

Community Spotlight: Homeless Prevention

The Community Shelter Board's Family Housing Collaborative (FHC)

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This case study explores the unique homeless prevention aspect of rapidly re-housing families and providing them with intensive case management services as soon as possible but within 15 days of referral to FHC. Semi-annual results in 2008 indicated that 143 families participated in the program and 93 percent of them successfully obtained housing and supportive services in compliance with program design.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Community Shelter Board's Family Housing Collaborative (FHC) is a rapid re-housing program that offers financial assistance to a third party on behalf of homeless families in need of permanent and affordable housing. Comprised of partnerships with the Salvation Army as the housing support coordinator and YWCA Family Center as the central referral point for all participating families, the program provides a wide variety of case management services such as landlord mediation, housing location assistance, home-based supportive services and financial assistance. Homeless families with children staying at the YWCA with one or more significant barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing are the target population. The FHC is funded by the Ohio Trust Fund, Franklin County Real Estate Transfer Fee and the United Way of Central Ohio.

First implemented in 1999, FHC follows the Rapid Rehousing Model of providing permanent housing to families as the primary and immediate intervention, in order for them to successfully address any other issues and achieve stability. Semi-annual results in 2008 show that 143 families were served, with 93 percent of them finding housing within 15 days of referral to the program. FHC operated under total costs of \$524,162 for the last fiscal year (7/1/2007 – 6/30/2008). The program experienced very small recidivism among participants and has an average length of stay in the YWCA's front door emergency shelter of ten days after referral to the FHC program (i.e. participating families move from shelter into their own housing with an average of ten days).

CHALLENGE

Rapid Rehousing research has proven that providing permanent housing for homeless families as the initial intervention and then addressing other issues produces positive outcomes across a wide variety of measures.¹ The biggest challenge facing FHC is the ability to quickly exit eligible families from emergency shelter into permanent housing and reduce the amount of time the family has to spend in the emergency shelter. Improving the efficiency of assessments, referrals and rehousing can all contribute to achieving this goal.

SOLUTION

The FHC program is designed to obtain housing and supportive services for eligible families within 15 days of reporting to the YWCA Family Center. This timeframe was developed to rehouse families as quickly as possible, but also to ensure that enough time is available to find decent housing in both the public and

¹ *The Seaver Study*. www.endhomelessness.org/files/1893_file_Rapid_Re_housing_Tull.ppt

private sector. Community Shelter Board's partnership with the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority and Community Properties of Ohio provide project-based Section 8 or public housing to families in need of long term assistance, however the majority of housing used by the FHC is private. The Salvation Army staff negotiates on behalf of the families with local landlords and enables them to move into affordable, market-rate, private housing. Furnishings for these units are available through a partnership with a furniture bank, while start-up kits including food and household items are provided through a partnership with the Mid-Ohio Food Bank.

IMPLEMENTATION

During the initial phase, families are admitted into YWCA when no other safe housing options are available. They are then assessed by YWCA staff and referred to FHC if they meet the following eligibility criteria:

- They desire an independent, stable home.
- They are unable to obtain or maintain an apartment due to barriers related to income, employment, debt, mental health or substance abuse issues, physical disability, criminal history, involvement with children's services, and/or previous evictions.
- They have or can have, as of program exit, income and community based supports sufficient to be independent, stable and maintain housing.

Should families agree to participate in FHC, they must sign a consent form and are immediately assigned to a Salvation Army staff member who assesses the family's particular needs. For example, they discuss housing options as well as financial assistance, related to time-limited assistance with rent, security deposits and utility arrearages, job training and childcare.

Once families successfully relocate, the Salvation Army provides intensive home-based case management services to link families with needed resources to remain stable. Case management visits occur on a weekly basis an average 100 days from referral to FHC, but no longer than 180 days after housing placement. Families also have the opportunity to develop their own housing stability case plans that incorporate services such as job training and placement, transportation, healthcare referrals, budgeting and after school tutors.

RESULTS

Semi-annual trends between 1999 and 2007 illustrate that the number of households served in FHC has generally increased. Successful housing outcomes have fluctuated slightly, with 100 percent success in earlier years and 93 percent most recently. Average length of stay and financial assistance expenses per household also varies by year, but is trending downward, indicating either better access to other community resources and/or more independence on behalf of eligible families to establish stability.

Below are semi-annual direct housing outcomes in 2008:

Program Outcome Achievement 7/1/08 to 12/31/08: Direct Housing

Measure	Semi-Annual <i>Goal</i> 7/1/08-12/31/08	Semi-Annual <i>Actual</i> 7/1/08-12/31/08
Total Households Served	161	143
Average Length of Stay (days)	15	10
Average Length of Participation (days)	100	103
Successful Housing Outcomes (%)	90	93
Recidivism	5	3
Access to Financial Assistance	90	91
Average Financial Assistance per Household	\$1000	\$908

The FHC had costs of \$304,324 for the last fiscal year (7/1/2007 – 6/30/2008), not including the financial assistance funds distributed to families of \$219,838.

INSIGHTS/LESSONS LEARNED

Common insights learned in implementing the FHC primarily relate to assessments, funding, and FHC staff relationships with community members. More specifically, having an accurate family assessment process in place is imperative to using resources efficiently and effectively. The most important factor is the ability for the shelter provider to work effectively with the direct housing provider. The shelter provider and the direct housing provider must have effective communication and problem solving processes to obtain positive results. In some cases, families were referred that were ineligible or were not capable of maintaining stable housing, causing a drain on finances and staff resources for FHC. Next, In order to continually improve family outcomes, increasing the availability of funds for financial assistance, supportive services and case management are necessary. Some families were unable to receive all of the help they needed due to financial constraints of the program. Finally, having excellent relationships with landlords and other community stakeholders is an important component of rapid rehousing and supportive services needed to efficiently assist eligible families. If community relationships are strained, it leads to prolonged responses to inquiries and services that families need.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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