

Breakout Session – Strategies for Addressing Family Homelessness

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(Brief notes from this informal and interactive session. Comments may be from the speaker or the audience.)

We need to help the TANF system work better for homeless families and youth. TANF is currently not serving low-income families well, especially not homeless families. Massachusetts prioritized homelessness and counts looking for housing as a work activity.

Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) program is an available resource to identify children at risk of disability – Philadelphia did outreach screenings in shelters and provided for services can follow the family.

Early Head Start programs proposed in current legislative bills, may provide a significant expansion, including child development services.

A program in Philadelphia developed a partnership with the shelters and early head start.

The Obama administration is very interested in home visiting, which is based on a nursing model to work with kids of risk (Virginia has some of these programs through CHIP). An effective partnership could be developed between homeless (prevention) services and home visiting programs.

Look for areas where we might become better service coordinators instead of direct service providers.

As a funder, the United Way is looking for ways to invest in effective homeless and homeless prevention programs.

Look outside of traditional homeless programs and funding streams for resources to use to improve housing and services, an example is an expanded or revised use of TANF funds.

Family Unification Program provided dedicated housing vouchers when there was a risk of child being removed from the home or for specific youth. These targeted voucher programs become available periodically and communities should be encouraged to apply for them and have effective plans for implementation. More information: <http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/2100>

HUD put out these dedicated vouchers for TANF families that required a partnership between child welfare and housing authority (services + housing) – however, many communities did not want to apply for it. For more information on this program: <http://www.nchcw.org/files/FUP/Child%20Welfare%20FUP%20Alert.pdf>

Pay attention to what is released and make sure your community applies for it. We can't ask congress for more voucher funding if we don't apply for the ones on the table. Think in advance about what relationships can be developed. Community agencies can offer to provide many services to assist the housing agency administer these programs such as offering to provide the required services, offer to do the home inspection, offer to assist with the referral process, and offer to educate and recruit landlords for the program. Norfolk has a housing broker team that provides landlord education and recruitment.

How do we come up with systems to share info across states? Facilitate relationships.

How to we get TANF interested? Get the TANF administrator in another state to call them. Having their peer describe the benefits and success in a similar program can go a long way in encouraging movement.

How do you serve the 5% most vulnerable? There are a few communities to look at including Salt Lake City, Philadelphia, and Hennepin County. The Hennepin County Project Connect Program uses a barrier assessment tool. Also, look for families stuck in ES for long time, families never meeting the requirements for TH, etc. and challenge the community is to think of the whole picture and how programs can work together to serve these families, including program changes to respond more effectively.

An example from Los Angeles: they had 20 TH programs all making decisions independently about who they are going to target and serve, but when you put them all together it doesn't make sense. They had intensive services to college mothers, but mothers with serious mental illnesses were getting almost no services. So, they got everyone around the table to assess what was missing in their overall program portfolio. They also discussed how to rework programs to ensure gaps were addressed.

How do you get programs to work collaboratively as a community wide approach when they are all funded independently from a variety of sources? One approach is to use the local 10-year planning approach. When the community has a plan in place, providers serving the community can be encouraged to work within that road map.

Look at what can be done to make the program fit the family – not family fit the program. An example, instead of a program having a standard case load size for their case managers, consider 1 CM works with 5 intensive families, 2 CMs work with 20 families each for less needed families, etc.

Beware of assessment tools that may not accurately provide the info you need to identify. There have been attempts to create tools in order to prepare for new initiatives such as Rapid Re-Housing that are well-intentioned but not well conceived.

In this era of outcome performance expectations, how do you prevent programs being designed to provide numbers, not to best serve the individuals? How do you also prevent creaming? This is where you need to carefully propose your program outcomes based on the group it is intended

to serve. It is important to work with the funder and the community to achieve the appropriate balance. “Creaming” (selecting applicants that are most likely to succeed) had become a problem just prior to the launch of the Chronic Homeless Initiative. Many were surprised that communities really pushed to serve those most chronic and most disabled (hardest to serve) and worked to achieve outcomes with these individuals. This was a great movement forward in the homeless services community.

An example for an area where this can be achieved is encouraging the valuable resources for PSH type programs to provide housing to those with the most needs and not someone that simply was facing an affordable housing barrier and only really needed a voucher (with some other supports in the community).