



Homelessness Is a Problem We Can Solve

Before the pandemic began, rates of homelessness were at the highest they'd been in the United States in 20 years. While data is still forthcoming, it's hard to imagine that the pandemic wouldn't have worsened them.

For people who were already experiencing homelessness at the beginning of the pandemic, COVID-19 was instantly world-altering. Shelters had to limit intake, and the places unhoused people were accustomed to finding food and help were not there.

Experiencing homelessness has always been a dire health risk, and COVID-19 has only worsened that danger. Unhoused people are disproportionately affected by health conditions that can make coronavirus cases more severe, and are often forced to shelter, eat, and access hygiene in congregate settings where social distance is difficult to maintain.

An influx of CARES Act funding last May and June helped provide traditional congregate shelters with resources for innovative rapid non-congregate housing solutions, and food suppliers for the homeless were inundated with donations and money to help. Some programs, like California's Project Roomkey and Project Housekey have been wildly successful.

But the CARES Act help has been transitory, and shelters around the country have been overwhelmed. Eviction moratoriums were often not enforced, and evictions have been soaring. The intermittency and uncertainty surrounding COVID-19 relief programs has been problematic in finding solutions to homelessness and hunger, which all experts agree are long-term problems we can solve.

The lack of low-income and affordable housing is a major contributing issue throughout the



The pandemic has exacerbated growing issues surrounding homelessness

country, and one the Biden Administration has pledged to take on with urgency as part of his Build Back Better infrastructure program.

Biden is the first presidential candidate to promise to make housing assistance available to everyone who is eligible for it. The fact that, historically, only about one-quarter of people eligible for Section 8 vouchers actually get them will make Biden's actions a game-changer, if achieved.

Biden also has already signed an executive order stating that FEMA should reimburse 100 percent of what states spend to house people in non-congregate shelters, all the way through September 2021, which should help immensely.

Data Brings Innovation

Each January, community homeless care workers and volunteers fan out in American cities, working to fulfill a Housing and Urban Development directive to count our homeless populations. This Point-in-Time (PIT) census is considered essential but also flawed because of the homeless numbers it does *not* count and because of

its infrequency.

Because unhoused populations comprise so many different groups—students and other young people, veterans, mentally ill people, single mothers with children, single men with substance abuse issues, among others—solutions for ending homelessness are as varied as the people and problems themselves.

But, increasingly, one through-line seems to be making a huge impact: real-time data collection, shared across those agencies that most need it to combat homelessness.

This movement to collect real-time data, including locations, names and faces, on a weekly basis ensures that government agencies, shelters, caseworkers, clinics and non-profits all have access to the same data as they assess and manage housing instability.

There's evidence that it's working: Since 2015, more than 80 communities have taken up this program, an administrative commitment to reduce homelessness to a standard called "functional zero." So far, 14 of them have essentially eliminated chronic homelessness, veteran homelessness or both.

Upcoming SLPS Programs Promise Broad Appeal

This semester's Sustainability Leadership Presentation Series (SLPS) will be starting off on a dynamic and positive note with Craig Moody's Conservation Career Conversations. The live webcast will be 2 pm, Friday, February 12, and is free and open to the public.

Moody will talk about the wide range of "green" career paths and how work in conservation and sustainability is profoundly rewarding, while helping our communities and the world. Moody is one of the founders of Verdis Group, a consultancy firm that helps organizations in sustainability and resiliency planning, transportation demand management, waste reduction and recycling, and programs for sustainable behavior changes. He also is the chairman of the Omaha Public Power District Board of Directors.



The Office of Sustainability at UNO is the SLPS presenting sponsor for this program. To join in, [click here](#) for the Zoom link.

Resiliency planning in local food systems will be the topic of April's SLPS, featuring JISC's President & CEO, W. Cecil Steward; Nancy Williams, Co-Founder and CEO of No More Empty Pots; Tim Rinne, Nebraska and Lincoln Food Policy Council; and Miki Esposito, Senior Policy Advisor to the Mayor for the Resilient Lincoln Initiative. The webcast will be 11:30 am–1 pm, Tuesday, April 6. JISC is the presenting sponsor.

Programs in March and May, to

be presented by SLPS Partners Creighton University and Hastings College, respectively, will be announced at a later date.

This is the eighth year of SLPS. Partners include Central Community College, The Student Environmental Action Coalition at Hastings College, Creighton University's Sustainability Program, Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities, University of Nebraska at Omaha Sustainability, Metropolitan Community College, Environmental Studies department at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, and Nebraska Recycling Council. Each SLPS is live-streamed, so people across the state—and around the world—can watch the webcast in real time. Each program is archived on our YouTube channel. All programs are free and open to the public.



Carolyn Hove



Alexandra McCracken

New Faces at Joslyn Institute Will Enhance Capabilities

With several new initiatives in our sights, the Joslyn Institute is adding some personnel to broaden our capacities in several sectors.

The personnel changes were, in part, due to our long-time Program & Office Manager, Donna Woudenberg's decision to cut back on her time commitment to JISC. Donna has been critical to our continued development in local food systems and a public market, the Coalition for Environmental Improvement, and the Mayor's Task Force on Sustainability. In addition, she has been the friendly person whom so many in Lincoln and Omaha have become familiar with at Earth Day celebrations, and our SLPS productions. Donna will continue to contribute to various projects and initiatives going forward.

Taking on Donna's role as Projects & Operations Manager will be Carolyn Hove. A 2019 graduate of the University of Kansas, with a degree in applied behavior analysis, Carolyn interned for the Joslyn Institute a couple of years ago, doing research and analysis. She recently received certification in Sustainability and Behavior Change from the University of California at San Diego, and was most recently employed as a member experience representative at the Arbor Day Foundation.

Alexandra McCracken comes to us as a recent graduate of UNL, where her focus was on global development and service. Her longtime passion for animal welfare and the environment led to further investigation of underlying issues within our industrialized food system, and to a more comprehensive understanding of sustainability, sharing our general sentiment that everything is connected. An avid supporter of the zero-waste movement, she is dedicated to helping our communities' waste management strategies evolve.

Alexandra will be Project Associate for us and will be joining the team in the planning and reopening of our EcoStore. She has also been a significant contributor to our social media presence, with her great capabilities in writing, video, and storytelling.

Joining us for special projects will be Daniel Hauschild, for GIS and data mapping and analysis; Charlotte Bi, for assistance with older populations studies; and Marita Avio will be consulting with us on our Conservation Center.

Need to change your contact information? Let us know.
402.991.8747
jci@sustainabledesign.org

