

MEMORANDUM

TO: Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness and Housing

FROM: HomeBase

DATE: July 25, 2008

RE: Rapid Rehousing for Families – Strategies and the Current NOFA

I. Introduction

Across the country, homeless service providers are struggling to continue serving their clientele amidst across-the-board budget cuts. However, in this year's NOFA, Congress has included an opportunity to apply for funding for a Rapid Rehousing Demonstration project, a housing strategy that the RSC members have years of experience with.

HomeBase's 1991 conference titled "Off the Streets and Out of the Shelters: Homeless People Regain Housing," gathered the homelessness community to discuss solutions to homelessness, especially different ways to connect people experiencing homelessness to long-term housing. The conference focused heavily on what would later become known as Rapid Rehousing – a combination of rental and housing search assistance, relationships with landlords, and comprehensive case management.

Since 2005, the Regional Steering Committee has studied family homelessness several times. In September and November of 2005, the RSC closely examined the characteristics of homeless families, the causes of family homelessness, and some of the most effective ways to address the problem, including rapid rehousing. The July and October 2007 RSC meetings also focused on the issue, presenting the latest research and methods for collaborating across communities to end family homelessness.

In this year's NOFA, Congress has allocated a one-time sum of \$25 million (minus \$1.25 million for evaluation) over three years for rapid rehousing demonstration projects across the country, for which Continua of Care (CoCs) may apply through this year's Homeless Assistance Grants competition.

II. Setting the Context – History and Theory of Rapid Rehousing

a. Family Homelessness

Every year, 600,000 families, including 1.35 million children, experience homelessness.¹ Homeless families are often young, with very little experience as leaseholders; those that have lived in their own housing are likely to have faced an eviction or frequent moves.² Since homeless families generally have incomes significantly below the poverty level and low levels of education, they generally need help both obtaining and staying in stable housing.

¹ Culhane, D. (2004). Family Homelessness: Where to from here? Presentation by Dr. Dennis Culhane, University of Pennsylvania Professor of Social Welfare Policy, Delivered October 14, 2004 to the National Alliance to End Homelessness Conference on Ending Family Homelessness. PowerPoint available online at <http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1044>

² Nat'l Alliance to End Homelessness, Family Homelessness in Our Nation and Community: A Problem With a Solution (2005) (available online at <http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1224>)

b. Rapid Rehousing History and Theory

Numerous studies have indicated that housing subsidies are an effective way to end family homelessness.³ In a national survey, the most common immediate reason that families became homeless was that they “couldn’t pay the rent.”⁴ Some families will require long-term, extensive support to remain housed, and those families are better suited to extended stays in transitional housing or permanent supportive housing. However, other poor families become homeless because of an unexpected life change, such as a job loss or a new child, and can get back on their feet with only short-term support. A short-term, shallow rental subsidy, coupled with assistance increasing education and income, is an ideal solution for many families.

Rapid rehousing programs differ in the nature and extent of the support they provide. Some programs connect families with Section 8 vouchers or other subsidized housing, while other programs focus on increasing a family’s self-sufficiency and decreasing the amount of time that families rely on public support to maintain their housing. However, all rapid rehousing programs operate on the theory that getting families into their own housing as quickly as possible is both in the best interests of the family and the most effective way of providing them with services. Evidence suggests that families may be more receptive to services and more willing to focus on long-term goals when in their own homes, instead of in the chaotic, stressful shelter environment.⁵

Getting families quickly into their own housing is a cost-effective means of addressing family homelessness. In Massachusetts, for example, a 3.5-month shelter stay costs \$10,900 per family, while rental housing costs around \$1,000 per month. Many families have much longer shelter stays, which costs “an average of \$48,500 per family... which would be equivalent to five or more years of a full federal rental subsidy.”⁶ Many families do not need full rental subsidies, which allows for even more savings. Program costs differ greatly between programs, depending upon the level of financial assistance the program provides and how long the program offers case management services. Even the most expensive programs, however, are no more expensive (and often cheaper) than housing a family in an emergency shelter for 4 months.⁷

Families in rapid rehousing programs tend to be successful in maintaining their own stable housing and staying out of the shelter system. Many programs report as much or more than 75-80% of families remaining housed after graduating from a rapid rehousing program.

Provider Example: Beyond Shelter, Los Angeles, CA

Three years after Beyond Shelter placed families in their own housing using the “housing first” model and provided optional, time-limited case management services after placement, 88% retained permanent housing. 66% were in the same apartment they’d moved into 3 years previously, and those who had moved were in similar or improved housing. 80% of participants were still paying their rent on time.⁸

³ Khadduri, Jill, Housing Vouchers are Critical for Ending Family Homelessness, (National Alliance to End Homelessness 2008).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ National Alliance to End Homelessness, Rapid Rehousing (2008).

⁶ Culhane, D., and Stephen Metraux, Rearranging the Deck Chairs or Reallocating the Lifeboats?, Journal of the American Planning Association, Winter 2008, vol. 74, No. 1, page 118.

⁷ National Alliance to End Homelessness, Housing First for Families: Research to Support the Development of a Housing First for Families Training Curriculum, 17 (2004)

⁸ *Id.*

Provider Example: Rapid Exit Program, Hennepin County, MN

Two years after entering the program, through which families are placed in market housing as quickly as possible and provided with follow-up case management services for six months, 85% of families remained permanently housed. The homeless episodes of those families that did return to homelessness were reduced from 30 to ten days.⁹

III. This NOFA and Rapid Rehousing

This NOFA has very specific requirements for the Demonstration Program applications.

Eligible Applicants

Each CoC is allowed to submit one project for the Rapid Rehousing Demonstration Program. The CoC must have a centralized intake for families with dependent children. This centralized intake may be either an assessment hotline, a single point of entry, a central intake facility, or a centralized group of people that is standardized across the CoC, and it is responsible for assessing homeless persons as part of screening individuals and families into the proper housing placements and service needs. Additionally, the CoC must have a single assessment tool that it uses to assess all families.

Eligible Beneficiaries

To be eligible to receive a subsidy under the rapid rehousing demonstration program, families must meet the following requirements:

- Must have dependent children
- Must have resided in an emergency shelter or on the street for at least seven consecutive days
- Must be able to sustain either subsidized or unsubsidized housing independently at the end of the subsidy – to this end, the agency must be able to prove that the families will be adequately assessed.
- Must have at least one of the following barriers to housing:
 - o A temporary financial strain that will not impact the family's ability to independently maintain its housing at the end of the subsidy
 - o Inadequate employment or loss of employment. The family must have, or be willing to obtain, employment that increases the income of the household to such a degree that it can independently sustain housing at the end of the short-term housing assistance
 - o Inadequate childcare resources
 - o A head of household with a low level of education or low command of the English language, but who is willing to obtain the education and/or language skills necessary to obtain employment and maintain housing
 - o Legal problems; the agency has the discretion to determine which legal problems it will address
 - o Mental health diagnosis that does not greatly impact the household's ability to independently sustain housing
 - o A history of substance abuse, but no active abuse
 - o Poor rental history, including up to three evictions

⁹ *Id.* at 18.

- Poor credit history

Eligible Activities

Activities under the demonstration program must be administered in accordance with the Supporting Housing Program, Transitional Housing component, but eligible activities are more limited. Under the demonstration program, the following activities are funded:

- Administration (up to five percent of the grant)
- Eligible housing activities
 - Leasing (up to 18 months)
 - One household may receive leasing dollars one time for three to six months or for 12-15 months, as determined at the time of the assessment.
- Supportive services: no more than 30% of total eligible program activities (grant total minus administrative costs). Eligible supportive services are:
 - Housing placement
 - Case management
 - Legal assistance
 - Literacy training
 - Job training
 - Mental health services
 - Childcare services
 - Substance abuse services

Under the demonstration project, agencies will have some flexibility in how they distribute their grant money. Programs should be able to tailor their leasing subsidies to a family's need, within the above framework.

Provider Example: Hamilton First Avenues, San Francisco, CA

First Avenues provides rental subsidies for up to 12 months. Families are responsible for paying 50% of their income, and the subsidies range from \$80-\$500 per month. The maximum rent a participating family can pay is 50% of their income plus the maximum monthly grant of \$500. (PLEASE NOTE: Under the Rapid Rehousing Demonstration Project, which is administered under the Supportive Housing Program, families will only be allowed to pay 30% of their income.) Since First Avenues' goal is to move families into independence, the grant may not be applied to subsidized housing like the Housing Authority. (PLEASE NOTE: Under the Rapid Rehousing Demonstration Project, families will be able to apply the subsidy to otherwise subsidized housing.) First Avenues subsidies may be applied to housing outside of San Francisco, as long as the family's income does not decrease and the family continues to work on its plan to increase income.¹⁰

Provider Example: Family Housing Collaborative, Columbus, OH

In addition to short-term rental subsidies, the Family Housing Collaborative (FHC) offers monetary assistance to facilitate immediate move-ins, including the first month's rent and

¹⁰ National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) Conference Call, "Designing a Local Housing Subsidy Program," March 13, 2008, with Beth Stokes.

security deposit. FHC also offers assistance in paying utility bills in the event of a power shut-off or similar.¹¹

Supportive services are one of the major pillars of successful rapid rehousing programs. Without them, families have little hope of either increasing their income or decreasing their expenses.

Provider Example: Safe Home Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA

Safe Home provides services ranging from school enrollment to assisting families in obtaining health insurance to providing necessary furniture. Safe Home has discovered that home visits for supportive services are absolutely crucial in making sure that families remain housed. In the first “wave” of clients that Safe Home served, home visits were not part of the program, and only 78% of clients remained housed. Of the second wave, which utilized home visits, 90% of clients remained housed. Home visits begin immediately after a family moves into its own housing; the case manager uses the visit to determine what the family really needs most, and to ensure that services are actually being provided successfully.¹²

Provider Example: Beyond Shelter, Los Angeles, CA

Beyond Shelter begins case management services while a family is being rehoused, and services continue for a time after the family is housed. Families are given help in job training and placement, childcare, money management, and family and life skills such as nutrition, parenting, and homemaking.¹³

Provider Example: The Supportive Housing for Families Program, CT

Supportive services are a keystone to the Supportive Housing for Families Program (SHFP). Case managers visit families in their homes every week (again, an essential element of service provision), helping the family develop an action plan and coordinating the family’s services. Services include substance abuse treatment, parenting training, childcare, transportation, education, and vocational training. SHFP generally provides services for 12-18 months after a family is housed, but will provide services for up to 2 years depending on the needs of the family.

Additional Criteria

HUD also requires applicants to be ranked in a number of other criteria, described below.

First Criterion: Applicant experience in operating Rapid Rehousing for Families Projects: previous, specific agency and staff experience operating rapid rehousing projects for homeless households with dependent children and/or agency staff experience operating traditional housing programs for homeless households with dependent children. The agency is also scored

¹¹ NAEH Conference Call, “Rapid Rehousing Strategies for Families,” September 13, 2007, with Tom Albanese.

¹² NAEH Conference Call, “Rapid Rehousing Strategies for Families,” September 13, 2007, with Phyllis Ryan Jackson.

¹³ <http://www.beyondshelter.org/home.html>

on whether or not this previous performance was measured. This criterion is worth up to 25 points.

Some Thoughts about Criterion One

It is important to note that previous experience in providing rapid rehousing is not a threshold requirement under the demonstration project, and points will also be awarded to agencies that have experience operating traditional housing programs for homeless households with dependent children. Therefore, CoCs that have no agency with experience in rapid rehousing for families are still eligible to apply for this grant.

Second Criterion: Assessment process: The CoC will also be scored on how well it assesses families for entry into rapid rehousing and other programs. This criterion is worth up to 20 points. To what extent does the applicant demonstrate:

- a. Appropriate criteria for determining whether a family is eligible for the demonstration project

Provider Example: Hamilton First Avenues, San Francisco, CA

First Avenues provides shallow, short-term rental subsidies for market-rate housing. To be eligible for the program, families must be able to increase their income enough to sustain themselves in their housing without support at the end of the subsidy. To ensure that families will be able to achieve this goal, they are thoroughly assessed upon entry into Hamilton's emergency family shelter. Each family must have at least one member working or about to transition from CalWORKS job training to employment. As part of the initial assessment, First Avenues obtains the family's credit report (an expense included in the program's budget) and ascertains the family's employment history. At First Avenues, increasing income doesn't mean only increasing the amount of income coming in each month – it also includes decreasing expenses, like transportation and childcare costs. There is no set formula for determining which families will be able to increase their incomes, so in addition to the assessment tools described above, the family participates in an exit interview with Hamilton shelter staff, transitional housing staff, and permanent housing staff to identify the family's goals and create a feasible plan to increase the family's income. First Avenues has found that creating an income plan upon the family's acceptance has been very successful.¹⁴

Provider Example: Safe Home Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA

The Safe Home Philadelphia also focuses on the family's own strengths and goals as a means to increasing self-sufficiency. In addition, during assessment the program gathers as much information as possible about the family's rental history, utility history, and employment history to ensure that the family's goals are achievable and to identify the areas in which the family needs the most assistance.¹⁵

- b. The types of services and referrals that will be made to households based upon the assessment, regardless of whether the family is eligible for the demonstration program

¹⁴ NAEH Conference Call with Beth Stokes.

¹⁵ NAEH Conference Call with Phyllis Ryan Jackson

- c. A single homeless family assessment tool used across the entire CoC (this must be attached to the application)

An effective assessment tool is essential to make sure that families get the services most appropriate for them. If families do not get the most appropriate services, then the system is ineffective and resources are wasted.

Community Example: Contra Costa County, CA

In addition to provider-specific assessment tools, all providers in Contra Costa County use a “matrix” to properly assess the status and needs of their consumers. Upon intake, case managers designate the family or individual’s position on a spectrum from “crisis” to “thriving” for a range of issue areas, including (among many others) housing, health, employment, and life skills. The matrix ensures that all families are assessed with the same criteria and are appropriately assigned to housing and/or services.

Community Example: Portland, OR

In the Portland, Oregon area, four counties have partnered to develop Bridges to Housing, a moderately centralized approach to assessment and targeting. All counties use a common screening and assessment tool, but assessment is performed by each individual provider. A short screening process rates families based on level of need. Families with a low level of need receive short-term assistance and emergency aid. Families with a moderate level of need receive short-term subsidized housing and services. Families with a high level of need receive temporary housing and comprehensive services. Assessment is based on the family’s strengths, goals and priorities, and all service providers are trained in assessment to ensure consistency.¹⁶

Third Criterion: Applicant relationship with mainstream community social services: It is important that the applicant maintain relationships with mainstream service providers, to ensure both that families are provided with all necessary services and that the burden of providing these services does not fall solely on the applicant. This criterion is worth up to 15 points. Can the applicant demonstrate that it has a variety of mainstream, community-based social services with which it routinely connects? Does the applicant have formal agreements or Memoranda of Understanding with these services?

Community Example: Columbus, OH

The Columbus Family Housing Collaborative relies on the collaboration of different agencies throughout the city to meet the needs of consumers. Columbus has a network of agencies that do not provide shelter, but which work together to employ skilled case management staff. Columbus relies on written agreements with mainstream service providers to ensure that the relationship between the Family Housing Collaborative and the service provider can withstand staff turnover.¹⁷

Provider Example: Safe Home Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA

¹⁶ Jue, Maylin, et. al., Ideas for Targeting and Assessment for Homeless Families (Preliminary Findings), Goldman School of Public Policy (2008) (available at <http://www.homebaseccc.org/PDFs/RSC/04.18.08.ShelterAlternativesPowerPoint.6.pdf>)

¹⁷ NAEH Conference Call with Tom Albanese.

Safe Home links families in the program with neighborhood and mainstream resources so that families get the help they need. These include child welfare services, health services, and (innovatively) City Car Share. Safe Home has found that mainstream service providers are more likely to become involved with homeless families if they are convinced that it will save money in the long run; Safe Home stresses the fact that housed people use fewer public resources than homeless people.¹⁸

Fourth Criterion: Applicant ability to maintain an affordable housing stock: If providers are to quickly place families in affordable housing, it is essential that there is a sufficient pool of housing from which to draw. This criterion is worth up to 15 points.

- a. Is there a formalized process for providing outreach to local landlords already used across the CoC?
- b. Does the applicant already have a process through which it maintains relationships with local landlords?
- c. Does the applicant have a formalized protocol for dealing with conflicts between landlords and system participants?
- d. Does the applicant have a system in place to locate landlords for participation in the project and to track the units that can be leased through grant funds?

Applicants will likely not be responsible for actually maintaining an affordable housing stock, as that requirement would be far beyond the scope of most providers' activities. Rather, maintaining relationships with landlords is the focus of this criterion. Providers of rapid rehousing projects say that maintaining strong relationships with local landlords is one of the most important elements of a successful program.¹⁹

Provider Example: Family Housing Collaborative, Columbus, OH

Columbus' Family Housing Collaborative (FHC) maintains formal relationships with local landlords. FHC draws up an agreement with a landlord that it updates annually. The agreement outlines the relationship between FHC, the landlord, and the consumer, the responsibilities of the parties, the preferences the landlord has in terms of referrals from FHC, FHC's role in responding to and mediating landlord concerns about lease compliance, and procedural duties, such as who fills out the housing application. FHC holds regular meetings with its partner landlords to address any issues that may have arisen. Additionally, FHC facilitates direct, day-to-day coordination and dialogue between caseworkers and landlords and public housing site managers.²⁰

Provider Example: Safe Home Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA

Safe Home maintains less formal relationships, but is involved with more than 30 landlords. Safe Home works with landlords to encourage them bypass credit and housing checks for Safe Home clients.

Provider Example: Hamilton First Avenues, San Francisco, CA

¹⁸ NAEH Conference Call with Phyllis Ryan Jackson

¹⁹ NAEH Conference Call with Tom Albanese.

²⁰ *Id.*

First Avenues maintains eviction prevention specialists who work with partner landlords to mediate disputes and advocate on behalf of clients. First Avenues focuses on establishing open communication with landlords to facilitate cooperation. First Avenues sends the program's newsletter to all participating landlords, so that the landlords understand the program's structure and activities. Additionally, First Avenues has found that the December holidays are the best time to conduct outreach to new landlords – each year, the program sends holiday cards to current and potential landlords.²¹

Fifth Criterion: CoCs Centralized Intake for Households with Dependent Children: the CoC must demonstrate that centralized intake exists for households with dependent children within the CoC that is well advertised to the community and easily accessible by households with dependent children. This criterion is worth up to 20 points.

Community Example: Columbus, OH

The Columbus CoC operates a single “front door” for all families who enter the homeless service system. All families in a housing crisis go to one shelter, where they are assessed. Some families are admitted into the shelter, and approximately one third of these families are referred to the Family Housing Collaborative for housing placement and/or transitional support.²²

Community Example: Connecting Point, San Francisco, CA

All families seeking shelter in San Francisco go through Connecting Point, where intake and assessment are performed. Connecting Point places families in appropriate shelter, including some into rapid rehousing programs. As part of its intake, Connecting Point also offers assistance in job hunting, school enrollment, childcare, mental health care, and other services intended to stabilize families. Compass, Connecting Point's operating agency, is active in the community, publicizing the issue of family homelessness and making local families aware of where to go in a housing crisis.

Community Example: Washington D.C.

Families entering the city shelter system are directed to a central intake site, where they are assessed for appropriate housing placement. Appropriate families are placed into the city's Community Care Grant Program, the local rapid rehousing program.

Sixth Criterion: HMIS bed coverage rate for households with dependent children. This criterion is worth up to five points on a sliding scale for CoC HIMS coverage of emergency shelters serving households with dependent children. Full points will be awarded if a CoC has a beds coverage rate of at least 65% (total number of emergency shelter beds of households with dependent children entered into HMIS as listed on Housing Inventory Chart divided by the total number of year-round emergency shelter beds for households with dependent children from the Housing Inventory Chart, not including beds provided by domestic violence providers. In the case of a tie between projects, preference will be given to those communities who participated in AHAR 3.

²¹ NAEH Conference Call with Beth Stokes.

²² NAEH Conference Call with Tom Albanese.

IV. Analysis

HUD has created very specific requirements for the Rapid Rehousing Demonstration Project, and many communities should not expect to be able to meet them in such a short period of time. However, other communities may be able to expand or shift already existing programs to qualify for the demonstration project. For example, a community could alter its assessment tool to more efficiently triage families, or make plans to expand the use of an assessment tool across the CoC. Additionally, many of the procedures outlined above are examples of best practices for implementing rapid rehousing programs regardless of the demonstration project. Communities may find it useful to begin implementing the above changes to their rapid rehousing programs, in case a similar funding program for rapid rehousing is included in the reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

V. Conclusion

Family homelessness is a growing problem in the United States, and rapid rehousing is a proven solution. The providers and communities sampled above offer some of the most effective ways to implement a rapid rehousing program. The Rapid Rehousing Demonstration Project, though complex enough that many communities will not qualify for it, provides a much-needed source of funding for homeless assistance programs during an economic recession. All communities should seriously consider the strategies outlined in this memo, regardless of whether or not they will qualify for funding under the demonstration project.

VI. Discussion

- a. What are the most challenging elements of the Rapid Rehousing Demonstration Project for your community?
- b. In what ways can your community alter/adapt already existing tools and programs to meet the requirements of the demonstration program?
- c. Are there best practices for some of the demonstration project requirements already happening in your community? What are they?

For further information, please contact Ashley Hart, HomeBase intern, via email at ashleynhart@gmail.com or by phone at (415) 788-7961.