

CHANGE-MAKERS

Beth Silverman

The executive director of Lotus Campaign helps make homes for the holidays — and all the other days, too.

By
TIFFANY J. DAVIS

Photograph
by
WILLIAM CROOKS



“STATISTICALLY, the length of time it takes to escape poverty is 20 years with zero missteps, unexpected medical expenses, or anything going wrong,” Beth Silverman says. “I don’t know about you, but I’ve never had a year — let alone 20 — where nothing went wrong.”

Silverman is the executive director of Lotus Campaign, a Charlotte, North Carolina-based nonprofit rewriting the playbook to solve systemic homelessness and affordable housing shortages. For her, that means bringing (historically unlikely) allies across the real estate, land development, rental, and social service sectors to one table, then matching unhoused families with access and holistic action plans. It’s a formula that has allowed the foundation to bring the average annual cost of placing and keeping someone in housing to just \$906 in neighborhoods of opportunity — neighborhoods with trees, parks, grocery stores, schools, bus stops, and proximity to major employers.

“All of our services focus on removing roadblocks to safe, stable, dignified places to call home,” Silverman says. Lotus guarantees rent and other eco-

nomics incentives to decrease economic risk to landlords; social service partners provide ongoing support to the individual or family to ensure they have what they need to rebuild their lives — career coaching, mental health services, and more.

Being housed with this big safety net of support makes all the difference. For the record, 98% of families Lotus engages maintain good rental standing, continuing on to either renew their leases or purchase first homes. Landlord partners also win, often offering additional units to Lotus tenants once they experience the double benefit of doing good and working with tenants determined to better their own futures.

Silverman keeps a James Baldwin quote on a Post-it note by her desk that reads, “Those who say it can’t be done are usually interrupted by those doing it.”

“I think that is the key to solving these ‘unsolvable’ things,” she says. “You have to let whatever modicum of blinding optimism you have shine, combat the brokenness you’re seeing, and then use it to change the world.”

“You get more people to come to the tent of solutions when you eliminate words like ‘should’ and instead innovate and collaborate where resources do exist.”



More Insights From Beth

Ideas for helping the unhoused in your community

Vote, Baby, Vote

“Go to your local city council meetings, community board meetings, or whatever sort of jurisdiction in your town that exists and vote yes to housing of all kinds — not just affordable, not just luxury, but all housing,” Silverman says.

Hit the Streets

“At Lotus, we participate in something called a ‘point-in-time count,’” Silverman says, referring to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s annual volunteer-based count of all unhoused people within a community at a given time. “Not only will you understand what the entirety of your community really looks like, but you’ll also help channel potential resources to the right places.”

Think Big
“People think that homelessness is so unique to their communities, and it is in some ways, but it’s also not,” says Silverman, who’s researched and consulted in cities from Naples, Florida, to Chicago and abroad. “Challenge yourself to learn about models that are working, then support those.”

Read All About It
“Last but not least, sign up for our newsletter!” Silverman says of the meticulously researched (and downright inspiring) digital and print content her team creates. “We share everything from housing myth-busting and legislation education to ways to support Lotus and housing in general as we scale.”

To learn more about Lotus Campaign, go to lotuscampaign.org and follow @lotuscampaign.