



Ending Family Homelessness

The View from Mercer County

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Mercer County Board of Social Services
Presentation to NJ Interagency Council on
Homelessness

Your Take-Away

- New Jersey's Emergency Assistance provides a unique opportunity to address family homelessness.
- The use of TRA (Temporary Rental Assistance) can be **THE BEST TOOL** for ending family homelessness.
- TRAs can be used effectively for 90% of homeless families, even those without histories of employment.

Our Starting Point

1. How can we best help families when they become homeless?
2. Is what we're doing now providing the right answer?
3. If not, what could we do instead?

What We Decided

- To stop managing homelessness and instead to end it.
- To shift focus to permanent housing and away from shelter & transitional.
- Families would stabilize quickly in an apartment they could stay in; as soon as they moved in, they were no longer homeless. They would receive services and rental assistance until they were self-sufficient.

Our Strategy

To find funding for a Rapid Rehousing model--

- Align all local funders in one system – County, City, Board of Social Services.
- Enlist Division of Family Development (DFD / TANF) as major partner.
- Create program for Rapid Rehousing that would combine rental assistance & case management.

Part I to Rapid Rehousing

Rental Assistance

- Made fundamental decision to give TRAs to homeless households.
- Changed use of TRA from back end (after Transitional Housing) to front end of eligibility.
- No state regulations prevented us from doing this.
- Families also need case management.

Part II to Rapid Rehousing

Case Management with Focus on Employment.

Decided to work with community-based agency and RFP for services, paid for by mix of funds.

- County – Supportive Services to Homeless (SSH)
- State – DFD match of SSH
- Federal – HEARTH funds through COC
(previously HPRP, HUD demo grant)

Our Preparation

- Needed to look internally at how we were doing business (paying for shelters, transitional housing etc.)
- Needed some different strategies to work with a community agency offering case management – commitment to screening, to data input, to case conferences.

Proposed Outcomes

- Demonstrate that adequate rental housing is available in the community.
- Demonstrate that Rapid Re-housing decreases the amount of time that families remain homeless.
- Demonstrate that Rapid Re-housing both downsizes & costs less than emergency & transitional housing.

Projected Costs (per family)

Current costs	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Daily</u>
• Shelter	\$3750	\$125
• Transitional	\$2700	\$ 77
Rapid Re-Housing		
• Rental Assistance	\$600	\$20
• Case management	<u>\$700</u>	<u>\$23</u>
Total	\$1300	\$43

Actual Costs

Homeless Families in Shelter and Transitional vs. Rapidly Re-housing Homeless Families

Intervention	Per diem Rate
Shelter (homeless)	\$125
Transitional Housing (homeless)	\$ 84
Rapid Rehousing (Not homeless) [TRA [Services	\$ 50 \$25] \$25]

Actual Outcomes

Since Jan. 2010 –

359 families rapidly rehoused – only 22 returned to homelessness.

- Rental Housing in community is available.
- 94% success rate.
- 6% recidivism.
- 60% of daily cost of Transitional Housing.

Comparing Rapid Re-Housing to Transitional Housing

Decreased
Length of
Time on Public
Assistance



Rapid Re-Housing:
189 Days
Transitional Housing:
339 Days

Increased
Earned Monthly
Income



Rapid Re-Housing:
50%
Transitional
Housing: 14%

Reduced
Recidivism
Rate



Rapid Re-Housing:
6%
Transitional
Housing: 21%

As a Result of Positive Outcomes with Community Agency

Board of Social Services created its own RAPID EXIT unit, using TANF-paid social workers -- NO NEW \$.

BEFORE	NOW
Family Services Unit -- served mix of homeless and not-homeless families – huge caseloads.	Specialized Rapid Exit Unit created -- only for rapidly rehousing literally homeless families - caseloads of 25 per social worker.

Outcomes Validate Model

- Being in one's own home, rather than in shelter, promotes greater long-term self-sufficiency – Families part of solution.
- Achieved through time-limited rental assistance and case management.
- Incomes rise; lengths of stay in homelessness shorten.
- Rapid Rehousing meets goals of HEARTH

RRH Adopted by System

- Our COC voted to end HUD funding of Transitional Housing for families in Mercer after 2013.
- MCBOSS made decision to no longer place families in TH, but to use RRH instead.
- Rapid Rehousing will be model for most families (90%). Only those with disabilities will need lengthier period of services or Permanent Supportive Housing (10%).
- State's partnership has been crucial in making this transition in the homeless system.

Key Question for State

- How can New Jersey align itself with the national mandates embodied in HEARTH?

Shorten the length of time homeless to 30 days or less

Reduce returns to homelessness

- What changes are needed?

What's Needed at State Level

- Policy Support for Rapid Rehousing.
- DHS now permits a daily rate for shelter and transitional. The same rule could allow for Rapid Rehousing daily rate.
- This is permissive, not mandatory - Another tool in the tool kit for CWAs.
- Based on Mercer data, rate could be set at \$25-30 for case management, plus TRA.

What's Needed at Local Level

- Commitment from County Welfare Agency to use TRAs, coupled with intensive case management -- through a community agency or CWA staff.
- Commitment to assign high-level staff to work in partnership with COC.
- Commitment to using a Rapid Rehousing screening tool.
- Commitment to enter data in HMIS so outcomes can be tracked and reported.

Finding \$ for Case Management

- DFD – Rapid Rehousing per diem rate (requested)
- HEARTH - Repurposed Transitional Housing Funds
- ESG – Emergency Solutions Grant
- CDBG
- County Homeless Trust Fund

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