYP) on Non-Violence in Tamil Nadu, India.

Ekta Parishad (Unity Forum) is an organization of the poor, especially the rural poor, in India. It evolved from a history of NGO community development work into a poor people's movement to secure rights to key 'livelihood resources': land, forest, and water. In its early years, Ekta Parishad's work was concentrated in adivasi (indigenous) communities who have experienced decades of displacement from their tribal lands and resources. In more recent years, as India has experienced a rapid intensification of land-grabs by transnational companies for the purposes of speculation and production for big agribusiness, even larger sections of its rural population have been dispossessed and displaced beyond. This has given Ekta Parishad's work to secure rights to livelihood resources even more urgency and global significance, and has brought those directly affected by the land grabs into the movement. Over the course of its 25-year history, the movement has expanded into broader sections of society to include the landless poor, bonded laborers, poor women, children, and the elderly.

These marches brought the poor of India together across politics, caste, religion and region to demand their common right to the land.

A primary area of their work is in bringing these people together to engage in non-violent marches around their rights. In 2007, Ekta Parishad organized a 350km march from Gwalior to the Indian capital, Delhi. They called the march Janadesh, which translates to "Verdict of the People." You can see an in-depth video about

the march below. The march was one of the largest non-violent actions of the poor in recent history, with 25,000 poor men, women and children walking down the national highway and threatening a hunger strike in the middle of the capital. The march was repeated in 2012 in the Jan Satyagraha ("People's March for Justice") with 100,000 people. These marches brought the poor of India together across politics, caste, religion and region to demand their common right to the land. They are currently planning for another march, Jai Jagat ("Victory to the World ") 2020 – a 15-month march of more than 7,500km from Delhi to Geneva.

We first met Ekta Parishad leaders Rajagopal and Jill Carr-Harris in Peru at the April convening of the Social Movements Working group of the International Network of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net). Our co-director Larry Cox and other leaders from our network made an immediate connection with them on the basis of our shared values, and we were excited to have the chance to deepen our relationship with them at the IYP training from September 4th – 9th, 2014. In particular, we wanted to learn more about their approach to and understanding of non-violence, not just as a set of tactics or a strategy for policy change, but as a way to transform the social structures that produce poverty and perpetuate systems of exploitation, oppression and violence.

The IYP training brought together 15-20 leaders, with a special focus on youth, from grassroots organizations and movements from Brazil, Nepal, Senegal, South Africa, Colombia, Guatemala, Bangladesh, Italy and Germany. During the few days we were there, we learned about non-violence in poor people's struggles for land reform and against land grabbing, for women's rights and gender equity, and for people's control over the decisions that affect them. Over and over again it became clear that the poor all over the world are up against common forces invested in the current global economic system, which is constantly advancing in its work of dispossession and extending its control over the resources we need to survive. Indeed, this gathering of grassroots leaders from around the world conveyed both the challenges and possibility of realizing this kind of broad social transformation today.

We spent time diving deep into the theoretical and theological constructs and concepts of non-violence. A large part of the training included small group discussions around the political, social, economic and cultural dimensions of non-violence. In the small group focused on non-violent economy, we considered activities that are emerging in grassroots communities and poor people's struggles that are both non-violent forms of resistance as well as creative alternatives to the

status quo. For example, we looked at the practice of establishing seed banks that enable farmers to liberate themselves from exploitative seed monopolies, while also creating alternative social relations of mutual support and community.

The training also included visits to local villages where Ekta Parishad has trained village leaders and developed educational programs for children, performances by a local children's drama group and a professional street theater group from Chennai, morning and evening multi-faith prayers, singing and seasonal celebrations. These cross-cultural exchanges were just as important as the more formal sessions in appreciating the broad social transformation that Ekta Parishad envisions and is working towards.

Indeed, this gathering of grassroots leaders from around the world conveyed both the challenges and possibility of realizing this kind of broad social transformation today. Learning about non-violent movements and organizations of the poor claiming and demanding basic economic rights in every continent, and meeting with people who are committed to these struggles for the long haul, made it clear that building a global Poor People's Campaign for today is both a concrete possibility and absolute necessity for all of our struggles. As we shared about the reality of poverty in the US, the organizations of the poor here, and our commitment to the work of reigniting Dr. King's Poor People's Campaign, leaders from Ekta Parishad, from Brazil, and elsewhere began to relate their organizations' struggles with ours. "[A Poor People's Campaign] in the United States, supported by the poor in the third world, would completely change things," stated one leader from Ekta Parishad, highlighting the power and potential of overcoming the divisions between people in struggle in the global North and the global South, and building the unity of the poor globally.

Ifran Engineer said the Quran is "the voice of the oppressed that cry out for justice and love for all," and cited chapter and verse to show that piety means doing justice, that God demands that you fight for justice even in cases where justice goes against your own interests.

This common ground was emphasized again in a meeting we had after we left the training with Irfan Engineer, Director of the Center for the Study of Secularism and Society. CSSS is an organization that studies communal and religious violence, including violence against women. Their work focuses on revealing how religions can be a crucial resource for uniting the poor across lines of division, and for building the strength and moral force of the united action of the poor. They also do extensive research on how religious identity is used by political operators and the

economic elite to "contain" the politically threatening results of mass poverty and turn the poor violently against each other. Some of their most recent research has involved a close look at the efforts of the BJP, the party of current Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to build and spread Hindu nationalism in India.

CSSS also does powerful exegetical work with the Quran. Continuing in the legacy of Muslim scholar and liberation theologian Ashgar Ali Engineer, Dir. Irfan Engineer described the Quran as "the voice of the oppressed that cry out for justice and love for all," and cited chapter and verse to show that piety means doing justice, that God demands that you fight for justice even in cases where justice goes against your own interests. We saw a lot of commonality between our work and that of CSSS, and are excited to build on the inspiring conversations we had in India.

After these several days, and as we move forward towards building a Poor People's Campaign for today, we draw strength and faith from Ekta Parishad and the leaders we met, and from all those with whom we are marching together towards justice and freedom.

Jai Jagat! Victory to the World!

It Would Actually Be Very Simple To End Homelessness Forever

by Bryce Covert Posted on October 9, 2014

Kirk is doing everything you would expect him to do.

Having lost his job amid the recession and been mostly homeless since September of 2009, he's applied to literally hundreds of thousands of jobs – he has 12,000 pages with 36 sent applications per page in his email inbox – while also trying to navigate the Seattle-area homelessness system. He's focused mostly on legal jobs given that he has a Bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary prelaw and a paralegal certification from a community college. He even managed to secure housing a few times, briefly, but lost one apartment when his unemployment benefits ran out, and was kicked out of housing through homeless programs twice because of errors in his psychiatric assessments. He also secured jobs

twice, but they were both seasonal positions, one with the United Postal Service and another with Wal-Mart.

"Trying to find work and being homeless, the biggest problem is that you don't have anywhere to go home and rest," he said. "All the other stresses of not having any money, not having anything good happen to you in the last four or five days, these things weigh very heavily when you're looking for work." A few nights before he spoke with ThinkProgress, he was nearly jumped. He once woke up to find someone had taken his suitcase, along with all of his clothes.

Someone like Kirk likely wouldn't have experienced such a long bout of homelessness in the decades leading up to the 1980s. But since then, thanks to a series of events but most notably the gutting of affordable housing, the country has experienced mass homelessness not seen since the Great Depression. More than 600,000 Americans don't have a home to sleep in on any given night, with over 100,000 chronically dealing with the problem.

Even with the size and scope of today's homeless population, though, it's not an unsolvable problem. The United States does actually know how to end homelessness. So why is Kirk still sleeping in a park?

The 1980s "was when contemporary homelessness really began," said Maria Foscarinis, executive director of the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. "It's really critical to remember that we didn't always have mass homelessness in this country."

After the widespread homelessness caused by the Great Depression, it became a limited and short-term problem for decades. Homelessness will always exist among people experiencing unexpected poverty, struggling with mental illness or substance abuse, or coping with other unexpected events. But it used to be that getting back on your feet didn't take months or years. And homelessness used to mostly impact a narrow slice of society: white, urban, older men, many dealing with alcoholism.

"In the 70s, there was an adequate supply of affordable housing, even a surplus," said Nan Roman, president of the National Alliance to End

Homelessness. “If people lost their housing, you could get them back into some place right away.”

In 1970, there was a surplus of 300,000 affordable housing units in the U.S. But then, in the 1980s, affordable housing began to evaporate. The Reagan administration slashed funding. Federal spending on housing assistance fell by 50 percent between 1976 and 2002. At the same time, gentrification sped up, with cities getting rid of cheap housing like single room occupancy units and replacing them with more expensive stock, and units being built were more often for co-ops and condos for ownership instead of rent. Federal incentives to build affordable housing dried up. Add to that the AIDs crisis, the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, cutbacks to the social safety net, and the rise in incarceration and subsequent hurdles for reentry, and you have today’s crisis.

By 1985, there were 8.9 million poor renters in need of housing but just 5.6 million units, a 3.2 million shortage. By 2009, there was a 5.5 million shortage. Today, just one in four eligible households gets federal rental assistance while rents keep rising, income stagnates, and a record number of families are paying more than what they can afford.
Other changes since the 1980s have been for the better. When mass homelessness emerged, we weren’t ready for it. “There was a process of learning, because we did a lot of things in the beginning that I think were intuitive, but we’ve learned a lot,” Roman said.

The original focus was on creating a plan to help someone with mental illness or substance abuse before getting her in housing, as well as a reliance on the shelter system, explained Jerry Jones, executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless. “If you go back a few years, it was an emphasis on creating a consensus plan on the local level,” he said. “If you went back 10 or probably 15 years, there was more of an emphasis on transitional housing.”

By now, if there’s one thing that nearly everyone working to end homelessness agrees, it’s that we know how to do it. It’s just a matter of making it reality. The focus is singular, as Rachel Myers, executive director of the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance explains. “People are homeless for different reasons and have different kinds of

needs," she said. "But one thing that everyone who's homeless needs is a home."

There are three ways advocates are going about pursuing this. The first is by changing the mentality around homelessness to focus on housing first. Previously, advocates thought it best to try to address issues dogging the chronically homeless such as mental health and substance abuse before getting someone into housing. Now they've flipped that on its head so that the focus is simply getting someone in a stable housing situation before addressing other issues. Laura Zeilinger, executive director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, the federal agency dedicated to homelessness, explained, "The communities really implementing housing first are having the most progress."

For some people, however, there aren't necessarily long-term issues – just the inability to afford rent. Rapid rehousing is another new and effective approach that's replaced an emphasis on putting people in the shelter system. It can be expensive to get back into housing once someone has lost it: first month's rent, a security deposit, and moving costs all add up. Rapid rehousing covers those costs and puts people in in real housing. "We're finding that getting people back into housing and linking them with services is more effective than spending the same amount of time in a shelter or transitional housing," Roman said.

And for those facing the highest hurdles, permanent supportive housing, or a place to live that comes with services like health care and job training, might be the right fit. "For veterans and single individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness, either on the streets or in a shelter system for a long time, permanent supportive housing works best," said Jones.

"The evidence pretty much indicates that if you provide people with a housing subsidy, their homelessness ends and they don't become homeless again," Roman said.
That's what Kirk thinks would happen for him if he could just get into an apartment. "If I got housing I'm sure I'd keep it. I know I'm mature enough to keep care of an apartment, I did it for years," he said. "I know I could be successful for any housing program, but I don't get in."

It's a simple, yet still radical idea, that for a person who's homeless, the solution is a home.

The government is putting that idea to the test. In 2010, it launched Opening Doors, what it says is "the nation's first comprehensive strategy to prevent and end homelessness." The goal is to end homelessness among veterans by 2015, chronic homelessness by 2016, and to end it for children, youth, and families by 2020. Progress is already visible on the first goal, although it's not clear if it will be met. Since the beginning of Opening Doors, veteran homelessness has fallen 33 percent and the number of veterans sleeping on the street has fallen by nearly 40 percent.

Some cities that are participating in the program have made even more progress. Last year, Phoenix and Salt Lake City both announced they had ended chronic homelessness among veterans. Both focused on a housing first approach, coupled with resources like job training and health care. Zeilinger said that New Orleans will end veteran homelessness before the federal deadline and is also on track to end chronic homelessness soon after that.

The point is supposed to be to create a "proof positive" by showing that when there's a will, there's a way to solve homelessness. End veteran homelessness, the logic goes, and you have concrete proof that you know what works and what it takes to end homelessness for other groups. That should in turn draw the necessary resources to the cause. "There's a bipartisan acknowledgment that people who have risked their lives for our freedom should not come home to sleep on the streets," Zeilinger explained. "The work we've done with ending veteran homelessness and the progress we're making is showing we have the right plan and when we invest in the solution and put the appropriations behind it, we can drive change."

But the danger is that while some groups have bipartisan support and will meet their goals, the progress will end there. "I think some folks actually do feel like if the main goal is to end chronic homelessness or end veteran homelessness, the campaign is over" after those milestones are achieved, Jones said.

That could mean Kirk would continue to slip through the cracks as someone who isn't a veteran. He meets the definition of someone who is experiencing chronic homelessness because it's been going on for more than a year, but if he were to once again obtain shelter only to lose it, he no longer would because he doesn't have a disability. That last point has really been getting in his way. "It's not just about having a housing problem," he said. To get into most programs, "You have to have a mental condition as well or they have no help for you." He also just got a new full-time job, which he says is "ironically" for a nonprofit providing mental health case management to the chronically homeless who struggle with mental illness.

"I'm sleeping on the street right now, but my company doesn't know it," he said. "I need to find housing for someone who does work." But those needs aren't on the agenda for quick solutions right now.

Zeilinger herself acknowledged this potential problem. Chronic homelessness hasn't had the same kind of political support as veteran homelessness. In fact, the goal was originally to end it in 2015, but it had to be shifted back a year "because we haven't been willing to invest $300 million to create the affordable housing that's needed," she said. "We're hoping we can present that data [on ending veteran homelessness] and illuminate it to help folks understand the importance."

There are other changes that need to be made to make this all work. Right now, the nonprofits that give out homelessness assistance in one way or another all get their own funding to run their own programs without speaking to each other. "If you're a homeless person you have to wander around and figure out where you fit," Roman said. There's a push to bring everything into one system, so that a homeless person could go to one place, get assessed, and be connected with what he needed.

Kirk has experienced this challenge firsthand. "It's really difficult to navigate this system when you're homeless," he said. "The bureaucracy seems too big and everything seems disjointed, none of the organizations seem to work together at all." For some of them, he doesn't have a severe enough mental illness to qualify. For another rapid rehousing-style

program that helps the employed with the costs of moving into a new apartment, he can't qualify because of his past, incorrect mental health assessments. "It seems like a 50-year-old black man who's been homeless for the last year should be able to go to one place, and if they can't house you they should say, 'We know this place over here,'" he said. "None of the organizations here do that."

"I've always felt that I fell through the cracks," he added.

So if we have the solutions, why are there about 200,000 people going unsheltered on a typical night?

One reason is that while the solutions are clear, they take resources. "I think we have the potential to end homelessness within a generation," Myers said. But "if we continue the investments that we're making now, we won't."

For one small example, Zeilinger says the magic number for chronic homelessness is 37,000. "That's the exact number of units we know it would take to end chronic homelessness in our country," she said. But the money's not there. The solution exists; we just haven't funded it.

A commission formed by the Bipartisan Policy Center put forward one solution for the whole homeless population. It recommended giving rental assistance to everyone whose income is at or below 30 percent of area median income (AMI), or between $13,650 for a single person to $19,500 for a family of four, through a reformed voucher program. At a cost of $22.5 billion, the report notes, "It could, in effect, end homelessness for the vast majority of those experiencing it," given that nearly all homeless households fall into the category of earning at or below 30 percent of AMI. Roman, who served on the commission, noted, "It would basically solve homelessness."

Another plan would call upon an existing mechanism: the National Housing Trust Fund. Congress created it in 2008 to build affordable housing across the country. "It was never funded, so the mechanism exits, but we never put any money into it," Myers explained. But if funded, "it could create upward of 1 million affordable homes over 10 years."

To fill it up with money, the United for Homes campaign has proposed modifying the mortgage interest deduction, which by and large benefits the wealthy, by cutting off eligible mortgages at $500,000 and converting the deduction to a 15 percent non-refundable tax credit. The group says that would free up $200 billion in revenue over ten years to create affordable housing through the trust fund. "I think there's a lot of bipartisan recognition of the fact that providing that housing subsidy to people who aren't struggling to afford housing and people already doing fine may not be the best use," Myers said.

With either plan, the cost of solving homelessness is in the billions. But that's just for the raw outlay on building affordable housing and/or giving people subsidies. Those figures don't take into account the potential savings from ending homelessness. It's a costly problem: those without shelter end up relying on emergency medical services and getting picked up and put in jail at a much higher rate, both of which are expensive.

For example, a study by the Central Florida Commission on Homelessness recently found that it costs the state $31,065 each year for each chronically homeless person living on the street in medical and incarceration costs. But it also found that it would take just $10,051 to give that person permanent housing with services like job training and health care. That's just a third of the cost of doing nothing for those without shelter. Other smaller scale examples show the same thing: A newly opened shelter in Fort Lyon, Colorado will cost under $17,000 per person, compared to the estimated $43,240 it costs to leave them outside. An apartment complex intended for homeless people in Charlotte, North Carolina has already saved $1.8 million. Even the Bipartisan Policy Center proposal notes that its own cost estimates "do not take into account any potential savings resulting from fewer families becoming homeless or reduced health care costs."

Perhaps an even more cost-effective tactic would be trying to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place. That's the focus of Boston-based HomeStart. The group kept getting calls from people on the verge of eviction but could only help them after they were already in a shelter, Linda Wood-Boyle, the organization's president and executive director, said. So 11 years ago it got private funding to help keep people

in their homes by covering some of what they owe to landlords and negotiating payment agreements for the rest. Today it keeps 550 to 600 people and families in their homes a year. And it saves a lot of money: the average cost to HomeStart for each saved tenancy is just $726, compared to the cost of $30,000 of putting that same tenant in a motel or shelter. Wood-Boyle doesn't know of any other programs in the country like it. But "it can be replicated," she said. "It takes coordination and it takes, frankly, cash."

Even with that data in hand, however, there may still be political resistance.

Homelessness has traditionally been a bipartisan issue; most of the advocates ThinkProgress spoke with recounted working with politicians on both sides of the aisle. Some conservatives have gotten involved out of religious convictions. Veteran homelessness is important to Republicans concerned about the armed forces. The work to end chronic homelessness first began under President Bush. And at the city and state level, politicians from both parties are working on it.

"There really has been bipartisan support for ending chronic homelessness," Zeilinger noted. "I think sometimes where we fall down in choices about where to put funds."
And therein may lie the rub. Even if no one is *for* homelessness per se, "If you don't believe that there's much of a role at all on social issues for the government, then you're not going to be interested in what the government can do about homelessness," Roman pointed out. The bipartisan support for the idea of ending homelessness hasn't led to a bipartisan effort to actually fund the things that work, particularly in the current era of budget cutting.

Just look at sequestration, the automatic, across-the-board cuts Congress let go into effect last year and that may still come back into effect. About 70,000 fewer families got housing vouchers at the end of last year as compared to the year before thanks to the cuts. That pain continues this year, as a budget deal at the end of last year that offered housing agencies partial relief from the cuts will only allow them to restore fewer than half of the vouchers they cut last year. Homeless

shelter and assistance programs were also hit hard by sequestration's cuts, which meant fewer beds and cutbacks in supportive services.

"Even if there's a desire [to end homelessness] and attention is given, if you're not willing to put resources behind it, it doesn't really matter," Myers said. "That's where I'm not seeing the bipartisan support."

There can be an aversion to supporting anti-homeless agendas either because the problem seems overly complex and/or because the homeless are thought to get there due to individual failings like substance abuse or lack of initiative in getting a job. "I think there's a lack of understanding among the general public about homelessness," Foscarinis said. "There are many stereotypes about who homeless people are, and that colors public perception."

Public support, however, may be shifting. Polling is finding that Americans are shifting from an individualized focus on the causes of poverty to embracing a structural explanation. And given that the problem has become so widespread – affecting families, suburban communities, and even those who hold down jobs – more and more people may be coming in contact with what homelessness looks like today. "Even if they're not struggling themselves, pretty much everyone probably knows someone who has experienced homelessness or come very close," Myers said.

Kirk's own experience has politicized him. "One thing this whole experience has done for me is caused me to want to become an activist or advocate for homeless and safety net programs for poor people," he said. He's already had a chance at it. He saw a flier for a community meeting featuring local lawmakers. "I thought, 'You know what, I'm homeless… I'm just going to go…tell them my story and see if they can help," he said. "They actually sat and listened. I couldn't believe that." He's now testified in hearings for two different bills that address homelessness.

The solutions are there. The public is moving in the right direction. What is lacking is political willingness to spend money. But most are hopeful that homeless will end in their lifetimes. "I'm in my mid-40s, I grew up in a generation that did not have mass homelessness," Jones noted. "It's

definitely not only a solvable problem, but an aberration from how this country usually works.” The challenge is to put it back on the right track.	