



Changing the System to
End Family Homelessness

Panel IV

Final Session: Community Conversations

Meet first in your community grouping, and then in larger groupings, as assigned.

A Process Questions

1. What did you learn today that was new and helpful for you?
2. Where are you now with respect to creating a Rapid Rehousing program in your community?
3. What are your next steps? How can we help you to take them?

B Conceptual Questions to Consider

1. What is your COC's philosophy in addressing homelessness? What is your Board of Social Service's philosophy? Do those philosophies match?
2. Do your community decision-makers understand the need, under HEARTH, to report as a single system, rather than as a series of program?
3. Do all governmental entities agree on the need for a system focused on permanent housing with services, rather than long shelter & transitional housing stays?

C Implementation Questions to Consider

1. Are the County, the County's Welfare entity and the COC all at the table together? If not, who can bring them together so as to minimize turf issues?
2. What will it take for funding sources to agree to commit future funding to support the priority of permanent housing with services?
3. Is there a single person in your county responsible for monitoring outcomes, analyzing HMIS data and reporting to the government leaders? Are you committed to ensuring that that person has sufficient training?
4. Is your Board of Social Services ready to commit to assigning a single coordinator for this project? To entering all recipients of Rapid Rehousing services into HMIS?
5. How will you provide educational programs (in-house or through consultants) to get providers on board with the Rapid Rehousing philosophy?



Changing the System to
End Family Homelessness
Panel IV

Rapid Rehousing – Questions Frequently Asked of Mercer County

Getting Started

How and why did you start providing Rapid Re-Housing Services to families?

First, we became committed to the philosophy of Rapid Rehousing: that when a family is housed in their own home in the community, everything else stabilizes for that family. We believe that no one should have to remain homeless in order to receive needed services. Rapid Rehousing allows us to operationalize that belief.

Creating Coordinated System

What were the steps you took to create a coordinated system across all the family homeless providers in your community?

We educated the community about the Rapid Rehousing philosophy and its track record in other communities. Government entities agreed to RFP all new funds for the purpose of Rapid Rehousing. We then created a point of entry for screening at the County Welfare Agency, where families have to apply for TANF.

Was everyone on-board with adding a Rapid Re-Housing program? Were there areas of resistance? How did you win/build support?

There was definite resistance among providers. The RFP process alone was not sufficient to overcome this resistance and to select only providers who had already embraced the Rapid Rehousing philosophy. Providers who have been selected must still be trained to a home-based case management model.

Has there been any ripple effect of creating a Rapid Re-Housing Program? Have your emergency shelter, transitional housing or permanent housing programs been used or targeted any differently?

Mercer County has seen a steady decline in the time spent in both emergency shelters and transitional housing. With the recognition that Rapid Rehousing was positively affecting the system as a whole, the Trenton/Mercer COC made a decision to phase out Transitional Housing for families after 2013. The success of the family program has led to the creation of a Rapid Rehousing for singles program. This, in turn, is likely to have a ripple effect on Transitional Housing for singles.



Changing the System to
End Family Homelessness
Panel IV

Working with Mainstream Systems

How is your Rapid Re-Housing Program working with other providers' services?

There is close coordination with the County One-Stop, since most Rapid Rehousing families are on TANF and have work requirements. Referrals are also made to other community services as is deemed necessary in each individual case, such as employment support, early education/child care programs, children's physical and mental health programs and domestic violence providers.

Challenges

What are some of the challenges you have found in implementing the Rapid Re-Housing Program and operating a system-wide Housing First/Rapid Re-Housing approach?

The start of any new program involves learning many lessons. We learned the importance of training any agency to the model. We learned that those in early stages of recovery from domestic violence are not good candidates for Rapid Rehousing. Likewise, women who are pregnant or who intend to get pregnant soon have an uphill battle to move forward in a timely way.

Is there enough rental housing?

We have found there to be an adequate supply of rental housing. We have also found that the Board of Social Services and community agencies renting apartments have significant leverage in negotiating an affordable rent – generally at about 75% of supposed "Fair Market Rent." Landlords would rather have an apartment occupied at \$750 per month than a vacant one that is seeking a renter who can pay \$1,000 per month.

Successes

What are some of the successes of Rapid Rehousing that you would like others to know?

Once a family moves into a home leased under their own name, they are no longer homeless. In this situation, most families are highly motivated to succeed through education and employment. Household incomes rise. Families are able to leave TANF, on average, in under 6 months.