

# Sunrise Metro's success forerunner for more such housing for homeless

[By Julia Lyon](#)

[The Salt Lake Tribune](#)

Article Last Updated: 02/27/2008 06:51:44 AM MST



*Sitting down for a smoke in his Sunrise Metro... (Francisco Kjolseth/The Salt Lake Tribune )*

•  
If success is measured by people trading the freedom and misery of the streets for living in one place, a groundbreaking housing project for Utah's homeless may be on its way.

Nearly a year after the opening of Sunrise Metro, an apartment complex near downtown Salt Lake City, 86 of its 100 original residents remain. Having a home may not have solved all their problems, but a transformation has begun.

After decades of homelessness, one man has accepted that living inside isn't "weak" and learned to cook lasagna in an oven rather than a fish over a fire. Another has finally begun to use counseling to deal with things he did in Vietnam "that no person should ever do to another."

And a third resident is no longer going blind, thanks to Sunrise helping him learn about cataract surgery options.

"He couldn't see his face to shave," remembered lead case manager Jenny White.

Part of a national movement known as "housing first," the aim of Sunrise is to provide a home, first, and then help a person deal with addiction, unemployment and other issues. Embracing that philosophy, Utah is in the midst of a major housing expansion for the homeless.

The \$9 million Grace Mary Manor, a Salt Lake County housing authority project for 84 homeless men and women, opens today. A 201-unit building for homeless families and

---

Advertisement

```
<script language="JavaScript" type="text/javascript"> document.write('<a href="http://cdslog.contextweb.com/CDSLogger/L.aspx?q=C~501660~315~15624~27126~11624~3~16~16~sltrib.com~2~8~1~0~2~1~PNZL6jWDBHzO41m1bj7Uia4Q6IQ1R NAHEbdZu_UuHPw^~7~1~~http://clk.atdmt.com/NMK/go/cntxiqm20420000041nmk/direct;wi.300;hi.250/01/1493953070" target="_blank"></a>'); </script> <noscript><a href="http://cdslog.contextweb.com/CDSLogger/L.aspx?q=C~501660~315~15624~27126~11624~3~16~16~sltrib.com~2~8~1~0~2~1~PNZL6jWDBHzO41m1bj7Uia4Q6IQ1R NAHEbdZu\_UuHPw^~7~1~http://clk.atdmt.com/NMK/go/cntxiqm20420000041nmk/direct;wi.300;hi.250/01/1493953070" target="\_blank"></a> </noscript>

---

single men and women is expected to open in early 2009 at a former Salt Lake City Holiday Inn.

Advocates believe the projects will significantly reduce the number of "chronically" homeless Utahns, now estimated at 2,000, one step in the state's ambitious 10-year plan to eliminate homelessness.

A better life: Residents in the \$11 million Sunrise were homeless for a year or four times in the three years before moving in. They may have been camping on the Jordan River, sleeping at a shelter or temporarily staying in transitional housing for veterans.

They also have a "disabling" condition, such as an addiction, a serious mental illness or a physical disability that impacts their daily living.

Housing is offered at little cost, along with support - such as help with securing Social Security benefits, employment and managing health or drug problems. A resident does not have to be employed or sober to live there.

Giving residents a spot at Sunrise is far cheaper than a year in jail, a nursing home or prison, officials say. It can also extend resources for others:

- \* An analysis from April 5 to Oct. 31 showed that 45 long-term homeless people left The Road Home, the nearby Salt Lake City homeless shelter, to live at Sunrise. That allowed 111 people, with less frequent needs, to be served in their place.

- \* Volunteers of America, a nonprofit offering services to the homeless, sent 19 people to Sunrise to live. In the six months before their move, those adults had used the VOA's adult detoxification center for services totalling \$18,300.

In the six months after the move, the same group used \$1,263 in services.

Of the 14 residents who have left Sunrise, several died or moved in with family. A few needed more daily support services and two ended up in jail unable to pay rent. Two others "graduated" into their own apartments.

As of the end of January, residents' average annual income had jumped almost 10 percent, to \$6,689.

'We need help': Despite the rent requirements, 15 residents live there for free because they have no income and may not yet receive Social Security or other benefits. Some residents still struggle with drug and alcohol use, which can create tension between them and the sober residents.

But for some, Sunrise is a place to find peace.

At dawn, Bill Watkins, 57, often sits by his window drinking coffee as he watches the sun rise over the Wasatch range.

His experiences as a combat engineer in Vietnam left him with a lifetime of problems culminating in a lost three-month period that he cannot recall. After waking up on the Nevada-Idaho border, he made his way to a Salt Lake City homeless shelter and eventually to Sunrise. Now he plans to stay until he has "fixed" his psychological problems.

"Most people who are homeless are not homeless by choice," he said. "We're sorry we're taking up your tax money, but it's not our fault. We need help."

Watkins feels a 10-year timeline to end homelessness "might be a bit facetious."

But if officials stick with this type of project, he said, "I don't think 15 to 20 years is unrealistic."

***jlyon@sltrib.com***