Fact Check: Marbut's "Culture of Transformation"

POLITICS

How A Traveling Consultant Helps America Hide The Homeless

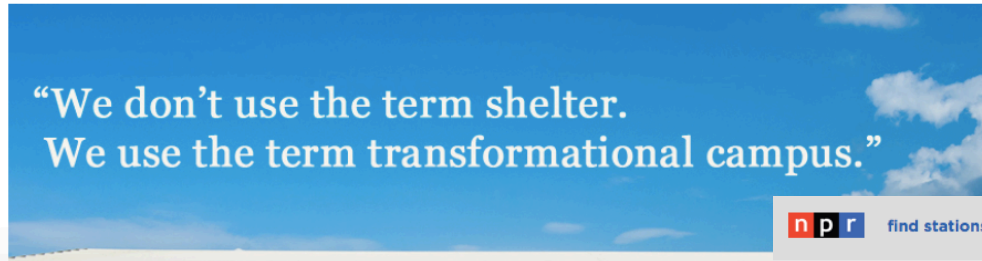03/09/2015 09:12 pm 21:12:41 | **Updated** Mar 17, 2015

1.2k

Arthur Delaney
Senior Reporter, The Huffington Post

"We don't use the term shelter.
We use the term transformational campus."

Equity Factor $£¥

Cities Are Hiring This Controversial Homelessness Consultant

BY **ALEXIS STEPHENS** | MARCH 31, 2015

Left: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/09/robert-marbut_n_6738948.html?

Right: https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/homelessness-consultant-robert-marbut

Bottom: http://www.npr.org/2014/11/09/362737965/consultant-on-homelessness-cities-enable-the-poor

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AROUND THE NATION

Consultant On Homelessness: Cities Enable The Poor

4:32

November 9, 2014 · 7:45 AM ET
Heard on Weekend Edition Sunday

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Transcript

In many cities it is now illegal to feed the homeless. NPR's Rachel Martin talks to Robert Marbut, the man behind the push to make handing out food a crime, who favors getting people into programs.

⊟ Transcript

RACHEL MARTIN, HOST:

7 Principles of Transformation

1. Move to a culture of transformation;

2. Co-location and virtual e-integration of as many services as possible;

3. Must have a master case management system that is customized;

4. Reward positive behavior;

5. Consequences for negative behavior;

6. External activities must be redirected or stopped; and

7. Panhandling enables the homeless and must be stopped.

Move to a Culture of Transformation

The assertion:

"A transformative culture positively fosters individual transformation and reintegration into society."

Fact Check #1

- The implicit assumption of this principle: people experiencing homelessness become, and continue to be homeless **primarily due to their actions**; they must change fundamentally to exit homelessness.

- *Journal of Health Psychology (2007)*: Over half of **140 adults** who were currently or had been homeless in New York City **previously led conventional lives** (i.e. housed, had jobs, friends, etc.)

- *Journal of Urban Affairs (2013):* A review of 10 academic studies between 1991 – 2010 identifies significant community-level determinants of homelessness such as **the housing market, economic conditions, and demographic composition.**

Co-location and Virtual E-integration of as Many Services as Possible

The assertions:

"Virtual e-integration improves coordination of services, enhances performance, reduces gaming of the system, engages individuals on the margins of society, and increases cost-efficiencies between agencies."

"Increase the number of service hits into a shorter period of time through the reduction of wasted time in transit and minimization of mishandled referrals."

"Co-location also increases the supportive 'human touch'."

Fact Check #2

- *Health Services Research (2004)*: **Diverse neighbourhoods** are more accepting of individuals with chronic mental illness and, hence, are associated with better mental health outcomes.

- *Journal of Behavioural Health and Services Research (2009)*: **Major challenges** for staff supporting homeless clients with co-occurring disorders includes **time** needed for change/relationship forming, inadequate **staffing and resources**, and poor **system communication** -- NOT a locational issue.

- *SAMHSA's* strategic initiatives for service integration focus on **consistent procedures**, **staff training**, and **coordination** across providers. Again, relocation is NOT a recognized as an optimizing strategy.

Must Have a Master Case Management System That is Customized

The assertion:

"…it is critical that ONE person coordinates the services an individual receives and to do so in a customized fashion."

"The types of service provided are critical, but more important is the sequencing and frequency of customized services."

Fact Check #3

- *Social Work in Mental Health (2014)*: Best practices for empowering homeless clients towards independence entails a **collaborative relationship** between the case manager/service agent and the patient.

- *Journal of Urban Health (2009):* Research has shown that "**autonomy**…has been strongly linked to improvements in problematic health and other behaviors" (p. 983).

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association currently recognizes **recovery-oriented approaches** to behavioural health care as the best practice:
  → **Patients**, not case managers, "optimize their autonomy and independence…by **leading, controlling, and exercising choice** over their services and supports…" (2012, p. 4)

Reward Positive Behavior

The assertions:

"Privileges such as higher quality sleeping arrangements, more privacy, and elective learning opportunities should be used as rewards for positive behavior."

"These rewards should be tools to replicate the real world in order to reintegrate into society."

Fact Check #4

- *United Nations (1948)*: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that **housing is a human right**.
→ To demand behavioral change in order to access shelter is to use the basic need of **shelter as a form of leverage**.

- *American Journal of Psychiatric Rehabilitation (2005)*: material resources (ex. stable, quality housing) positively impact homeless individuals' recovery from severe mental illness.
→ Material assistance contingent on particular behaviors prioritizes perceived behavioural change over one's **recovery from mental illness**.

- *Journal of Behavioral Health Services and Research (2009)*: "…once clients had their basic needs addressed…**their concerns began to turn toward health and other therapeutic issues**.

Consequences for Negative Behavior

The assertions:

"There should be swift and proportionate consequences for negative behavior."

"Too often negative behavior has no consequences and therefore it is deemed to be acceptable behavior."

Fact Check #5

- *Journal of Community Psychology (2001)*:
  - Being required to obey behavioral contracts is one of many situations that can **invalidate one's dignity**.

  - Receiving resources that **meet basic needs** (food, clothing, shelter, etc.) has been proven **to promote dignity** in individuals more than being rewarded such resources based on behavior.

- Marbut claims to imbue his practices with respect and dignity, yet his principles embody the opposite.

External Activities Must be Redirected or Stopped

The assertions:

"External activities such as 'street feeding' need to be stopped or redirected."

"These activities are often well-intended but are enabling and do not engage homeless individuals."

"Street feeding programs without comprehensive services actually increases and promotes homelessness."

"Street feeding groups should be encouraged to co-locate with existing comprehensive service programs."

Fact Check #6

- National Coalition for the Homeless (2014):
  - The belief that street feeding the homeless keeps them homeless is a **complete myth**.

  - **Proven reasons** people remain homeless: **lack of affordable housing**, lack of job opportunity, mental health or physical disability.

Panhandling Enables the Homeless and Must be Stopped

The assertions:

"Unearned tax-free cash is enabling and does not engage homeless individuals in job and skills training that are needed to end homelessness."

"Most often this cash is not used for food or housing, but for drugs and alcohol, which perpetuates the homeless cycle."

"Furthermore, most panhandlers are not truly homeless individuals but are predators of generous citizens."

Fact Check #7

- Homelessness researchers Stephen Gaetz and Bill O'Grady (2010):
  - **Panhandlers would rather have regular jobs** to earn money, but their circumstances prevent them from obtaining and maintaining regular employment.

  - Panhandlers may choose to spend their money on their perceived immediate needs. We may not agree with those choices, but we may also not agree with housed peoples' spending preferences.

- There is **no empirical, tested, and replicable study** that demonstrates a causal link between panhandling and the **preference to remain homeless**.

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