

Promising Strategies:

Utah Workforce Services and The Road Home *A Public/Private Partnership to End Family Homelessness*

Salt Lake City, Utah

Overview

A partnership between the Utah Department of Workforce Services (Workforce Services) and The Road Home has helped over 1,000 families quickly exit homelessness. Workforce Services co-locates staff at The Road Home to help families get connected to benefits and provide the intensive employment services they need to quickly find jobs. Workforce Services also provides Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) resources to The Road Home to cover the first four months of families' rent while rapidly re-housed parents are searching for employment. The Road Home offers housing search assistance, mobile case management services, and any additional rental assistance that families require to achieve housing stability. Both agencies' resources are being used to provide an integrated employment and housing intervention that helps families stabilize in their own housing quickly and avoid future homelessness.

History

The Road Home is the largest family homeless service provider in Utah and offers a wide range of services including emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing. Until recently, The Road Home also operated a winter overflow shelter program that received state funding from Workforce Services. In 2008, The Road Home decided to test an emerging new practice: rapid re-housing. Workforce Services allowed The Road Home to use state funds intended for the winter overflow shelter program to pilot rapid re-housing. The demonstration was a success. Families were quickly housed and did not return to homelessness. Since families moved out of shelter faster, it alleviated the strain on shelter capacity, which diminished the need for a winter overflow program.

The pilot provided clear evidence that rapid re-housing could work for Utah families. When new federal funds became available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to help low-income families and at-risk and homeless people impacted by the recession, state

and local officials chose to invest much of these new resources in rapid re-housing. In Salt Lake City, The Road Home weaved together both state and local ARRA funds from Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) and the TANF Emergency Contingency Fund (ECF), to offer rapid re-housing to the rising number of families seeking shelter services.

Program Description

Shortly after families enter The Road Home's emergency shelter program, they are connected to an onsite staff person from Workforce Services. The staff person makes sure families receive the benefits they are eligible for, assesses parents' employment barriers, and connects families to work supports (including child care and transportation) that help parents transition quickly to employment. Because Workforce Services administers both the TANF program and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program, they have a wide array of resources and supports to help low-income parents find employment, including services for parents with very limited job skills. Workforce Services staff also have expertise in identifying people with disabilities and helping them get connected to benefits and employment services that are best suited to meet their needs. This includes expediting eligible families' receipt of SSI.

While Workforce Services works to connect parents to jobs and the work supports they need to succeed, The Road Home works to help families get back into housing of their own. Families receive help looking for housing and negotiating with landlords, help paying the rent, and follow-up case management services to ensure they are transitioning successfully into their new housing. The Road Home uses a progressive engagement approach to delivering both rental assistance and case management services. Communities using a progressive engagement approach typically provide minimal amounts of assistance to all families initially and then extend or intensify the assistance provided on an as-needed basis.

Families who are rapidly re-housed receive TANF-funded rental assistance for four months. During this time, parents are expected to work closely with Workforce Services to find employment. Once housed, caseworkers use an ongoing assessment process to evaluate whether families are on the path to being able to pay the rent independently. For many families, the four months of assistance is all that is required. Families that require more assistance receive it. The Road Home uses other state and federal housing funds to pay for the additional months of rental assistance that families may require before assuming rental payments on their own. In the past, the extended rental assistance was funded with HPRP. The Road Home is now relying on funds from other U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs, including the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program and HOME tenant-based rental assistance. On average, families exit the rapid re-housing program

after receiving five months of rental assistance. Only one in eight families has received more than 12 months of rental assistance.

A similar progressive engagement approach is used for case management services. An ongoing assessment of how families are progressing toward achieving their goals determines whether The Road Home and Workforce Services intensifies, extends, or tapers off supportive services. Families who require only minimal amounts of case management and employment services receive only limited amounts. This allows the caseworkers to spend more time with families who require more help to stabilize in their new housing. The ongoing assessment process has also helped The Road Home identify the subset of families who requires ongoing and intensive support services to stay stably housed. These families may be transferred to The Road Home's permanent supportive housing or transitional housing programs. Occasionally families can be transferred out of the rapid re-housing program without having to relocate – the source of the subsidy shifts and the family stays in their current housing.

Outcomes

Over 1,000 families received rapid re-housing assistance to move out of shelter and back into housing of their own. With rapid re-housing, the average family shelter stay dropped from 71 days to 26 days. About half of the families transitioned out of the program after receiving an average of five months of rental assistance and case management support. The average cost of serving the families who have exited to date is approximately \$4,900.

The majority of families, 87 percent, do not return to shelter. The Road Home is working to further minimize returns to shelter. They are working to ensure that families who have a housing crisis after being re-housed are quickly reconnected to services that can help them avoid an eviction or find new housing. The Road Home also continues to work with families who lose housing after receiving rapid re-housing assistance to help them achieve housing stability and a permanent end to their homelessness. The Road Home has re-housed nearly half of the families who returned to shelter.

Rapid re-housing allowed The Road Home to respond to the sharp increase in the number of families seeking shelter during the recession without increasing shelter capacity or being forced to turn away families. By reducing the amount of time families spent homeless, The Road Home was able to free up shelter beds to accommodate other families in need and funds that might have been used to increase shelter capacity were instead used to help families get back into housing.

Funding Outlook

Utah Workforce Services and The Road Home are committed to continuing and deepening their successful partnership to end homelessness for families in Salt Lake City despite the end of the ARRA funding that allowed them to offer it to a broad group of families.

Funding from the ARRA-funded TANF ECF ended in 2011. Workforce Services, however, continues to provide state TANF resources to pay for the first four months of rental assistance for families who are rapidly re-housed. The agency also continues to locate a staff person at The Road Home shelter program to help parents find and maintain employment. Workforce Services is also working to increase the amount of employment assistance families receive. When parents find work more quickly, they need less rental assistance. This enables scarce resources for rapid re-housing to go further.

The HPRP program ended in September 2012. This marked a significant reduction in the community's resources to support homeless families. The Road Home has decided that continuing to rapidly re-house families is the most efficient use of available resources. Maintaining their investment in rapid re-housing will require reallocating resources from other interventions, including transitional housing.

Lessons Learned – Observations from Utah Workforce Services

By working together, TANF agencies and family homelessness programs can achieve a more efficient and effective response to most families' housing crises. Rapid re-housing also improves families' well-being by minimizing the length of time they are homeless and the accompanying stress of living in shelters or in places unfit for human habitation.

Workforce Services has found many benefits to helping the families they serve get established in housing as soon as possible. It is difficult for the agency to meet its mission of helping low-income people find and maintain employment when its client is a homeless parent with children. When parents are homeless they are more concerned about finding a safe place to sleep and protecting their children than finding employment. It is also difficult for parents to find jobs, or assess whether a job will be accessible, until they know where they are going to live.

Workforce Services leaders report that it is important for agencies administering TANF and WIA to work with housing and homeless service providers to create a workable and mutually beneficial partnership. For homeless organizations, the chief mission is to keep families out of shelters and in housing. The primary mission of TANF and WIA agencies is to help families

achieve self-sufficiency through employment. As partners, homeless and TANF/WIA agencies can embrace a joint mission of keeping families in homes through employment. For most families, it is income from employment that allows them to stay housed, and once families are re-housed they are very motivated to keep that housing. This reinforces parents' commitment to achieving their employment goals.

By partnering with a homeless services organization, Workforce Services is able to offer its clients an integrated employment and housing intervention that weaves together the broad expertise needed to help families achieve both stable housing and employment. Together, the homeless service organization and the TANF/WIA agency share the responsibility and the credit for families' outcomes.

Other lessons learned by Workforce Services include the following.

- When TANF funds are used, there must be an expectation of finding work as soon as possible. Cooperation with finding work is mandatory. Coaching, information, and help are what the family can expect when looking for work.
- Clear referral pathways and communication between housing case managers and the employment staff makes all the difference. Families hear the same expectations and concerns from staff of both agencies and both agencies are working toward the same goals.
- Workforce Service staff provide families with job search assistance. Their sole job is to help unemployed people find work and this expertise is critical to help families find employment. The Road Home housing case managers know the kind of supports that families need to achieve safety and housing - they have the expertise needed to address families' housing needs. It takes teamwork to provide the full range of services families require to achieve their housing and employment goals. The outcomes of stable housing and employment complement each other and are a logical desire of any family.

Lessons Learned – Observations from The Road Home

The Road Home prioritizes developing partnerships with public and private agencies that help them offer rich services to their clients. Workforce Services, from the frontline workers to state leaders, fully recognize and embrace homeless people as a key part of their constituency. Workforce Services has been willing to be flexible and develop new strategies that allow them to better serve people experiencing homelessness.

The Road Home encourages coordination with Workforce Services across all organizational levels. The Road Home case managers work closely with Workforce Services employment staff to coordinate services to families. The Road Home case managers are encouraged to attend Workforce Services trainings and The Road Home regularly hosts tours of their shelter programs for Workforce Services staff. Before implementing any new initiative, all involved staff from both agencies meet to ensure all participants have a shared vision of the project goals.

Developing partnerships with agencies providing services that are critical to improving the lives of homeless and at-risk families is time consuming but critical. It allows The Road Home to offer richer interventions to families and helps to improve both family and agency outcomes.

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