

My theme for this past year is unity – because I believe it’s the primary factor driving our success. I quoted Rumi in your program book for his saying that, “The lamps are different, but the light is the same.” I believe it is the shared light of humanity that reinforces for us how unacceptable homelessness is. Because we know that we all share the same basic human needs: safety/security, love and belonging, recognition, identity, and personal fulfillment.

We know that homelessness can often dehumanize people and rob them of these basic elements of humanity.

And even though we’re all different, whether we’re coming at this problem as providers, advocates, municipal leaders, developers, banks, public housing authorities, public officials, philanthropists, people who’ve experienced it, academics, or any other type of stakeholder –we’ve come together, because we all believe that we can and must end this unacceptable social problem.

Before she left, Diane Randall, the first Executive Director of the Partnership, bequeathed a paper weight to Howard Rifkin, the second Executive Director, which he then gave to me three years ago. It says “Every wall is a door” (by Ralph Waldo Emerson). In her note, Diane advises us “to try to find the openings in work that is more difficult than it should be.”

I think we have figured out a way to do just that.

When I joined this Campaign back in 2005 as a young mental health advocate, estimates were that Connecticut needed to address chronic homelessness for approximately 10,000 individuals. We now have less than 300 people in the state experiencing chronic homelessness, and less than 100 that haven’t already been matched to a housing resource. That is extraordinary progress. Since January 2015, providers across Connecticut have housed more than 1,400 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.

We have made Veterans’ homelessness rare and brief in Connecticut.

We have created a system that is data driven, targeted and well-coordinated; that can be built upon to end homelessness for families with children and youth.

We are doing this in CT through an immense level of coordination and collaboration with all of the major local, state and federal partners. State buy-in and steady investments in supportive housing over many years have been critical. Philanthropy has also played a crucial role in supporting the policy, planning, coordination, and collaboration building necessary to reach our goals. The leadership, support and investments by the Malloy Administration, have greatly accelerated our pace and allowed us to meet some major milestones.

Our track record and collaborative approach won us \$6.5 million from HUD to create a coordinated community response to end youth homelessness.

Advocacy to maintain the necessary resources for supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and coordinated access networks has been a substantial component of this effort. And it's been effective. Our government partners, strong return on investment, and unified voice have led to the continuing protection of these resources during the most challenging fiscal times many of us have ever seen.

It's clear that we have many reasons to celebrate tonight. At the same time, we must understand what lies ahead. Uncertainty at the federal level and CT's fiscal challenges will threaten our progress – and we'll have to remain unified, focused, creative and flexible to continue to maintain our progress and advance our goals. We need to strengthen and accelerate our coordination with corrections, juvenile justice, child welfare, education, the workforce system, early childhood programs, health care systems and mainstream mental health services. We need to find a way to reimburse housing support services through Medicaid. And we need to double down on our affordable housing efforts, if we are ever going to be able to sustain our progress. We have a quarter million households in our state who are severely cost burdened – paying more than 50% of their income on housing -- and the vast majority have very low incomes.

For more than a decade we've invested in the partnership building, proven solutions, and systems reforms that have positioned us to weather this storm we are facing. Together, we can continue to show that homelessness doesn't have to exist.

Diane's parting words were "May you find all the doors to open and let the light in". Thanks to all of you, that has happened for thousands of people in our state.