

## Community Spotlight: Homeless Prevention

### Lessons from Lancaster, PA

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This case study has been written as a resource for communities who would like to begin or modify an existing program to focus greater attention on rapidly re-house individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The agency highlighted in this case study has been re-housing clients since the late 1980s in a relatively rural part of Pennsylvania.

#### CHALLENGE

Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, a county of 400,000 including the City of Lancaster (population 60,000) incorporates both rural and urban populations within its jurisdiction. In 1988, shelter providers in the area found that they were spending so much of their time on the day to day business of providing for people's basic needs that they did not have staff with time to focus on moving families out of the crisis phase and into permanent housing. They sensed the need in their community for an agency dedicated to finding housing and providing follow-up case management to create long-term housing stability for those families and individuals seeking emergency services in their programs.

#### SOLUTION

Tabor Community Services (Tabor), a HUD-approved housing counseling agency, was chosen for the task, since the local non-profit agency already had expertise in developing relationships with landlords and providing stabilization services following housing placement. The Shelter to Independent Living Program (STIL) was created as a non-facility-based program to provide Rapid Re-housing services (also called Housing First, by the agency), which was a newly designed concept when it began serving clients.

#### IMPLEMENTATION

The program first began in 1998 as a small pilot project working with ten families and was staffed by church members who provided mentoring and support. Two years later, the program shifted to the current model and hired one full-time staff member who worked with 35 families. At that time, STIL worked predominantly with two local shelters as the referral base. As of 2008, the program employs four full-time Housing Counseling Case Managers who can serve approximately 200 households annually. STIL now has the capacity to accept referrals from all local providers of homeless services.

The mission of the Shelter to Independent Living Program is "to mainstream homeless households back into the community into permanent housing through landlord advocacy, housing counseling, budget counseling and case management and to provide education, resources and accountability to empower homeless households with the skills and disciplines necessary for long term self sufficiency." In order to successfully accomplish that mission, the program was designed with several key components:

- **Assessment/Intake Session** - provides a comprehensive needs assessment and enrolls households in appropriate programs.
- **Intensive Budget Counseling and Education** - assists in developing working budgets and develops tools and skills to budget and manage finances for ongoing self sufficiency.

- **Protective Payee Services** - holds clients income in escrow to teach money management skills and helps maintain payments to landlords.
- **Outreach to Landlords** - cultivates a pool of landlords to expand housing choices for households.

Homeless households in need of permanent housing are referred to the Shelter to Independent Living Program through a network of homeless provider agencies. After undergoing an orientation and assessment/intake process, the family or individual attends a Landlord/Tenant Rights and Responsibilities Workshop, which provides training to clients on their responsibilities as tenants, as well as the landlord's rights and responsibilities, and explains the components of a lease, increasing their understanding of what is required of good tenants. Program staff feel that one of the keys to participant success is the intensive case management provided both before housing placement and for six to twelve months afterwards, focusing primarily on budgeting, accessing needed resources/services and goal setting/achievement.

Intensive case management and housing relocation are dual roles performed by one of five staff members with the agency (one team lead and four case managers). The staff member works with households to locate housing options, advocates with landlords and assists in accessing local rental assistance programs, if available. Tabor Community Services has a list of over 250 landlords who have agreed to work with and rent to STIL clients who would not normally meet the rental criteria. Because of the program's success, many landlords are willing to rent to clients as long as they stay involved with Tabor. To ensure this collaboration, annual meetings are held with landlords to address any issues and communicate any program changes.

The STIL program is one of the few Rapid Re-housing programs nationally that does not directly provide a housing subsidy. Instead, program staff leverages existing community resources such as Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8), or rental assistance through the local Community Action Agency and Council of Churches.

## RESULTS

Tabor Community Services, and the programs under its purview, have been outcomes-based and have provided measurable results for over 10 years. Each client file contains a "Tracking Outcomes Form" that clearly identifies each outcome a family achieves, supplemented by case notes. Monthly, case managers provide outcome reports, which are entered into a master outcome form to track overall program progress toward established indicators and outcomes. Regular tracking allows for the identification of trends or issues affecting program results in order to make programmatic adjustments to ensure the program meets its specified goals.

Annually<sup>1</sup>, outcomes and indicators are reviewed to determine the program effectiveness and need for improvement/change and adjusted accordingly. Tabor's standards for outcomes exceed national/local averages; however, the program sets the bar for success high as the agency philosophy is that there is always room for improvement, and outcomes/indicators should reflect a program's ability to make significant and meaningful changes in clients' lives and achievement of their goals for long-term self-sufficiency.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the program fiscal year.

The average length of time for each homeless household from referral to successful program completion is 16-18 months, with housing procurement within 3 to 4 months after the referral and the follow-up intensive budget counseling, and case management services for six to twelve months after housing procurement. Over the last five years in the STIL program, 74% of households have moved to permanent housing and of those, 82% have retained that housing.

Other key outcomes in 2007/2008 were:

- 84% of newly-homeless households were able to obtain permanent housing.
- 87% of new households placed in housing entered the Protective Payee Program and paid rent and utilities on time.
- 80% of clients were able to remain in the program and maintain housing for one year.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**

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