

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **CONTACT INFO:**

Jenn Brandon, CVM National Office, (206) 441-7872, x175



### **HOMELESSNESS EXPERTS COUNTER SENATOR COBURN'S "WASTE" REPORT; CITE VOICE MAIL FOR THE POOR AS A CRITICAL, COST-EFFECTIVE SERVICE**

SEATTLE, December 18, 2008 – Leaders from organizations working to end homelessness in America today questioned the inclusion of Community Voice Mail (CVM) in a list of “wasteful” federal expenditures produced by U.S. Senator Tom Coburn, M.D. (R-OK). Recognizing that CVM is a hugely successful, cost-effective program operating in more than 400 towns and cities, these leaders asked that CVM be removed from this document.

On December 12, Senator Coburn released a report entitled "2008: Worst Waste of the Year," highlighting 65 federally-funded programs that he believes are wasteful. Included among these programs is the \$15,000 that Summit County (Ohio) received to start a CVM program for low-income and homeless people in this area of the state. CVM operates in 46 cities around the country, providing free voice mail boxes to over 40,000 individuals who are working with social service agencies to improve their lives. Clients put this reliable phone number on job and housing applications, and use it to stay in touch with people who can help them.

“Senator Coburn is absolutely wrong about Community Voice Mail. It is one of the most cost-effective, highly leveraged tools we have to end homelessness” said Jeremy Rosen, Executive Director of the National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness. “Without a reliable phone number, it’s almost impossible for the homeless to stay in touch with potential employers, health care providers, case managers and others trying to help them. Imagine trying to get a job without a phone number.”

“We provided the initial funding for the Community Voice Mail program in Tulsa,” said Lynn Schusterman, Chair of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation in Tulsa, Oklahoma. “This is a great cost-versus-outcomes project. Its goal is to help people help themselves, and we are pleased with its success. Already, we’ve seen 63 clients obtain jobs and an additional 57 find stable housing.”

“The \$15,000 provided to start CVM in Summit County is partial funding for a \$100,000/year program that will provide direct services for up to 1,000 homeless and low-income people each year. Given that 70% of our clients report successful achievement of their goals for employment, housing, safety and other things, this is hugely cost-effective program” says Jenn Brandon, Executive Director of the CVM National Office in Seattle. “Without a phone number, it’s very hard to provide low-income and homeless people with information about job opportunities that may transform their lives, and few employers will hire people they can’t contact by phone. CVM is a simple solution to a fundamental problem. It is the opposite of ‘wasteful’.”

Community Voice Mail’s mission is to use communications technology to connect people living in poverty and homelessness to information and resources they can use to help themselves. Founded in 1993, CVM serves more than 40,000 people each year through partnerships with 2,000 social service organizations in 46 U.S. cities. Clients use their CVM numbers as a reliable way to communicate with prospective employers, landlords, health care providers, case managers, and family. CVM is a leader in applying telecommunications tools to help low-income and homeless people change their lives, and help social service organization become more effective. For further information visit [www.cvm.org](http://www.cvm.org).

#### **Further Contact Information:**

Jeremy Rosen, National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness, (202) 714-5378

Lynn Schusterman, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, (918) 591-1090

## Community Voice Mail Fact Sheet

- For 15 years, Community Voice Mail has partnered with high-tech companies, community-based human services, and government to link people living in poverty, homelessness and transition to jobs, housing, and available resources. The service is cost-effective, efficient, and accountable, tracking usage and outcomes throughout its history.
- Nationally, clients use CVM for an average of 7 months. 84% use CVM for employment, 70% for housing, and the majority use it to coordinate health and social services. On average, 70% of CVM clients report achieving one or more of their goals.
- The program has been recognized as a national leader in innovation, effectiveness, and corporate partnership by the likes of Harvard's JFK School of Government, the Points of Light Foundation, and the Committee Encouraging Corporate Partnership.
- More than **2,000 social and human services agencies in 400 cities and towns** depend on CVM to stay in contact with their clients. Without CVM social service providers—including medical providers, probation officers, and Social Security benefits administrators—have no alternative other than to wait for the person to initiate contact or go in search for them.
- The Tulsa CVM program is hosted by the Tulsa Day Center for the Homeless, which provides a safe shelter for Tulsa's homeless population. It launched on February 14, 2008, when the first voice mail client (Carl Irving) dialed his voice mail number to hear a message left for him by Tulsa Mayor Kathy Taylor. Since that day, the Tulsa CVM program has grown in size and impact.
- Thus far **566 Tulsans have received CVM numbers**. 15% are Veterans. 37% are women. 33% indicate they have a disabling condition. Most are between the ages of 26 and 59, but 12% are younger than 25 and 4% are 60 or older. Most startling is that **24% of Tulsa CVM clients indicate they have dependent children, for a total of 370 children** dependent upon the CVM client for their livelihood.
- As clients enter the program, they are asked to establish goals for using the service and we track their rates of success in achieving these goals. In Tulsa, **81%** of the CVM clients who have reported outcomes thus far have indicated they achieved at least one of their stated goals, including **63 who found jobs and 57 who found housing**.
- 30 social service agencies in Tulsa are now providing CVM numbers to clients who are seeking help but don't have a reliable phone number with which they can be contacted. These agencies provide a broad range of services in Tulsa; from health care and help getting a job, to schools communicating with students of homeless families and help for people seeking safety from domestic violence. **20% of Tulsa CVM's agencies provide health care services**, and the Tulsa Day Center also offers a medical clinic. According to the clinic director there, being able to reach a client with a voice message has made a significant impact on their ability to deliver medical care: Clients can now receive timely information about lab results and medicine dosages; scheduling appointments for such things as check-up, chemotherapy and even surgery is now easier. As the clinic director says, "CVM has certainly made my case management easier and allowed better care for our clients."
- One unique feature of CVM is the ability to send "broadcast" voice messages to all clients in Tulsa. The manager of the program at the Tulsa Day Center uses this technology to routinely send information about jobs, health care, local events, and even emergency weather information (it gets cold in Tulsa, and they have tornados). Since February, more than 140 messages have been sent. Case managers at the agencies distributing CVM numbers can also send broadcast messages, thereby saving time and money that would otherwise be spent dialing individual phone numbers or (more likely) tracking down individual clients. It's a highly time- and cost-efficient system.