



Changing the System to  
End Family Homelessness

Panel I

## **Six Things Needed from County Welfare Board to Start Rapid Rehousing for Families**

1. Commitment to work in a county-wide team with COC.
2. Commitment to use TRAs for families who are homeless and develop a mechanism to use them
3. Commitment to assign high-level staff to work in partnership with COC.
4. Commitment to using a Rapid Rehousing screening tool to identify eligible participants.
5. Commitment to enter data in HMIS so outcomes can be tracked and reported.
6. Commitment to ongoing system development and quality assurance.



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## MERCER COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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### **What is Rapid Rehousing?**

Rapid Rehousing is a strategy that utilizes rental assistance coupled with intensive case management to address the issue of family homelessness. It is identified as a best practice by HUD and the National Alliance to End Homelessness. New Jersey's unique ability to utilize Temporary Rental Assistance (TRA) for housing, provides an opportunity to couple the TRA with intensive case management services (rapid rehousing case management) provided by a community agency to move families out of homelessness while addressing their involvement in work activities and movement to self-sufficiency through employment. A screening/evaluation of the family's circumstances decides who can benefit from this program. A Screening tool has been developed and tested for this purpose and is currently accessible in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

### **Why should Rapid Rehousing be offered as a tool to Counties?**

Federal homeless policy under the HEARTH Act calls for a decrease in lengths of stay in homelessness, reduced recidivism and increase in household income. The Mercer County pilot project achieved these goals. Once a family is no longer in a shelter, transitional housing or a hotel or motel they are no longer homeless. Rapid Rehousing achieves this outcome while moving the family to self-sufficiency. It would provide a tool for other counties to move to shorter lengths of stay in homelessness thus complying with HEARTH requirements.

### **Why is it important to have a Rapid Rehousing Case-management rate now?**

Continuums of Care (COC) will need to have programs available to them that shorten lengths of stay in homelessness. The goal of Rapid Rehousing is to move the family quickly (within 30 days) from a homeless setting; hotel/motel, shelter or transitional housing to an apartment with a TRA and intensive case-management focused on moving them to employment. Complying with the HEARTH requirements will mean that more permanent housing vouchers will be available to the County to address long term homelessness.



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## **Options for Funding Rapid Rehousing**

### **Option 1**

#### **Utilize Emergency Assistance funding, thus providing a new tool for Counties to address family homelessness.**

The preferred option for funding rapid rehousing case management would be to permit counties to fund it as an optional use of emergency assistance funds, just as shelter and transitional housing are optional uses currently. Rapid Rehousing has been piloted in Mercer County with positive outcomes and could be provided in other Counties using EA funds without any new startup funds that would be needed for a pilot.

Counties currently use Emergency Assistance funding to create services that meet the needs of homeless families in their county. Various counties have utilized EA to develop and fund shelters and transitional housing. Others have not. The option to develop rapid rehousing case management would work the same way. It would be an additional tool in the County's tool box to deal with family homelessness. The Emergency Assistance regulations read "the County/municipal agency shall determine the most appropriate form of emergency housing which is required to address the needs and authorize payment of the cost---". It follows that counties should be able to develop programs and authorize payment for rapid re-housing case management programs within the current regulations.

#### **How would it work?**

CWA staff would continue to provide the same activity they do currently with shelter and transitional housing: decide who is homeless and refer the family to the service. In this instance the service would be Rapid Rehousing case management with more intensive services to move the person to employment and off of TANF. The Rapid Rehousing case-managers have a much smaller caseload and can focus on outcomes of employment and self-sufficiency. The CWA staff would facilitate the use of the TRA.

Rapid Rehousing Case management is an intensive outreach model. It includes housing search and location, landlord negotiation, linkage to mainstream services, and focus on skill building (budgeting, job search) that leads to employment and self-sufficiency. In Mercer County Rapid Rehousing has resulted in rapid exit from homelessness and then a focus on employment and exiting TANF.

#### **How would it be paid?**

The same mechanism would be utilized that is currently in place for shelters and transitional housing. The provider (of rapid rehousing case management) would bill the CWA as a direct service to the client based on the daily rate for the number of days the client received the service. The client



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would be identified in the billing and could be checked against the TRA for that person for that month. Mercer County has piloted the program and developed a \$25.00 a day rate for Rapid Rehousing Case-management.

The cost of rapid rehousing includes both the TRA cost + the case management cost. These costs may vary slightly, based on the Fair Market Rate (FMR) for the TRA in different Counties and variation in provider agency staff salaries. A range of \$25.00 to \$28.00 a day could be utilized to meet the needs in different areas of the state.

### **How would Rapid Rehousing Case-management providers be chosen?**

Based on a successful model recently used by DFD to certify child care providers, we would recommend the use of an RFA. Providers would be certified to provide the service and the County could use eligible providers based on their needs. The provider would need to be certified to serve a minimum of 25 clients.

### **When could Rapid Rehousing be implemented?**

If it becomes an optional EA service it could be operationalized immediately by those Counties who choose to use it.

### **Option 2**

#### **Carve-out Emergency Assistance funds for the purpose of funding Rapid Re-housing case management.**

Each County would be permitted to utilize a % of its average Emergency Assistance allocation to fund rapid rehousing case management. A formula could be developed for example: 10% of the average of the last 3 to 5 years of Emergency Assistance funds to be utilized for rapid rehousing Case-management.

Once an amount was developed for each county, the process for billing for the service and choosing providers would be the same as in Option 1.



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## **How to Fund Your Rapid Rehousing Program**

### **Housing**

County Welfare Emergency Assistance - TRAs

County Homeless Trust Fund – for populations not eligible for TRA

### **Case Management Services**

HEARTH

ESG – Emergency Solutions Grant - annual

Repurposed Transitional Housing Funds - annual

CDBG - annual

County Homeless Trust Fund - annual

DFD – Rapid Rehousing per Diem rate – ongoing

*This rate has been requested. See following pages.*