

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Meet the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA)

Albany, NY - "There's no place like home." In the "Wizard of Oz," Dorothy's one wish is to go home. She gets there by repeating this simple phrase and clicking the heels of her ruby red slippers. If only that wish were as easy to grant for the 30,000 men, women, and children in New York state who are homeless.

While ensuring that thousands of homeless families and single adults find housing and other services is no easy feat, the folks at the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) are up to the task. The team from OTDA (which includes the Division of Audit and Quality Control and the Bureau of Shelter Services) oversees the 118 facilities that provide services and shelter to the more than 8,300 single adults and 4,100 families who have no homes of their own.

There is much more to dealing with the issue of homelessness than simply finding someone a bed for the night. Studies indicate that among homeless families, a majority have long-term involvement with the child welfare system and more than half have drug involvement. Among the homeless single adults, about a third have substance abuse problems, a quarter have mental health problems, and just under a fifth have physical impairments. It takes a concerted effort between non-profit providers and local and state agencies to deliver services to New York's homeless.

OTDA's dedicated professionals have proven themselves to be a crackerjack team. This dedicated group includes Robert Dawes, director of the Bureau of Shelter Services; Ed Canfield, data processing systems auditor; Donald Kennedy, social services management specialist; Terry Powers, social services representative; Fran Teeter, specialist in adult services; and Jane Wagner, social services representative. All are deeply committed to helping the homeless. As part of this mission, OTDA began to work with CTG in November 1997 on the "Using Information in Government" (UIG) program, which explores how government agencies can best use information management analysis and tools to conduct information-intensive work. OTDA needs timely access to information collected by a variety of state, local, and non-profit homeless service providers, but that information is limited in scope, availability, and accessibility.

To remedy this, the UIG project developed by OTDA involves devising plans for a uniform database to provide agency officials and local partners with the information needed to track homelessness and more effectively manage homeless services in the state. Due to its wider implications, OTDA's project has now become part of CTG's electronic records research grant, "Gateways to the Past, Present, and Future: Practical Guidelines to Secondary Uses of Electronic Records." As part of "Gateways," OTDA is working with CTG and the New York State Archives and Records Administration to develop a prototype information resource based on its participation in UIG.

Thanks to the hard work of the OTDA staff and their provider partners, more New Yorkers are finding their way home. And they didn't even need the ruby red slippers.