

Housing Assistance Centers

Key Concepts

Housing assistance centers aim to provide responsive services to individuals and families in need of support during difficult times. Services include identifying housing problems, offering a flexible approach to housing, and providing support, counseling and other services. Housing assistance centers will be more assertive and intervene before a person becomes homeless.

To expand homeless prevention services, each multi-service center will support a housing assistance center. This furthers the goal of multi-service centers being a one-stop site to resolve problems homeless people face. Housing assistance centers can help individuals and families find housing and serve as a source for housing-related information.

Housing assistance centers will also host **Eviction Prevention Teams** and expand existing prevention services. Eviction Prevention Teams will educate both landlords and tenants about the rights and obligations of each in providing and maintaining affordable rental housing. This way unnecessary evictions can be prevented without the need for emergency cash assistance in instances where the tenant lacks such knowledge.

Other services Housing Assistance Centers may provide include:

- Emergency rental assistance
- Case management and wrap around services
- Housing search assistance
- Explanation of subsidy program
- Inform tenants as to their rights and responsibilities
- Legal assistance
- Landlord mediation and tenant education
- Money management
- Credit counseling.

EXAMPLES AND COMMON SOLUTIONS

Program	Philadelphia Housing Support Center (Philadelphia, PA)
Web Information	www.endhomelessness.org
Practice Used	<p>Background:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Housing Support Center is a joint venture between the Department of Human Service child welfare agency and Adult Services, as well as the Good Neighbors Make Good Neighborhoods program and the Family Unification Program. After the programs inception resources were garnered from other social service systems as well, providing a strong central system that serves as a link between the shelter system and permanent housing with increased effectiveness for preventing homelessness. • The Center concentrates on five main strategies including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ prevention and diversion ⊖ shortening the length of stay in shelter ⊖ developing and accessing more permanent housing ⊖ increasing connections to mainstream services ⊖ using a housing first approach <p>Sources of Funding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For permanent housing, the Center relies on Housing Choice Vouchers through the local public housing authority. For services accompanying permanent housing placement, the Center uses a mix of resources, including Supportive Housing Program (SHP) dollars, some Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds, in addition to a variety of other mainstream sources. • Some factors improving the success of the center in utilizing permanent housing resources are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊖ The local housing authority has one of the first “Moving-to-Work” designations from HUD. ⊖ The local housing authority has the ability to create priorities through an administrative process. ⊖ Families experiencing homelessness qualify under the definition of the Family Unification Program to receive such Housing Choice Vouchers. <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In its first year, the Center reduced the length of shelter stay and provided permanent housing with services for 500-600 families though the Good Neighbors Program and the Family unification Program as well as for an additional 100-200 families through other programs.

SELECTED RESOURCES

Online Resources

Center for Urban Community Services
www.cucs.org

Help USA
www.helpusa.org

The Housing Assistance Council
www.ruralhome.org

The National Alliance to End Homelessness
www.endhomelessness.org

Westchester County Department of Community Health
www.westchester.org

Publications

Comprehensive Services in Public Housing: Lessons from the Field (1999), Center for Community Change, www.communitychange.org.

Homeownership Education and Counseling (Spring 2003), Rural Voices, Housing Assistance Council's quarterly magazine.