

Rapid Re-housing

\$25 million has been appropriated for FY 2008 to conduct a demonstration on the effectiveness of Rapid Re-housing programs in reducing family homelessness.

HUD is directed by Congress to select a limited number of sites to receive funds for this demonstration through the Homeless Assistance Grants competition process (Continuum-of-Care applications). When selecting sites, HUD is directed to select sites that:

- Have proven experience in providing Rapid Re-housing services
- Strong performance of Continuum-of-Care
- Represent geographic diversity

Selected programs can use funds to provide:

- Short-term housing assistance (including up to 18 months of rental assistance)
- Housing placement services
- An array of appropriate services for families.

Up to \$1.25 million can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. The evaluation will include a cost benefit analysis, including both direct and indirect social benefits, and success of the program in keeping families housed.

Background:

Rapid Re-housing is a set of strategies to help families quickly move out of homelessness and into permanent housing. It typically involves:

- housing search and landlord mediation assistance
- short-term or flexible rental assistance
- transitional case management services

The set of strategies are consistent with a Housing First approach which prioritizes a focus on helping individuals and families access permanent housing as rapidly as possible and providing services primarily following a housing placement. Some communities that adopted Rapid Re-housing strategies as part of a Housing First approach were able to substantially reduce homelessness among families or prevent shelter stays altogether. By helping families exit homelessness more rapidly, shelters are able to accommodate more families without increasing capacity.

Examples/Models

Rapid Exit Program, Hennepin, Minnesota. There is a single point of entry to the county funded shelter system for families and preparation for exiting shelter happens immediately. Based on an assessment which evaluates families' barriers to re-accessing housing, families may be enrolled in the "Rapid Exit Program." The county contracts with local non-profit organizations to help families residing in shelter quickly find rental housing. The nonprofit agencies outreach area landlords and negotiate terms that are favorable for all involved. This involves agreeing to help the landlord address any challenges which may arise with newly housed families and providing tenancy support services. While families are quickly expected to pay the rent independently, the agencies can help with initial costs (e.g. security deposits and first month's rent), most have limited rental assistance under the program to help families, and may pull resources from other sources. Each family is assigned a case manager who provides home-based direct services and case management for approximately six months, focusing heavily on employment and accessing benefits for which the family may be eligible. The agencies are evaluated based entirely on their performance: their success in helping families quickly exit the shelter system and avoid future shelter stays. The adoption of the Rapid Exit Program contributed to significant reductions in the length of time families reside in shelter, resulting in savings for the county.

Community Care Grant, Washington, DC. The Community Care Grant program was designed to help families avoid shelter stays. The District has a central intake site for families applying for shelter. Families in dire need are immediately served, but the majority is placed on a shelter waiting list. The Community Care Grant evolved due to the concern over the size of the waiting list and fear that with the onset of time limits for welfare benefits, families could ill afford lengthy shelter stays. Families now applying for shelter may elect instead to work with one of seven Family Support Centers located throughout the city. A grant of \$7,000 is provided to the Family Support Center for each family housed. Up to \$3,000 of the grant can be used flexibly to pay for housing and the remaining \$4,000 is used to reimburse the Family Support Center for the provision of transitional case management. The housing portion of the grant can cover security deposits, first month's rent, a short-term housing subsidy, furniture, utilities or needed household items. The Family Support Centers agree to

provide case management services to the family until their goals are met. Some of the Family Support Centers provide Housing Specialists, individuals who primarily interface with landlords and respond to their concerns. Administrators have determined that the cost of serving families under the Community Care Grant is less than the cost of the average family shelter stay of six months.

Shelter to Housing Pilot, Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) funds a statewide shelter system for families experiencing homelessness. After spending \$20 million in one fiscal year to house families in motels when the shelter system was full, the state instituted a series of shifts to end its reliance on motels. Accomplishing this, DTA reinvested savings and lessons learned in new pilots. Shelter to Housing was among the initiatives piloted. DTA contracted with Housing Assistance Providers (HAP) to help families residing in shelter find and rent suitable housing in the private rental market and provide the case management services following a housing placement to promote housing stability and link families with necessary on-going supports. HAP providers received \$6,000 for each family moved into a rental unit with a twelve month lease. HAP providers used these funds flexibly, for example, as short-term rental assistance or reducing the rent over the course of the year. The families who were selected for this program were employed, in an education or training program and soon to graduate, or had savings. Eighteen months following placement in permanent housing, 85 percent remained stably housed.

Family Housing Collaborative, Columbus, Ohio. In Columbus, there is a single point of entry to the family shelter system. The Community Shelter Board, a nonprofit umbrella organization, oversees this system and fosters collaboration between the numerous community based organizations. All families entering shelter are quickly assessed and referred to the appropriate housing and service intervention. Families with the potential to stabilize their housing after receiving short-term assistance and linkage to community-based support are referred to the Family Housing Collaborative. Families are provided assistance locating housing in the private rental market and short-term, home-based case management services is offered to families to help them stabilize in their new homes. The Community Shelter Board is able to offer short-term rental assistance to families to expedite their transition back into independent housing. The Family Housing Collaborative can also help rapidly re-house families requiring more financial assistance through partnering with public and private subsidized housing providers. The adoption of the rapid re-housing strategies contributed to the 46 percent decline in family homelessness that occurred from 1997 to 2004.

Hamilton Family Center, San Francisco, California. Hamilton Family Center is the largest family emergency shelter provider in San Francisco. Several years ago, the agency made a decision to embrace a Housing First approach and provide families with the tools so they could rapidly exit shelter and access rental housing in the community. Case managers who traditionally provided assistance to families within the shelter were tasked with helping families locate housing in the community and providing case management services to families within their own home after they were housed. Launched in 2006 with support from the City of San Francisco, Hamilton's goal is to provide flexible rental assistance to approximately 80 families over the first year.