The best expression of inclusion: a place to call home
Remarks by CEO Kevin Lindamood
Health Care for the Homeless Chocolate Affair 2017

Exclusion. I can think of no other word in the English language that better characterizes the experience of homelessness. Exclusion. Left out. Locked out. Kept from. Not a part of. Not able to. On the outside, looking in. Homelessness is the fundamental expression of *exclusion*. You might even say they're synonymous. That homelessness is exclusion. Created both by our practices and by our policies.

For decades, so-called "housing readiness" policies deliberately locked out the most vulnerable among us. People with addiction. People with mental illness. People with complicated medical problems. *You're not eligible for housing until you get help first.* And for just as long, many of our neighbors weren't eligible for the health insurance they needed to get help no matter how poor they were. We know all too well the human consequences of these policies of exclusion. People stayed on the streets and got sicker.

What do we do in the face of homelessness? How do we respond to exclusion? We deliberately pursue its opposite. We practice *in*clusion. We work as Health Care for the Homeless has done over the past 32 years to bring everybody in and to leave nobody out.

We do this in practice—in how we behave—and we work to enshrine inclusion in our public policies. Think about what's changed. Over the past 12 years, *Housing First* has become our nation's policy. Today, some of the most vulnerable members of our communities—all over the country—are moving into housing with the support they need. And in 2013, just four years ago, only 30% of the people we served had health insurance. Today, thanks to the expansion of Medicaid, 90% of the 10,000 people we served in 2016 are insured and we can leverage more resources to help them. Housing First is a policy of *in*clusion. Medicaid expansion is a policy of *in*clusion. And policies of inclusion are far, far more effective.

But consider this: We practice inclusion not only in our policies and in *how* we do our work, but also by *who* is advancing our mission. I look around this room tonight and I see a powerful expression of a diverse community coming together to ensure that people without homes have access to the care they need. Nowhere is this better represented than in our staff. 250 professionals who are only made stronger through our diversity.

The family of our Chief Health Officer came to the United States from India 43 years ago in search of a better life and they found it. Their son, **Dr. Nilesh Kalyanaraman**, has unified the clinical vision of our agency and expanded our services.

Ali Naqvi, a member of our finance team, arrived in the US at age 21 in the 1990s as his family fled religious persecution in Pakistan. He's part of a team ensuring that our staff are paid—a very important function, Ali—and that cut the monthly checks that keep people in housing.

Irina Gayevsky came to the United States 21 years ago from Ukraine, where she lived in a town 70 miles from Chernobyl. She analyzes our data to show that we're improving the health of those we serve.
And one of our case managers, **Mekael Mekonnen**, escaped war in Ethiopia at the age of 12 and is now helping so many of our clients navigate complicated systems.

Oh, and I should mention that my father-in-law, **Gerardo Marin**, is here tonight, in town this weekend to celebrate his 70th birthday. As a 17-year old, he came to the United States from Columbia in pursuit of higher education. He is here tonight with *his* daughter and *my* daughter, both of whom do so much every day to sustain *me* in this work.

What do we do when confronted with the realities of homelessness? How do we live in the face of exclusion? We live out our values. We remove barriers. We get even more deliberate about the practice of *inclusion* in our work and in our policies—seeking to bring everybody in and to leave nobody out.
I can think of no better expression of *inclusion* than a place to call home.