



**HOMELESS &
HOUSING
RESOURCE
CENTER**

Making It Work: The Role of Employment in Housing Stability

Thursday, July 30, 2026



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Friendship Place & the AimHire Model

Jean-Michel Giraud, President and CEO, Friendship Place
Richard McKey, AimHire Division Director, Friendship Place



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Friendship Place

- Serves people experiencing homelessness in DC – MD – VA
- Founded in 1991
- Programs include:
 - Street outreach
 - Drop-in center – meals, laundry, clinic
 - Homelessness prevention/intervention
 - Short-term housing for veterans, individuals, families
 - Transitional and Permanent housing facilities
 - Job placement
 - Advocacy
- Serves >5000 people/year




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Our Approach

- Derived from the Boston University Psychiatric Rehabilitation Model (William Anthony)
- Person-centered:** trauma-informed, individualized care
- Programs developed by staff, volunteers, and board members with **lived expertise** of homelessness
- Solutions-driven:** “Finding Ways to Say Yes”
- Inclusive:** “Nothing About Us Without Us”



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Choosing an Employment Partner

- Most common program offerings:
 - Training based – classroom structure, builds participant's credentials for a specific industry, sometimes paid during enrollment
 - Placement based – focused on rapid job readiness, employment ASAP
 - Hybrid – some programs offer short term training and placement (HVRP)
- Training based programs funded by WIOA support homeless job seekers, but barriers to engagement sometimes prohibit training
 - Urgency to get hired
 - Industry may not match participant's experience, barriers, or desired employment
 - Training schedule may conflict with other obligations – case management, childcare, health, recovery
 - No guarantee of placement when training is complete – placement-based program intervention may be necessary
- When we accounted for these factors, FP choose a placement-based model to serve homeless job seekers




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Connecting with Employment Partners

- Know their program, know your participants
 - Make sure your candidates can meet their enrollment qualifications
 - Warm handoffs during intake – onsite most effective
 - Case conferencing participants when communication or engagement lapses
- Complementary services
 - If your program can help with transportation, digital access, or attire, this will have a huge impact on the participant's job readiness
 - Work with employment program staff to find funding overlap and gaps

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Job First Model

- **Job First** - placement driven, rapid job placement (within 90 days)
- Income is the goal
 - 95% of program participants state they need a job ASAP
- Supplements housing subsidies, provides income to qualify for Rapid Rehousing
- Effective for at-risk homelessness intervention
- Can work with training-based models to ensure placement
 - Vocational training : market centered/crime reduction centered
 - Employment placement : participant centered, participant first

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Model Overview: Employability and Readiness

- **Assumed Employability:** Every participant can be hired using the skills they have right now. Match participants to the right jobs.
- **Rapid Job Readiness:** Goal of getting participant job ready within 2-4 meetings – 30 days from enrollment.
 - Resumé
 - Mock interview
 - Technology skills
 - Communication skills

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Model Overview: Partnerships and Flexible Funding

- Employer Partnerships
 - Connections with hiring managers
 - Onsite hiring events
 - Wide network of employers matching participant experience
- Funds to remove financial barriers
 - Digital access – phones and laptops
 - Transportation – gas, public transit
 - Attire – interview clothes, uniforms, tools





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Model Compatibility

- Job First facilitates Rapid Rehousing
 - Helps participants qualify
 - Avoids future insufficient income/cliff effect/recidivism
- Complements Permanent Supportive Housing
 - Decreased reliance on SNAP, TANF, SSDI from PT income
 - Can allow graduation from services
- Enhances homelessness prevention/intervention programs
 - Low-barrier enrollment for at-risk people
 - Fast enough to avoid eviction or recidivism





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Benefits of the Model: Income and Independence

- Job First is a fast, responsive intervention that provides income and independence
- Costs of program small compared to income earned by participants
- Supplements addiction recovery





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Benefits of the Model: Positive Treatment Outcomes

- Large volume of research on addiction recovery shows that employment is a strong predictor of positive treatment outcome (see, e.g., Laudet, 2012, Frone, et al., 2023, Bormann, et al., 2025):
 - fewer parole violations among employed compared to unemployed persons
 - lower rates of relapse
 - lower chances of further convictions



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Participants with Behavioral Health Conditions

- Job First is a natural partner for assisting participants with serious mental illness, substance use disorders, and co-occurring disorders
- Ability One partner, Chimes, reported that participants with Case Managers were 70% more likely to start
- A lengthy application process requires robust partnership and significant supports and patience
- Retention benefits are significant
 - AimHire statistics: 79% retention rate at 1 year for participants employed by Ability One employers
 - Participants retain jobs after incidents that would otherwise lead to termination (e.g., repeated no-call no-shows, relapse, arrest)



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Building Consensus with Participants

- Founded on motivational interviewing – building an agreement with the participant on what they believe is realistic and achievable within 3 months
- Give the participant the model, and see if it works for them
- Puts the participant's goals in the forefront: Full time? Part time? Income limits? Time frame?
- Can be intensive or light touch based on the needs of the participant
- Accepting, patient, flexible: case management principles



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AimHire Process

- Orientation
- Program screening and intake
- Path to success
 - Weekly check-ins with staff, at least 5 job applications/week
 - Job Leads
 - Hiring events
 - Career fairs
 - Employer connections communicated through check-ins and newsletter
- Participant gets hired
 - Participant is retained for 6 months with check-ins for one year



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Employment Specialists

- **Strategy:**
 - Apply for the right jobs
 - Connect participants to networks and opportunities
 - Encourage consistent searching and follow up
- **Coaching:**
 - Improve hard and soft skills,
 - Overcome fears, failures, and setbacks,
 - Encourage participants to follow their vision
- **Connection:**
 - To resources, other participants, community support, emergency aid
- **Accountability:**
 - Help participants understand that only they can keep themselves employed



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Job Developers

- **Job developers** find jobs and build connections with employers
 - Start with experience/desired jobs, build contact goals based on the jobs participants need
 - Connect with the managers who make hiring decisions
- Build with barriers in mind
 - commute distance
 - transportation options
 - background checks
- **Support participant after placement to ensure retention → powerful element in keeping employer partners**



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Bringing Leads to Participants

- **Job Developers and Employment Specialists** collaborate to get job leads to participants
 - Time-sensitive, specific to participant employment needs
- Hands on help with applications – computer lab, volunteers, application drives, follow-up on status
- Leads get lost in email – we built a job board
 - Jobs.friendshipplace.org
 - Jobs posted daily based on participant needs



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Volunteers

- Resume Prep
 - 80% of incoming participants have a resume, but need updating
 - Simple and clear format
- Technology Assistance
 - Digital divide is one of our participants' biggest barriers.
 - Hands-on coaching removes this barrier and gets people to work
- Interview Prep
 - Mock interviews
 - Coaching and prioritizing
- Offsite volunteering: Remote assistance, donation drives, sharing job leads, career fairs
- Volunteer sources: Congregations, students, friends & family, retirees, board members
- On-Site Services: Computer lab, clothing closet, kitchen/food





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Participant Responsibilities

- Weekly check-ins
 - Participant must contact staff weekly by phone, email or in-person
- 5 job applications/week (10 to 20 is ideal)
 - Minimum required for hire within 90 days, more is better
- Consistent progress
 - Ongoing communication from participant and adherence to responsibilities demonstrate that the participant is ready for a Job First program
- Goal of getting hired within 90 days





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Financial Support for Participants

- Phones - unlimited data, case/screen protector, email access.
 - No phone = no job.
- Transportation - Metro/Bus, Gas, Uber/Lyft
- Clothes, tools, uniforms
- Licenses, certifications – CPR, ServSafe, Security, OSHA 10
- Grocery cards (limited)
- **Financial support is essential**
- Financial needs vary over the course of the program
 - Average participant spend/week during job search period: \$45
 - Average participant spend/week during onboarding period: \$200

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Hiring Events

- On-site applications, screenings and interviews with employer partners present
- On-site interview, or screening and follow-up interviews
- Candidates pre-screened for employers by staff prior to events, invite-only basis
- Smaller, targeted hiring events = more hires, higher employer satisfaction

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Working With Employment Barriers

- **Returning Citizens**
 - Understanding individual participant's specific charges, time since charge
 - Directing participant to opportunities with limited/no checks
 - Connecting participant to expungement resources
 - Knowing which charges can be accommodated, based on industry and employer
 - Coaching participant on when and how to discuss charges
- **Addiction Recovery**
 - Understanding individual participant's relapse triggers
 - Directing participant to supportive environment
 - Connecting participant to recovery support programs
 - Coaching participant through stressors, encouraging functional recovery

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Working With Employment Barriers (cont.)

- **Participants in need of workplace accommodation**
 - Help dispel misunderstandings/miscommunication around "Disability"
 - Majority of participants do not know how to request an accommodation.
 - Understand participant's specific disability and accommodations
 - Connect participant directly with doctor who can provide note
 - Refer participant to AbilityOne employers
- **Seniors Re-Entering the Workplace**
 - Condense skills and experience relevant to their roles
 - Supplemental coaching for technology, communication as needed
 - Consider full scope of skills and match to opportunities
 - Flexible income goals depending on circumstances



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Incorporating Jobs First

- **Start with Strengths**
 - Case managers understand trauma-informed care and barriers
 - Program leaders understand local partners, participant expenses, relationship building,
 - Board members, donors, and existing volunteers seeking ways to make direct impact on participants – resumes, interviews
- **Recognize Differences**
 - Behavioral and consistency standards for re-entering workforce vs. finding housing are different
 - Set expectations with participants and staff, early and often
 - Timeframe and urgency differ from housing



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Building Volunteer Teams

- **High-skilled volunteers write resumes, conduct mock interviews, provide application assistance, and help with training**
- Volunteer recruitment is ongoing, roster of 4-6 volunteers provides 2 day/week support for 50+ participants weekly
 - 1-2 hours of training per volunteer
- Outstanding volunteer retention builds needed experience and skills
- Board members and donors volunteer or recruit volunteers
- Naturally draws volunteers with experience in hiring, interviewing, teaching, and resume writing
- Remote/external volunteers can build employer partnerships, share job postings, remote resumes/interviews



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Building Employer Partnerships

- **Build caseload.** Consider participants' experience. Start from there.
- Employer partnerships are built on hires and retention.
- Employers who want to help still have to hire qualified candidates
- Find employers hiring for jobs our participants qualify for and send them those candidates, ready to work, with a goal of staying for at least one year
- Guide candidates through hiring and onboarding to ensure a seamless placement



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Building Participant Financial Support

- **No/Low Cost Assistance**
- Attire- clothing closet maintained by volunteer, promoted by volunteers/board/development
- Laptops- donated and refurbished, limited quantities, be strategic about issuing
- **Costs to Prioritize**
- Phones- T-mobile Moto-g with 2-3 months of service = ~\$175
 - Mint mobile plan for participants with existing devices – 3 months \$45-90
- Transportation- to interviews, programs, job fairs, for job retention, until 2nd paycheck, longer as needed



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Contact Information

- For requests for technical assistance or speaking engagements, please contact:
 - Jean-Michel Giraud
 - jgiraud@friendshipplace.org
 - Phone: (202) 503-2961
- Website: friendshipplace.org
- Job Board: jobs.friendshipplace.org



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Thank You!

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Contact Us:

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