

# Hennepin County, Minnesota

Population: 1.1 million (22% of state)

Includes 46 municipalities, 557 square miles

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## **Largest city: Minneapolis**

22.7% of Minneapolis residents live in poverty

25% of children live below the poverty level

45% of City's households of color have incomes below  
\$25,000 (vs. 13% of white City households)

# Hennepin's Family Homelessness Crisis 1992

- Census of homeless families in shelter increasing 35% per year, doubling every 25 months.
- All beds filled, plus 100 overflow motel rooms
- Projections: Within 1 year, 150 parents and children turned away each night
- **Hennepin County's voluntary policy of sheltering all homeless families with minor children was at stake!**

# WHY? It's not rocket science!

	<b>1986</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2005</b>
<b>Fair Market Rent: 2BR Apartment</b>	<b>\$480</b>	<b>\$621</b>	<b>\$928</b>
<b>TANF cash benefit, family of 4</b>	<b>\$621</b>	<b>\$621</b>	<b>\$621</b>

# Hennepin and Private Non-Profit GOALS

- Reduce admissions to family shelter by 10%
- Reduce length of stay in family shelter by 10%
- Buy ourselves one more year with no homeless family turnaways.
- Preserve “Shelter All” policy.

# Implementing a Strategy

- **HC led planning/implementation/evaluation.** Counties have statutory responsibility to administer public entitlements and social services in Minnesota.
- **HC obtained a state grant** to reduce/prevent family homelessness. Intent to subcontract \$\$ to non-profit partners.
- **Focus groups with homeless families:**
  - How did you become homeless?
  - What's keeping you homeless?

# PREVENTION: The Front Door

- **Choosing the intervention point:** emphasis on early intervention in financial crisis.
- **Choosing the method:** emphasis on cash and in-kind assistance, NOT services.
- **Choosing the agency to deliver prevention:**
  - Geographically dispersed non-profits
  - Pre-existing connections to extremely low-income households AND
  - In-kind resources (food shelf, low-cost car repairs, legal services, etc.) to stretch a family's budget

# Prevention....continued

- **Choosing the eligibility criteria:**
  - Non-preventable, verifiable financial crisis
  - No other resources available to pay rent
  - With one-time assistance, family can preserve housing
- **Choosing the intended outcome:**
  - 75% of households assisted will not be admitted to shelter within 1 year.
  - Contracts specify outcomes, not specific services

# Prevention.....continued

## **SERVICE MODELS**

- Early intervention: Financial/in-kind direct assistance
- Mid-stage: Legal assistance, mediation
- Late stage: Shelter Diversion funds



## Results of Prevention

- **OUTCOME:** 96-98% of families did not enter shelter within 1 year following prevention assistance
- **OUTCOME:** 43% reduction in family shelter admissions
- **OUTCOME:** Shelter-All Policy still in effect today

# **RAPID EXIT: The Back Door (Reducing Shelter Stays)**

## **Family-Reported Obstacles to Exiting Shelter:**

- 1. Cost:** About \$2000 for application fees, security deposit, first month's rent, furniture
- 2. Tenant Screening by Landlords:** Our families profile poorly—evictions, bad credit, lack of stable employment or housing history.

## **Solution #1: Cost**

- Before 1993, Hennepin County paid homeless shelter costs but family had to save TANF for housing exit costs.
- Families needed 3 months to save exit costs; Hennepin paid about \$9000 so families could save \$2000.
- Now, Hennepin guarantees housing search costs, security deposits, first month's rent, necessary furnishings from first day in shelter.

## **Solution #2: Landlord Screening**

### **Defining the Problem:**

- 1. Survey** of 3200 County clients to determine their housing screening barriers
  - Extremely Low Income, poor credit, evictions, lease violations, criminal history, etc.
  - 93% had at least one “moderately serious” or “extremely serious” screening barrier
  - Average: 3.4 barriers; 17% had 6 or more barriers.

# Landlord Screening....continued

## Defining the Problem:

### 2. Landlord Advisory Committee

Question: *What would convince you to take a chance and rent to tenants with this profile?*

Answer:

“Tenant **takes responsibility** for past problems and can **demonstrate progress** in resolving them.”

“A **credible intermediary** is available to the landlord to resolve new problems if they occur again.”

# The Rapid Exit Model

- 1. Central screening** of all families within 3 days of shelter admission to determine housing barriers.
- 2. Barrier rating** (level of difficulty in getting and keeping housing)
- 3. Referral to a Rapid Exit non-profit** for immediate re-housing in private housing market

## Rapid Exit Model...continued

4. Rapid Exit staff develop **credible intermediary role** with landlords-- who accept the families despite their barriers.
5. Rapid Exit staff work with family and landlord for **6 months** after re-housing to assure stability.
6. **Services end and family remains in housing.**
7. **Little or no rent subsidy** available to the vast majority of families.

## Results of Rapid Exit

- **OUTCOME:** 95% of families assisted with rapid Exit do not return to shelter within 12 months of case closing.
- **OUTCOME:** Length of stay in shelter reduced from approx 100 days in 1992 to 30 days today.
- **OUTCOME:** Savings to Hennepin County in the millions of dollars!



# WHY? It's not rocket science!

- Poor families often spend 80% of their income on rent and utilities.
- One episode of bad luck or bad judgment means they cannot pay the rent....and lose their housing.
- 10% of people who rely on public assistance become homeless in a single year... but 90% do not. It is possible to be poor and have stable housing in the community.
- The families were in housing before their crisis and they can return to housing after their crisis.

# “Secrets of Our Success”

- Intimate **partnership** between the public and private sectors
- **Outcome-focused** services: adjust the methods to achieve the result
- Some **flexible funding** to cover people and costs that are not eligible under traditional entitlement programs
- **Cultural competency** of non-profit staff

**QUESTIONS?**