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## Responding to Chronic Homelessness Project Profile

Focus on: **Prevention: Supports to Obtain and Retain Housing**

Focus on: **Health Related Services**

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### Supportive Housing Initiative Act Project County of Santa Barbara

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#### **Activity Description**

*Why:* The high needs, complex clients with serious mental illness and multiple risk factors for housing instability, were getting lost in the system, were not getting well and recidivating through all aspects of service delivery resulting in higher costs.

*What:* Two intensive case management teams, one in each geographic region of the County, were created to enable at least 106 adults with serious mental illness and multiple risk factors for housing instability to obtain and maintain permanent, stable, affordable housing in the community. Permanent housing units affordable to extremely low income and homeless people were provided through Section 8 vouchers.

*Partners:* Five County departmental and nonprofit agencies working as a collaborative:

- Santa Barbara County Alcohol Drug and Mental Health Services (ADMHS)
- Work Training Program (WTP)
- Transitions Mental Health (TMHA)
- Sanctuary Psychiatric Center of Santa Barbara (SPCSB)
- Santa Barbara Mental Health Association (SBMHA)

*Significant Program Design Features:*

#### **Service Delivery**

- consumer driven
- based on the accepted PACT model
- provided “wrap-around” services
- available 24/7
- provided *in vivo* in the tenant’s apartment or community.
- caseloads no larger than 10
- 3 weekly contacts per client; multiple daily contacts if client need demands

#### **Housing**

- TMHA provides 20 units of permanent housing
- WTP/ SPCSB provide 12 units housing
- no limit on length of stay in the housing units
- participation in services not a condition of occupancy
- clients do not lose their housing unless they do not fulfill their tenancy obligations as outlined in their lease.

## **Funding Sources**

### Originally:

- Federal Section 8 Vouchers<sup>1</sup>
- State of California Supportive Housing Initiative Act Funds
- State of California AB 2034 Funds
- Santa Barbara Mental Health Association down payment loan program (HAP)

### Post-expiration of SHIA grant:

- Federal Section 8 Vouchers
- Medi-Cal Reimbursements: a distinguishing mark of this project is that it was able to supplant SHIA funding and support its budget through Medi-Cal reimbursements for care provided to clients.

## **Outcomes**

Client census through June, 2004: 117 (North Team: 61; South Team: 56)

### *Housing stability*

- Most clients once settled into independent living remained consistently in the same housing. Sixteen clients left housing due to: evictions (5), move to more restrictive care (1), relocations (3), deaths (2), transfer to Board and Cares awaiting transition to independent living (3), and homeless (1).

### *Treatment and satisfaction*

- Clients appear to be more hopeful about their recovery and have created future oriented goals, and from Consumer Satisfaction with Mental Health Surveys, case studies and observations, evidence an increase in the quality of life and satisfaction with services received. (However, it appears that clients may feel more comfortable reporting higher quality of life satisfaction as opposed to service satisfaction due to their past negative experiences with the system.)
- Many clients, once enrolled and settled into the SHIA program, appeared to engage successfully and consistently in appropriate services and activities. (Very few clients discharged from SHIA to re-enter more restrictive levels of care or for medical necessity.)
- The careful planning of treatment and services for each client provides an opportunity for a sense of independence and responsibility for their recovery process. This also appears to reduce their dissatisfaction with care, and clients tend to remain in programs for longer periods of time.

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<sup>1</sup> In year three of the SHIA grant, the program experienced difficulty obtaining Section 8 vouchers from the Housing Authority that had been dedicated to the SHIA Project. Due to a freeze on vouchers, the Santa Barbara County Housing Authority was unable to fulfill their agreement with the SHIA program for a total of twenty vouchers for the North SHIA Team. The North SHIA Team received a total of sixteen vouchers from the County by grant ending. The program received 20 vouchers dedicated by the City Housing Authority for the South SHIA Team. The City Housing Authority was also able to extend five more vouchers towards the end of the grant due to the success of the program and clients in independent living.

### *Vocational rehabilitation*

- Approximately 30% of clients enroll in various forms of vocational rehabilitation services and are at different stages in this process. (There is reluctance from clients to get involved in work related activities that could dramatically impact a client's SSI benefits, however, this gradually shifted over the last year.)
- Several clients are now interested in beginning with volunteer work and then gradually shifting into small part-time jobs.
- The program is looking to shift some clients into consumer run activities as a way to engage in the employment field. Clients who have made this shift have appeared more hopeful about their recovery and have maintained high levels of independence within their community.

### *Cost savings*

- Over the course of the three years the program was able to provide a significant cost savings to the county system. These clients were high utilizers of the system, especially the emergency/crisis system. They were also clients that were not being served appropriately by the current system. These data clearly indicate a dramatic decrease in the amount of admissions into higher care services. This reflects a 65.9% drop once SHIA began providing intensive case management services.
- These clients still access the higher care system, but not as frequently and also enter short-term psychiatric units rather than residential emergency care units. During these admissions, SHIA clients experienced a significant reduction in the length of time they spent in higher care services. This significant drop of 90.7% has not only impacted the system financially, but has also allowed room for clients other than SHIA to receive much needed higher care services. The result for SHIA clients is that they have become confident about their recovery and self-symptom management thus enhancing their quality of life.
- The total costs of higher care services also shows a significant drop of 76.1% once SHIA began providing services. Clients continued to need higher care services on occasion due to the cyclical nature of mental illness and the predictable relapses on the road to recovery. However, the length of stay for clients was reduced drastically due to the consumer involved supportive services, the discharge planning and the continuity of care that the SHIA project provides.
- SHIA clients continued to benefit from a variety of outpatient services that were used to enhance the current SHIA services. Although SHIA clients receive more services and increased contact there is still a cost savings to the County system. Clients are more likely to efficiently use the correct services because SHIA closely collaborates and monitors treatment plan development and subsequent services to match the individual needs of each client.

### *Systems Implications*

- Initially, SHIA was viewed as an addendum to the Alcohol Drug and Mental Health service delivery system of care. In some instances, parts of the system became rejecting of the program. Over the life of the grant, the collaborative SHIA program worked patiently and persistently to achieve a full integration into the Mental Health system. This unique program has now become a centerpiece for future program planning in order to produce a system-wide transformation.

- The strong collaborative relationships derived from the SHIA grant are the impetus for the community's collective "whatever it takes" attitude to sustain and grow our program no matter what.

### **Places Where Similar Work is Underway**

Contra Costa County: Project Coming Home

San Francisco: Direct Access to Housing

Los Angeles: Skid Row Collaborative

Santa Clara County: Off the Streets Team and Navigator Project

Most AB 34-funded programs