

6.3.2: Movement toward Equity

Understanding and acknowledging past injustices is the first step toward making homes equitably available to all families. Efforts to make changes come from multiple directions. There are legislative changes (some which have passed and some that are proposed), and non-profit agencies and advocacy groups that work both legislative and with direct action. In addition, there are grassroots efforts to change neighborhood dynamics and to add resources.

Updating the Fair Housing Act

Housing distribution was historically discriminatory towards minority groups regarding social identities such as people of color, sexual orientation, gender and sex, country of origin and disability. The Fair Housing Act passed in 1968 and banned sale, rental and other housing practices that indicated preference or discrimination based on race, color, religion or national origin. In 1974 it was amended to include sex, and in 1988 to include people with disabilities and people with children. While in 2016, a rule by the Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) insured equal access to Community Planning and Development programs regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or marriage status, non-conforming gender individuals may find it difficult to access services as this rule applies to one specific program (and not to other public or private programs).^[1] To date, the Fair Housing Act does not include gender identity or sexual orientation. Only a handful of states have it illegal to discriminate based on sexual orientation and gender identity and that creates a challenge for LGBTQ+ families and couples.^[2]



Figure 9.16 Many years of social activism, including protests, contributed to the creation and passage of the Fair Housing Act.

The 2019 Equality Act is an attempt to make all Americans equal. The Equality Act is a 2019 bill passed by the US House of Representatives that would amend the Civil Rights Act to “prohibit discrimination on the basis of the sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy, childbirth, or a related medical condition of an individual, as well as because of sex-based stereotypes.” This Act was sent to the Senate in May 2019, but has not been taken up for consideration at this time (August 2020).^[3]

Addressing Homelessness: Housing First

People who are homeless (aka “housing bereaved”) can experience an overlap of social problems, such as poverty, untreated mental illness, unemployment, and/or addictions. Traditionally programs attempt to help people become “ready for housing” via support and criteria that may require multiple moves. For example the person must become sober or employed first. A relatively new and innovative approach, “Housing First” sprung from grassroots efforts as early as 1988 in California and 1992 in New York. Simply put, the idea is that if people have stable housing, solving other problems becomes more likely. Having a secure home, consistent access to schooling, transportation and support services means that people can be more successful in addressing overlapping issues such as mental health, addiction, and seeking employment.

[Housing First: National Alliance to End Homelessness](#) is a non-profit organization that exemplifies the approach to end homelessness. The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness has endorsed the Housing First approach. HUD estimates that homelessness costs the government between \$30,000 and \$60,000 per person annually, due to emergency room visits and jail time. A less expensive solution is to actually provide people with housing.

Various communities have adopted the Housing First approach and it looks different depending on the resources and principles of each location. Utah's Housing First approach is a model for how these services can be made available. Through the collaboration of many local organizations and donations from local churches, real permanent semi-communal housing is provided along with services such as counseling. A true success story, "Grace Mary Manor in Salt Lake City is a permanent affordable housing facility for 84 chronically homeless individuals with a disabling condition." (Clifford, NPR, 12/2015) Through programs like this, Utah was able to decrease their homeless population by 91%.^[4]

At the time of this writing (July 2020) [the state of Oregon hosts a web page dedicated to Permanent Supportive/Supported Housing Resources](#) which contains some of the federal government's resources about Housing First. It is unclear how the COVID-19 pandemic will affect the future of this program. In addition, [JOIN was founded in Portland in 1992](#) and reports that they supported 1,377 people leaving the street for permanent and stable housing in 2018. One year later, 83% of those families remain stable.^[5]

Creating Standards

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness has determined criteria and benchmarks for communities to achieve the goal of ending chronic homelessness. Standards are important because they help us identify what we are working toward. These criteria are summarized as follows:

1. The community has identified and provided outreach to all individuals experiencing or at risk for chronic homelessness and prevents chronic homelessness whenever possible.
2. The community provides access to shelter or other temporary accommodations immediately to any person experiencing unsheltered chronic homelessness who wants it.
3. The community has implemented a community-wide Housing First orientation and response that also considers the preferences of the individuals being served.
4. The community assists individuals experiencing chronic homelessness to move swiftly into permanent housing with the appropriate level of supportive services and effectively prioritizes people for permanent supportive housing.
5. The community has resources, plans, and system capacity in place to prevent chronic homelessness from occurring and to ensure that individuals who experienced chronic homelessness do not fall into homelessness again or, if they do, are quickly reconnected to permanent housing.

These goals are considered met when the benchmark of maintaining these criteria has met for 90 days. Though likely not achievable, the goal of zero homeless individuals in a community is aspirational.^[6]

Changing Opportunities

We've discussed at length redlining, and the continuing effects on people of color. How can the effects of so many years of institutionalized discrimination be undone? Analysis and action can contribute to change. Communities across the United States have been analyzed by [The Opportunity Atlas](#), which identifies neighborhoods from which children are most likely to rise out of poverty. (Click on the link to assess your own community from a variety of social characteristics, including race, sex, and income).^[7]

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Sloan School of Management partnered with the Seattle Public Housing Authority and King County (WA) Public Housing Authority and used The Opportunity Atlas to create a pilot program that offered families using housing vouchers to move into "high opportunity neighborhoods" as defined by the Atlas. Research shows that each year spent in a high opportunity neighborhood increases the likelihood of children going to college and total lifetime earnings by at least \$200,000.^[8]

In this study, the [Creating Moves to Opportunity](#) (CMTO) project, families received additional basic services such as education on the location of opportunity neighborhoods, personalized rental application coaching, housing search assistance, and financial assistance. Fifty-four percent of the families receiving this assistance chose to move to opportunity neighborhoods compared to approximately 14 percent of families who received standard services. This demonstrates that families using housing vouchers are not choosing lower opportunity neighborhoods because of preference; when given education, means, and the choice to move to higher opportunity neighborhoods they are more likely to do so. This still in progress project offers hope that there are ways that

federal housing voucher programs can change the course of intergenerational poverty via investments in families who use vouchers.^[9] In 2019 the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) funded a larger version of this project.^[10]

Community Efforts

Individuals and communities are taking initiative to improve their neighborhoods aesthetically and with increasing resources that benefit families, such as informal libraries, greenspaces, and art houses.



Figure 9.17. Theaster Gates organized multiple grassroots efforts that have used culture to transform the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood in Chicago.

For example Theaster Gates, a University of Chicago professor who is also a potter and social activist, started by drawing attention to one run-down home that he refurbished, and gradually organized multiple grassroots efforts that have used culture to transform the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood in Chicago.^[11]

Gates founded the Rebuild Foundation in 2010, which is a non-profit organization that encompasses multiple neighborhood improvement projects. To read more about his community work, [visit the “Projects” section of his website.](#)



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Another example combines an international organization, Firmeza Foundation based in the Netherlands works with local neighborhoods to create community artwork. Artists Jeroen Koolhaas and Dre Urhahn (aka Haas and and Hahn) work on the designs with community members, then hire and train local residents to complete the painting. Dre Urhahn describes the impact of the attention and love that community members pour into their neighborhoods as well as the resulting beauty as transformational aspects of the projects.^[12] Two well known projects are the favela paintings in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and Northern Philadelphia in the United States. To learn more about how their work is funded and organized, [listen to their TED TALK here.](#)



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Conclusion: An Existence of Human Dignity

In prior chapters we have discussed models related to what human beings need. We shared this graphic that shows two versions of how needs are met.

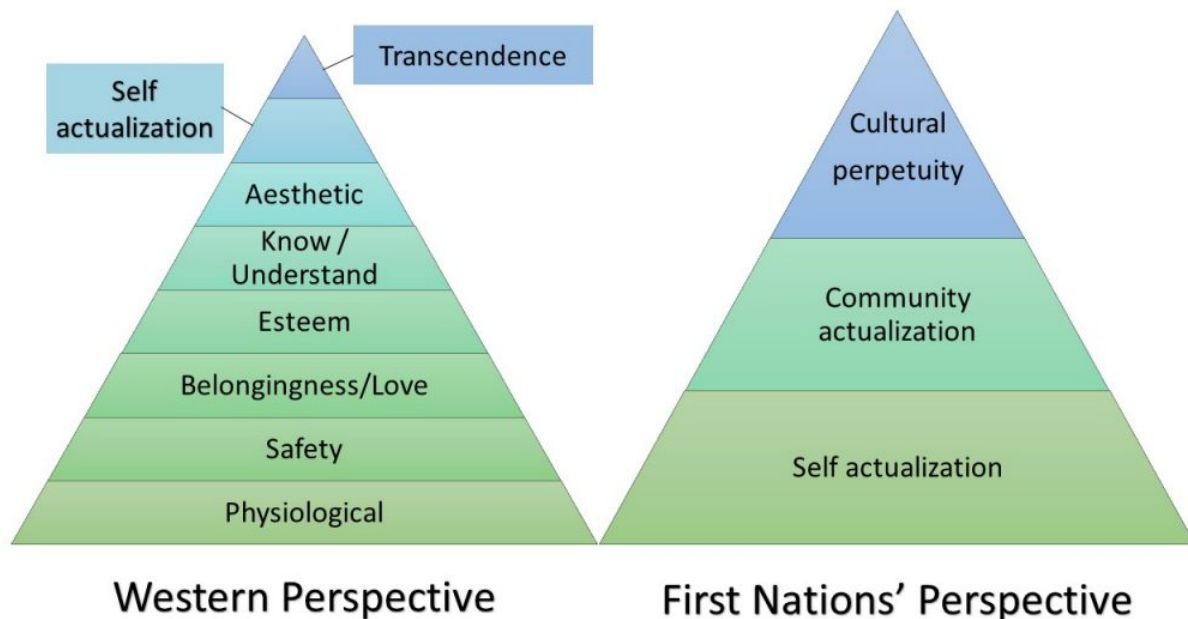


Figure 9.18. Maslow's hierarchy of needs compared to the First Nations' perspective. Maslow's scope of analysis is individual rights/privilege in one lifetime. The First Nations have an expansive concept of time and multiple dimensions of reality.

The models differ in perspective but they both emphasize the importance of basic needs, of which shelter is one. Maslow's model on the left places shelter as the foundation of the hierarchy of needs, meaning that it must be met first in order for other needs to be achieved. In the First Nations' Perspective on the right, the well-being of the community is prioritized; well-being includes basic needs for all being met.

The United Nations, a 193 nation member group founded in 1945, summarizes its mission as: [Peace, Dignity and Equality on a Healthy Planet](#) created a Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 which includes

"Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection."

–Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations. 1948. Article 23^[13]

There is broad agreement that secure housing is a critical need for families to survive and thrive. While institutional biases that contribute to inequity and lack of secure housing for many families in the U.S. have decreased, they have not been completely eradicated. Nor have the effects of the prior centuries of discrimination been undone. We must continue to work to understand the past and the present in order to impact the future.

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Figure 9.17. "Theaster Gates" by [Locust Projects](#). Public domain.

"How to revive a neighborhood: with imagination, beauty, and art" by Theaster Gates/TED Talks. License terms: [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#).

“How painting can transform communities” by Jeroen Koolhaas and Dre Urhahn/TED Talks. License terms: [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#).

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Figure 9.18. “Maslow’s hierarchy of needs compared to the First Nations’ perspective”. License: [CC BY 4.0](#). Based on research from [Rethinking Learning by Barbara Bray](#).

1. 24 CFR § 5.106 ↵
2. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (n.d.). Housing discrimination and persons identifying as LGBTQ. Retrieved March 9, 2020, from https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/...ntifying_lgbtq ↵
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