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Independent Living Facilities as Affordable Housing and Homelessness Response Research

Idaho Policy Institute

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Compiled for Good Samaritan Home

INTRODUCTION

Boise and the surrounding Treasure Valley have grown significantly in the past ten years. Since 2018, the Ada County population increased just over 5% while the Canyon County population increased by 5.5%.¹ As a result, both median home and median rent prices increased by about 10%. These changes have resulted in many Treasure Valley residents experiencing housing instability. Nearly 50% of all renting households qualify as housing burdened (pay 30% or more of their incomes on housing costs).² In 2021, 1,054 people sought homelessness services in Boise and an additional 4,307 sought services in the surrounding counties.³

The pressure to mitigate these housing problems is felt by nonprofit, private, and government organizations alike. Interventions in the Treasure Valley tend to fall under the following categories: homelessness prevention, emergency shelters, rapid rehousing, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, or permanent housing.⁴ Most permanent affordable housing in the Treasure Valley is only made available through The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds, including Section 8 housing vouchers. Rapid rehousing and transitional housing is provided through nonprofits that also act as homeless shelters. Good Samaritan Home (GSH) is a unique independent living facility in Boise. GSH offers permanent and affordable housing to adults with low or fixed incomes, including seniors, veterans, and adults with disabilities. Residents are provided with a room of their own and three meals each day. Shared meals and other shared spaces create a sense of community for residents.

METHODOLOGY

After 80 years of operation, GSH is interested in better understanding the successes and challenges of similar programs across the country. More specifically:

1. What are the impacts of independent living facilities on residents and communities?
2. Are there independent living facilities similar to GSH that have scaled up or have completed impact studies? What can be learned from them?
3. What affordable and innovative housing solutions exist in the Treasure Valley? How does GSH compare to these solutions?

To answer these questions Idaho Policy Institute explored peer-reviewed literature and investigated housing programs in peer cities to Boise.⁵ Focusing on peer cities allows for an understanding of successful methods in areas with similar demographics. IPI was unable to find information on any identical or similar programs in Boise or peer cities. However, when observing the structure of GSH, IPI noted the similarities of GSH to tiny home villages. Although these are not directly comparable, the impact is believed to be similar, as such tiny home villages are mentioned often throughout this summary.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the most obvious and widespread impacts of independent living facilities is their ability to reduce homelessness and provide housing stability. A 2020 study of 500 families across five U.S. sites found that supportive housing reduced homelessness by 25% in families most likely to become homeless.⁶ Particularly in the case of tiny homes, these facilities provide housing to those who are uninterested, unwilling, or unable to participate in traditional housing markets.⁷ Residents who receive housing are able to increase their long term (six-year) housing stability⁸ and demonstrate the ability to sustain being housed.⁹

Benefits of independent living facilities go beyond the level of the individual. Senior independent living facilities aid the housing industry by freeing up homes to younger generations or those who are equipped to be homeowners, as well as provide economic opportunities such as resident support jobs.¹⁰ In Ohio, the independent senior living facility industry provides a total economic impact of \$4.8 billion in Ohio alone. This comes in the form of construction jobs, permanent jobs and taxes.¹¹ Additionally, the availability of low-income or independent living facilities not only provide residents with opportunities like networking and access to schools, but fosters racial and socioeconomic integration on the community level.¹² By including units at multiple price levels, mixed-income developments afford members of various socioeconomic classes greater housing choice in communities where such choice might not otherwise be available. Those who move into a mixed-income development in a low-poverty neighborhood should also benefit from high-quality housing and good public schools.¹³ This realizes the Fair Housing Act and creates diverse communities.¹⁴

Despite the implicit societal impacts and explicit residential benefits of independent living facilities, there is often resistance to these facilities. This may look like restrictive zoning codes, lack of funding, and a shortage of information.¹⁵ Creating unique housing solutions like tiny homes is a pivotal step in broadening the market of independent living facilities.¹⁶ Adding niche building options like tiny homes allows those who might be opposed to traditional housing find somewhere that suits their needs, and also cuts down on costs normally associated with housing like construction, maintenance and energy.¹⁷ These tend to combat issues like regulation and building design and appeal to residents.¹⁸ Increasing the quantity and variety of unique home options like these aids in mitigating homelessness and provides housing opportunities to those who might not necessarily fit the traditional housing market.¹⁹

CASE STUDIES

The recent housing crisis highlighted the importance of stable housing to the stability of communities and cities. Previous research shows that having a respectable and safe place to live allows an individual to focus on employment, health, and education while benefiting the community in various ways.²⁰

There are a variety of reasons why an individual might be experiencing homelessness. People with disabilities frequently require supportive housing services, but their income is insufficient to cover even basic housing costs due to their disability. Although an individual might have employment, they may not be able to afford housing and still have enough money for necessities such as groceries, gas, and child care.²¹ Finally, some individuals become homeless due to falling through the cracks. This can occur for various reasons, including job loss, significant sickness, or fleeing a domestic abuse situation.²² GHS collaborates with other groups to create spaces that meet the most fundamental human needs: shelter.

The effects of independent living facilities such as GSH on residents and the surrounding community are not unique to Boise. Among traditional affordable housing programs, there are other innovative housing solutions in Boise peer cities. The following case studies summarize some of these programs. These case studies focus on programs led by nonprofits and not based in the housing first model.

CASE STUDY #1

GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA - HAMMER TINY HOME COMMUNITY

In 2019, the City of Greensboro Zoning & Inspections approved the first Small House neighborhood in Greensboro, North Carolina, consisting of five 288 square ft tiny homes and one 180 square ft tiny home.²³ This non-profit is constructing homes for people experiencing homelessness in which residents pay rent equal to 40% of their monthly income.²⁴ Each house contains a bedroom, kitchen and living area, a bathroom, a stackable washer and dryer, and all utilities.²⁵ Tiny House Community Development aims to reduce homelessness by forming public-private partnerships to build tiny house communities.²⁶ This non-profit is accomplishing its mission by featuring three to ten tiny houses and will be mainly for chronically homeless persons, elders, single parents, and their children. Tiny House Development Inc. is also dedicated to developing and advocating tiny house communities throughout the state.

CASE STUDY #2

SPOKANE, WASHINGTON - COMMUNITY FRAMEWORKS

Spokane is adopting the HomeStarts initiative through the nonprofit, Community Frameworks, to provide a solution to people experiencing homeless. Community Frameworks employs various strategies to achieve its mission and create housing options that stabilize individuals and families. Strategies include increasing safety and healthier living environments, lowering monthly expenses, and increasing access to jobs, education, and health services.²⁷ In 2009, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded Community Frameworks a \$6.6 million grant to expand the HomeStart program's network to 40 groups across four states.²⁸ Expansion within Community Frameworks has resulted in a total economic impact of over 61 million, created 146 jobs, serviced 377 residents, and developed 253 affordable rental homes according to their July 2019 to 2020 annual report.²⁹

CASE STUDY #3

RENO, NEVADA - HOPE SPRINGS

The city of Reno created Nevada's first bridge-housing community program, Hope Spring, in 1997. Hope Springs fills in Nevada's housing continuum gaps by offering safe, dignified homes to people experiencing homelessness. Hope Springs accomplishes their mission of providing secure housing options by

connecting clients to a team of specialists, including doctors, mental health experts, addiction counselors, and caseworkers. Hope Springs has been able to support people experiencing homelessness with a diverse team of behavioral and wellness support service providers.³⁰ According to Hope Spring's 2020 Annual Report, 25% of the people who arrived at this nonprofit reported experiencing homelessness in 2020.³¹ Furthermore, Hope Springs has provided housing services to 559 individuals and medical care to over 10,000 people in the community.³²

CONCLUSION

The impact of independent living facilities like GSH affects residents by providing shelter, job access, education and health services. Additionally, the residual impact on communities is seen through job and volunteer opportunities, integration of socioeconomic status and adding alternatives to the housing market.

Few organizations exist in the Treasure Valley like GSH as much of current housing is only available through HUD funding or as rapid/transitional housing in the form of homeless shelters. While GSH seems to be the only of its kind as permanent affordable housing, there are similar organizations such as The Tiny House Community Development and other non-profit housing programs in Boise's peer cities that have similar impacts. However, GSH goes above and beyond its peer city organizations by offering shelter, meals and community to its long term residents.

ENDNOTES

¹ US Census Bureau. (2020). American Community Survey, 2020 5-year estimates.

² Ibid.

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¹⁴ Sternman, M. (2011). Harnessing the Benefits of Mixed-Income Housing in Westchester County and other Low-Poverty Areas. *The Columbia Journal of Law & Social Problems*. <https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.libproxy.boisestate.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=4095d5bd-e87c-462b-9513-29d882dea407%40redis>

¹⁵ Mingoya, C. (2015). Building Together. Tiny House Villages for the Homeless: A Comparative Case Study [MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY]. <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/98940>

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¹⁷ Mingoya, C. (2015). Building Together. Tiny House Villages for the Homeless: A Comparative Case Study [MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY]. <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/98940>

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