

**Homeless Service Program**  
**St. Vincent de Paul Roman Catholic Church**  
120 N. Front Street, Baltimore MD 21202

**Project Description**

**The Problem:** Over the years since St Vincent has let its private park serve as a sanctuary for the homeless, serious problems have evolved: (1) health risks from uneaten food and rat infestation, human waste, and exposure to elements, temperature extremes, and intravenous/sexually-transmitted infections; (2) community risks from the social integration of substance-using and drug-dealing individuals; and (3) the erosion of the park as “green space” due to resident trash and the risks noted in (1) and (2). Despite these parish burdens and government pressure stimulated by civic/business concerns for the park’s condition, St Vincent has stood firm in retaining a safe harassment-free place for people without housing options.

**The Promise:** Recently, Baltimore City has adopted the “Housing First” model, committed substantial resources to it, and targeted the park for attention. The homeless are no longer without housing options. St Vincent will not coerce individuals to leave the park but neither does St Vincent want to impede the City’s housing initiative. St Vincent and Baltimore City have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to cooperate fully in relocating park residents to permanent housing. Within the park, there exists a fragile community built on group solidarity and a desire for better circumstances. The group expels residents who threaten or act violently toward others. When asked by church staff and provided with the tools, residents assist in clearing the park of trash. St. Vincent has a Memorandum of Understanding with the *Clean Sweep Program* of the Baltimore Downtown Partnership to serve as consultants to us. We seek funds to develop a program to nurture positive park leadership during ongoing transition when the park’s fragile community may be destabilized.

**Grant Purpose:** St Vincent intends to develop an in-park program for the resident homeless that will work in conjunction with Baltimore City’s “Housing First” initiative to move the more vulnerable into permanent housing and will support the objectives of the City’s initiative in several important ways.

*First*, new restrictions on the availability of currently uncontrolled food and clothing donations and the enforcement of the existing prohibition against ramshackle shelters should make staying in the park less convenient.

*Second*, St. Vincent will meet with the Baltimore City Police Department to explore options to reduce the drug abuse problem.

*Third*, recruiting the park residents for job training should instill self-discipline and work habits that will promote their transition into successful housing.

*Fourth*, establishing a council for self-governance should confer the necessary skills to identify issues, weigh options, and craft good choices for the group; all worthwhile skills for personal choices. All these factors should coalesce to increase the probability of park residents participating in the City’s initiative.

Therefore, we seek funding (1) to work with homeless persons staying in our church park to assume park management duties and (2) to hire a part-time manager to monitor the park management and assist in engaging the homeless in a "resident assembly" (whose composition will change as residents are housed) to develop park rules and use group solidarity to enforce them. Our proposed

program, operating in conjunction with Baltimore City's Housing First Initiative, is intended to increase the capacity of the residents to respond to the city's initiative. The program will be planned, implemented, and evaluated by a team composed of a director and coordinator (both 0.1 FTE in kind) and the manager (0.3 FTE TBH) responsible for the in-park management and resident engagement.

**Objective 1:** Work toward a more orderly park, respected church boundaries, and a ban on illegal activities.

**Method:** Establish a Resident Assembly composed of more functional residents to (a) develop a set of rules for park management, and (b) use group solidarity to enforce them. Continuing engagement with the park residents will strengthen assembly functioning in the face of its changing composition as residents accept housing.

**Objective 2:** Work toward (1) skill-building among the trained residents; (2) improvement in self-esteem and well-being among all residents; (3) improvement in the park environment (decrease in overall health risks and better aesthetics).

**Method:** Provide training to a corps of park residents to conduct a weekly cleaning of the park. This effort will be based on the Baltimore Downtown Partnership's *Clean Sweep* Program.

**Objective 3:** Work toward the coordination of donations to the park to address the needs of the park residents in a more orderly, efficient, and less wasteful manner.

**Method:** Identify all those who donate clothing and food in order to coordinate the donations of the regular donors and redirect the donations of the sporadic donors to community organizations that can better use their materials.

**Community Partnerships:**

Our Lady of Fields in Millersville (Friday Evening Feeding Program)  
Epic Church in Canton  
Loyola College Center for Community Service and Justice

**City Agency Partnerships:**

Baltimore City Division of Homeless Services [MOU]  
Baltimore City Police Department BEST Program  
Health Care for the Homeless, Inc.  
Baltimore Downtown Partnership [MOU]