

Memorandum

To: Homeless Service providers

From: John Records, Executive Director, Committee on the Shelterless (COTS)

Re: Support for staff and clients who have been impacted by trauma

Date: October 27, 2007

Agencies that help homeless children and adults usually are doing extremely challenging work. We are supporting people in crisis, often having shattered lives, mental illness, addiction and physical illness. Moreover, our agencies almost always are severely under funded for the work, and may struggle to provide the most basic elements of care such as enough food and a safe environment.

The challenges homeless people suffer often are rooted in trauma and neglect, and that often began when they were children (refer to the research on adverse childhood experiences by Vincent Felitti, M.D., and others). The choices made by the homeless people as adults are profoundly influenced by their prior experiences, and can result in further trauma for themselves and those around them. Trained mental health and chemical dependency clinicians are hard to afford in homeless agencies. The agency staff and volunteers frequently suffer from vicarious trauma and burnout.

At the homeless services agency I manage, Committee on the Shelterless (COTS) in Petaluma, California, we have been searching for ways to help our clients to address and recover from their trauma, and to support our staff in working with traumatized clients. **We've found that Somatic Experiencing (SE) can offer immediate relief to program participants and staff. I cannot overstate how important this is. The availability of an intervention that can inexpensively, quickly and effectively relieve the symptoms of trauma is one of the most encouraging developments I've encountered in over 15 years of working with homeless people.**

SE is delivered as an educational empowerment self-help teaching model that targets physiological PTSD symptoms such as insomnia, hypervigilance, and anxiety. Though not directly intended to do so, the SE work can also help relieve psychological symptoms and help homeless people make the needed changes to stabilize their lives.

I encourage homeless service providers to explore the potential that Somatic Experiencing offers for supporting staff and clients who have been impacted by trauma. For more information about the Somatic Experiencing Clinic at COTS, please contact Patricia Meadows, pmeadowsca@aol.com.