Washington Families Fund Systems Initiative Evaluation: 2012 Interim Report

Appendix I: County Summaries

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Appendix I A: King County

FOCUS AREA 1: PROMISING PRACTICES

Overview of the System at Baseline

In 2009, the Washington Families Fund (WFF) Systems Initiative was launched, and King County began developing its plan, *King County Moving Forward*, for creating a homeless service system. As part of this Initiative, Westat reviewed county documents and visited various stakeholders to gain a baseline understanding of the homeless service system in King County. The following is an overview of the configuration of the homeless service system in King County as of 2009.

According to the 2009 Annual One Night Count of Homelessness, there were 1,015 homeless families in King County. Seventy-seven percent of the families (811 families) were residing in transitional housing, 20 percent (204 families) in emergency shelter, and three families were identified as living on the street. In 2009, King County's system for housing homeless families was composed of 184 housing programs with 213 emergency shelter units, 891 transitional housing units, and 70 permanent housing units available to homeless families. In addition to housing providers, the county had providers who offered a range of services, including mental and physical health, alcohol and substance abuse, rental assistance services, landlord liaison work, and eviction prevention programs.

Overall, the Westat evaluation team found that in 2009 there was no "system" of services for homeless families. The services that existed were fragmented, and homeless housing providers operated separately and independently. Stakeholders also reported rare coordination with mainstream services. It is important to note that even though the homeless system was fragmented, the majority of stakeholders reported they were generally on board with the guiding principles of the WFF Systems Initiative. In fact, many aspects of the county's Ten Year Plan were aligned with the Initiative's promising practices, particularly prevention, tailored services, and economic opportunity. Unfortunately, many stakeholders voiced concern that King County was a community that could get bogged down in process; thereby, many plans were not implemented. Interviewees also reported that the homelessness agenda in the county was politically charged, and that funders, versus work groups such as those organized by the Committee to End Homelessness (CEH) that oversees the Ten Year Plan, drove decisions with regards to homeless housing and service strategies.

A final major concern that was widely voiced during the 2009 baseline period was the lack of affordable housing in King County. With 1,875,519 people, King County has the largest population of all 39 Washington State counties and contains almost 30 percent of Washington's entire population (U.S. Census Bureau State & County Quick Facts). Yet, according to the County's Landscape Assessment, in 2008, 137,442 households were living below the poverty line in King County. Also, 57 percent of very low-income households (defined as having less than 30 percent of the area's median income) have a severe housing cost burden, paying more than 50 percent of household income for rent (32,400 households in 2000). The Landscape Assessment also found that only eight percent of all market rate rental units throughout King County were affordable to families earning less than 40 percent of the area's median income (rents of approximately $600–$800/month).

Pillar 1: Entry into the Shelter System

Baseline Status

As of our site visit in 2009, the county did not have a centralized intake system in place for homeless families to access emergency shelter or transitional housing in King County. Rather, the burden was placed on families to navigate a housing system with multiple, uncoordinated points of entry.

In order to access emergency shelter, families generally used multiple strategies. According to the Landscape Assessment, these strategies included seeking shelter either on their own, through referrals from agencies (i.e., the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), other shelters, or churches), or through a call to 211. The 211 line is a community information referral line only that provides families with a list of organizations to call for available shelter beds. However, during our 2009 site visit, interviewees consistently reported that the 211 system did not have updated information, and the shelter lists were not always current in terms of housing availability. Therefore, families generally had to call and check with multiple providers for availability. If they were placed on a wait list, then they had to regularly check back to see if a slot opened for them. Also, since the telephone system was referral only, there was no assessment of whether a family met eligibility requirements for specific housing. Finally, housing placements were not targeted to specific shelters, but were made largely on a random basis.

Once families were provided a list of housing programs, they had to be proactive in seeking housing assistance by making a number of calls. Not all housing programs maintained wait lists, and often those programs with a wait list required families to make a weekly call to maintain their spot on the list. According to the Landscape Assessment, 60 percent of families reported waiting three or more months to get into emergency shelter. During the 2009 site visit, we had an opportunity to speak with providers about the current system for accessing housing. Providers noted frustration with the number of places that families needed to call, and the amount of time it took for families to find housing for which they were eligible.

In terms of housing eligibility, the county's Landscape Assessment noted that both clients and providers had limited information about the eligibility criteria of each shelter. Therefore, clients could spend substantial periods of time getting on waiting lists for shelters for which they ultimately were not eligible. The intake and assessment process varied by shelters, and several shelters required families to show documentation of homelessness, have a form of identification, provide documentation of income, consent to a background check, and in some instances, consent to a drug test. Once found eligible for a shelter, the family then likely underwent further intake and assessment of needs.

As noted previously, several providers reported frustration with the process for entering shelter, and during a series of provider meetings in the spring of 2009, the evaluation found broad support by stakeholders to implement coordinated entry and uniform screening/assessment. Many providers understood the importance of coordinated entry to facilitate matching services to the needs of the client. As one provider noted during our 2009 interviews, "Four years ago, we tried coordinated entry and I think the providers now really understand the need for coordinated hubs. But there isn't a uniform assessment, so there's no way to track contract performance. There are uneven funding levels to serve the same kinds of families. The people aren't necessarily in the right program, and programs aren't tailored."

Summary of Strategic and Implementation Plans

King County's Strategic and Implementation Plans lay out a strategy and objectives associated with coordinated entry and assessment for families at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The plans outline three key objectives in this area:

Objective 1: Create a centralized process with equal access for families to seek and gain housing stability assistance, including prevention assistance.

- Take steps to ensure that families can access coordinated entry regardless of their circumstances.
- Create culturally appropriate access for immigrant and refugee families and those with limited English backgrounds.
- Ensure safe access for survivors of domestic violence.
- Establish an outreach plan aimed at community and mainstream programs, agencies, and services to ensure access for all populations who need housing stabilization services.
- Create a public outreach campaign to inform the public regarding 211 as the entry point for housing stabilization services.

Objective 2: Enable a system to uniformly assess families and match them with housing resources and services that best fit their circumstances and preferences.

- Establish a uniform screening and assessment tool to gather information about a household and its housing and service needs, administered by a cadre of specialists trained and skilled in conducting assessments.
- Create and adopt a scale that identifies families' housing stability challenges (low through high).
- Facilitate assessment and sharing of agency program eligibility requirements and their case management capacity in relation to the adopted scale.
- Employ a placement process for connecting families to the most appropriate service provider.
- Engage with providers, stakeholders, and large and small community groups to inform them about the new coordinated entry system, with particular attention to harder-to-reach and non-service-seeking populations.
- Work with families already in emergency shelters and transitional programs, as the first step of Coordinated Entry and Assessment.

Objective 3: Use system-level data to inform planning and funding of programs based on a more accurate understanding of the true scope of family homelessness in King County.

- Develop oversight structure to regularly review coordinated entry system progress, including providing feedback on future directions and reviewing system-level data on trends.
- Work with Safe Harbors to ensure that consistent system-level data are being collected.

Status as of February 2012

As of February 2012, many of the implementation steps described in the plans have been undertaken, and the county plans to launch the Coordinated Entry and Assessment (CEA) system in April 2012. This system will be led by Catholic Community Services of King County (CCS).

In preparation for the CEA launch, the county used funds from the Gates infrastructure grant to hire a staff person for 12 months to help design and implement the system. A second staff person was also hired for two years to work on the systems change processes. These county staff regularly met with provider focus groups, including domestic violence providers as well as providers serving immigrant and refugee families, and at times with individual providers, to develop plans for the system. This process involved a series of meetings throughout spring and summer 2011, as well as a summer speaker series, including speakers from Grand Rapids, Heartland Alliance, and the Road Home who talked about their experiences and initiatives that have implications for the Initiative in King County. Summer provider meetings also delved more into the specifics of the coordinated entry and assessment system to take place, with some meetings focused on the directors and others on the case managers (line staff).

By spring 2011, funding to support coordinated entry was secured, and a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) was issued for an agency to operate the CEA system. The RFQ was released in May, a bidders' conference was held, and five applications were received in July. The award was made to CCS in November of 2011. CCS has had a long history of serving families in need in King County. Established over 90 years ago, CCS is the largest provider of assistance to poor and vulnerable people in Washington State, and provides a range of services for individuals and families. CCS currently offers a variety of support services at Family Centers in Seattle, Kent, and Bellevue and operates over 40 programs across the county.

The CEA system is designed such that families calling into 211 will receive an appointment for an in-person assessment, and an email or text message reminder of the appointment. CCS will then provide CEA services for homeless families by deploying five assessment specialists throughout the county in CCS facilities as well as private or public facilities that provide families with basic assistance and mainstream services. CCS assessment specialists all need to be bilingual. In addition to the assessment specialists, CCS has a program director, an immigrant/refugee family coordinator, and two additional staff—one who will deal more with agencies (i.e., keeping track of units and availability) and one coordinator working on the client side (appointment changes, doing checks on how families are triaged on the matching level of services, double-checking assessments for continuity, making sure assessments are being done well, and so forth).

The county also worked closely with providers and Safe Harbors in developing the assessment tool for CEA. The assessment tool was developed by reviewing tools used by other counties within Washington State and nationally, and is scheduled to be tested prior to the launch of the system. This tool will be strengths-based, focused on housing barriers, and can be used to match a family's needs to the housing that is available (i.e., emergency shelter, permanent supportive housing, transitional housing, service-enriched housing, rapid housing). Safe Harbors, the county's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), is developing a customized module that will capture data from the entire process, including the 211 interaction, setting the appointment with the assessment specialist, and data from the assessment. In addition, the system will have data from the agencies on resources available as well as information on the agency's eligibility criteria, etc.

Outcomes as of February 2011

Awareness

Despite the involvement of many in the planning process and the group involved in developing the plans, there continued to be many open questions. Even individuals who had been involved in the coordinated entry planning subgroup had lost touch with the specifics of the plan and did not know what the current thinking was with respect to specifics. For example, agencies wondered whether they would still be able to take in any families on their own, such as immigrant families. Agencies also questioned what would happen to families who have experienced domestic violence, and how they could continue to advocate for these populations.

Acceptance and Participation

Without exception, the key informants we interviewed saw a need for coordinated entry and assessment. The Grand Rapids exchange was noted as important in guiding the approach. Most interviewed also were looking forward to the change and several noted the advantage of families not having to go to several agencies for support, although there were a number of concerns. For example, although one shelter representative noted that it would be nice not to have a shelter wait list, she was concerned about the daunting list that might result at the systems level. Other concerns related to how families ask for help, and whether those families that were comfortable with less formal ways of connecting to resources would be able to navigate a more formal centralized system. Others were concerned about the logistics of getting people to access the entry points and the lack of transportation as well as issues of access for immigrants, refugees, and those with limited English skills. Therefore, at the time of our visit, providers were ready for a change, but there continued to be questions concerning what the change would mean for their organizations and clients. As noted above, the county has conducted a number of activities to inform and engage the community since February 2011, and the evaluation will capture updated stakeholder perspectives at the next site visit.

Pillar 2: Prevention

Baseline Status

In 2009, prevention services were part of the portfolio of services available to families, but represented a small amount of the total homeless related funding (less than 5 percent as reported in the Landscape Assessment). The services were primarily one time assistance for families dealing with extenuating circumstances, and eligibility often excluded homeless families. This assistance was generally offered on a first-come, first-served basis. Financial assistance was available as short-term rental subsidies; eviction prevention funds; transportation subsidies (e.g., bus tokens and gas gift cards); emergency assistance to pay for utilities; assistance with moving expenses; and access to tools to reduce barriers to permanent housing (e.g., reduced screening barriers for individuals with credit problems). With the exception of two of the programs described below, the Landlord Liaison Project and the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program, the funding was provided without additional services (such as case management) accompanying them.

In seeking prevention assistance, families could call 211 or call provider agencies directly. A variety of agencies provided prevention services throughout the county; however, none of these services were coordinated. The key prevention services offered by agencies included the following:

- *The King County Housing Stability Project (KCHSP),* operated by Solid Ground in collaboration with several agencies in the county, providing one-time loans and/or grants to homeowners and tenants in danger of losing their housing due to short-term financial difficulties; loans or grants to homeless families and individuals who need assistance moving to permanent housing; and limited assistance for other types of moves. For a family to receive support, it must meet a number of income requirements, such as having income that is twice the amount of the rent, in order to be able to maintain the unit. The funding is targeted to families who have a one-time need.

- *Eviction prevention* funds are reportedly available from a number of agencies, including Community Action Agencies (e.g., El Centro de la Raza, Hopelink, Multiservice Center, Neighborhood House, and Solid Ground) and often through the agencies with which they work (e.g., food banks). Many of the agencies that have eviction prevention funding also participate in the King County Housing Stability Project.

- The *Landlord Liaison Project* began in January of 2009 through the coordinated 2163 funding of the City of Seattle, King County, and United Way, and is managed by the YWCA of Seattle, King County, and Snohomish County. The Landlord Liaison Project provides services to help both single adults and families who face barriers to accessing housing. The program was developed in response to the need for permanent housing placement services. The Landlord Liaison Project provides services to reduce barriers to accessing housing and to screening for those with credit problems; provides funds for eviction prevention; and builds relationships with landlords to have a pool of landlords ready to house the families who have been previously denied housing. Landlords participating in the project agree to use alternative screening criteria with applicants, and in turn, receive rapid response to their concerns, access to a 24-hour call-in line, and access to risk reduction funds. In particular, the YWCA finds landlords who are willing to serve the formerly homeless and to waive some of screening criteria in lieu of receiving case management from the referring agency. Each tenant in the program is connected to one year of case management by the referring agency. Although agencies may have conducted these activities informally in the past, the main difference with the Landlord Liaison Project that administrators cite is the existence of a coordinated hub with a 24/7 call-in line. The hope is that this program will help with the "back door" problem of homelessness as well as with the front door.

- *Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program* (*HPRP).* In June of 2010, the city of Seattle received $2.5 million in American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 (ARRA)/HPRP funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for a two-year homeless prevention project. This project was designed to reduce the number of people who experience homelessness by proactively identifying households experiencing "trigger situations" that are often precursors to homelessness and connecting these households to the community, the mainstream system, and local service providers to address these situations. Wellspring is coordinating the effort among King County agencies. The prevention part of the program was slated to end December 2011. The project had to use 70 percent of the total federal dollars by March, or the grant could be seized.

According to the mid-review report of the Ten Year Plan, the Seattle-funded HPRP agencies began working with households in October 2009 and in the first six months, the programs had provided prevention services to an estimated 1,293 people (both individuals and families). As part of this program, the agencies developed and implemented a new coordinated process for eligibility screening, using the King County 211 as a primary referral point. The program piloted a centralized placement list, incorporating Safe Harbors as the centralized data entry system. Families entered through referral from 211, walk-ins, or partner referrals. Agencies worked together to create shared standards, goals for success, and solutions to link with resources and landlords. The program also integrated homelessness prevention resources with the City's PeoplePoint program, a one-stop access point to multiple federal, state, and local benefit programs including public assistance, mainstream financial services, job training, education, child care, food, utility assistance, and health care.

Summary of Strategic and Implementation Plans

The Moving Forward Implementation Plan outlined several emphases for prevention include housing stabilization, shelter diversion, and creating a flexible financial resource package for families at imminent risk of homelessness. The process will involve an implementation advisory group, the implementation staff team, funders, and prevention service providers. Mainstream systems also will be engaged to integrate prevention activities into their work with at-risk families, redirecting existing resources toward early intervention activities.

It was anticipated that system-level work would begin during Phase 1 from 2011 to 2012 (i.e., creating shelter diversion, evaluating newly funded expanded prevention services to determine effective targeting of higher risk families, engaging mainstream and community-based organizations), but would not be realized fully until Phase 2 during 2013 and 2014, when the plan proposed to focus on collaboration and resource leveraging with mainstream systems. The major strategies proposed were the following:

- Target and expand services available for families who are at highest risk of homelessness in order to stabilize housing; and
- Make prevention resources more flexible to meet family needs.

Status as of February 2012

In the early stages of designing the CEA system, plans were outlined to include shelter diversion. Shelter diversion was to serve families on the placement list for shelter. However, the county discarded these plans, including prevention, due to concerns that the need might be too great for the system to handle at this time. These concerns came from the county's experience with implementing HPRP and data available through 211, as well as the early experiences of Pierce County's implementation of coordinated entry with prevention services. According to interviews with county leads, the current plan is to focus on coordinated entry, and once it is fully implemented, the county will develop plans to incorporate prevention strategies.

Even though the plans to include prevention assistance with CEA were discarded, in January 2012, the city of Seattle and King County funded a prevention project with a nonprofit agency, Neighborhood

House. The agency has participated in the HPRP program, and will implement a prevention program to provide temporary financial assistance, housing relocation, and stabilization services, including landlord negotiations, housing stability case management, financial empowerment services and budgeting, and security and/or utility deposits to low-income families and households at risk of homelessness. This project is to serve 150 households through its Homeless Prevention Program, and also provides opportunity to partner with the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) by serving 10 ECEAP families. The Neighborhood House project will also be infused with additional funding through a Living Cities grant that will include financial empowerment. The county has provided some infrastructure funding to expand the Living Cities dollars so that the financial empowerment activity can be extended to all of King County.

Outcomes as of February 2012

Awareness

Providers and others in the system had a number of questions about prevention. Concerns were voiced, for example, that some types of shelter diversion (e.g., remaining doubled up on a short-term basis) may not work for a lot of families. One of the concerns was how to prioritize services and target them appropriately, especially based on the HPRP experience. Another concern was in regards to the target population for services.

Pillar 3: Rapid Housing

According to the King County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, the concept of rapid housing and the need for more permanent housing resources has been a long-standing priority. However, as of 2009, there was no central triage system or mechanism that helped move families quickly into permanent housing. During our 2009 site visit, key informants reported that few families moved directly from a homeless situation to housing and even rarely from shelter into permanent housing. According to data presented in the Landscape Assessment, families tended to stay in the system longer than individuals (up to the maximum allowed length), and some cycled to another shelter if there was no affordable housing available at the end of their initial shelter stay. Also, families generally followed the continuum of care path, exiting shelter to move into transitional housing programs prior to obtaining permanent housing.

During the site visits, key stakeholders reported three concerns with the current housing path for families. One concern was specific to transitional housing in that its focus on preparing families to be "housing ready" has further delayed families from moving quickly into permanent housing. Stakeholders reported that families have cycled through different transitional housing programs that they can often stay at for up to two years. Moreover, county stakeholders reported that the Foundation's Sound Families Initiative also supported the strong focus on transitional housing in King County. For instance, as of 2011, three transitional housing projects were slated to come online for homeless families during the next year due to earlier commitments the Sound Families Initiative made before ending in 2007. It should be noted that while Sound Families bolstered transitional housing in the county, it also provided support for programs to allow families to transition in place. The two housing authorities (KCHA and SHA) have provided Section 8 vouchers for some of these programs to allow this to happen.

Another key concern voiced throughout the baseline period and continuing to the date of this report is the lack of affordable housing units and housing subsidies to increase the affordability of market rate housing and to prevent the transitional housing from getting backed up. In some instances, families may need to cycle through multiple transitional housing programs if Section 8 resources are not available, i.e., resources that are generally not available due to long waiting lists and few additional units opening up each year. Those we interviewed spoke of the need for additional and more flexible rental and financial assistance dollars. The Ten Year Plan also identified that an ongoing monthly housing subsidy is the single most critical need for housing support.

The final major concern noted during our site visits was that once families are placed in permanent housing, they often are no longer provided follow-up services. Even for the transitional housing with transition-in-place mechanisms, there is a cliff of services. The contracts for housing are generally longer than the contracts for services.

Finally, even though the majority of resources in the county were focused on the traditional continuum of care path for families, there were a few programs in place with components of rapid housing. These include the following:

- *HPRP*, as noted earlier, has provided funding for both prevention and rapid housing. The housing funds were awarded in June of 2010 and need to be completely spent by August 2012.
- *Journey Home*, administered through Solid Ground, is a Housing First program that *provides* long-term case management, transitional housing, and placement in permanent housing. The program has five case managers, and two housing placement specialists. All of the shelters in the county refer to the program. Referred families then work with case managers to develop plans that address the barriers that are blocking families' ability to access and maintain permanent housing. Similar to HPRP and the Landlord Liaison Project, Journey Home uses a housing search model and has a well-developed landlord list as well as flexible funding to pay for move-in expenses, existing housing-related debt, transportation, and other expenses related to employment and housing search.
- *Stable Families,* administered through Solid Ground, is a bit unique in this category as it targets formerly homeless families who are at high risk of cycling back into homelessness. The program provides long-term support services including case management, financial literacy, mental health services, and short-term rent subsidies to stabilize families before they lose their housing again.

Summary of Strategic and Implementation Plans

The Strategic and Implementation Plans called for moving families quickly to stable housing, including aligning emergency shelter and transitional housing programs to the housing stabilization approach. Activities are slated to begin during Phase 1 to help achieve the following objectives:

- Restructure the homeless housing system to shift from housing readiness to the housing stabilization approach; and
- Maximize capacity and use of housing resources.

In addition, the plans called for focusing support services on housing stability, including reconfiguring case management practices, developing model assessment tool for case managers, realigning program

requirements to support housing stability case management, and exploring opportunities to coordinate housing and employment services funding at the system level. The major activities include the following objectives:

- Align case management practices to focus on housing stability;
- Tailor service programs to be flexible and responsive to the needs and priorities of families; and
- Maximize linkages to economic and educational opportunities to increase financial security.

Status as of February 2012

The county's approach to rapid housing weaves together several of the pillars—rapid housing, tailored services, economic opportunities, and, to some extent, shelter diversion—into a housing stabilization approach. The plans called for a systems transformation approach, aligning emergency shelter and transitional housing programs into some form of interim housing without strict time limits (as with past 90-day shelter limits) but to also align case management practices to focus on the urgency to shorten families' length of stay in shelter and place families in permanent housing, and then to focus on housing stability. (Alignment of case management practices and the focus on tailoring services is described under both Tailored Services and Economic Opportunities).

The approach is viewed as a system change process, in which the county will attempt to align the system (i.e., how families move through the system) and have the funding streams support the realignment (e.g., support shelter/transitional housing together). To guide the process, a county staff person has been dedicated to examine how to align the system. The county has also conducted a survey of providers to assess their readiness for change, brought in speakers to examine different models for housing (i.e., Grand Rapids, Columbus, Chicago), convened providers to discuss realignment, and is in the process of developing a toolkit to help agencies assess their capacity and plan for change. The county team is conducting an analysis of features of the different funding sources (with Building Changes) as well as working on ways to deal with the funding, structural, and attitudinal barriers in the system and in the organizations.

The plan is to move to a housing stabilization approach by June 2012. The county will contractually require all funded housing providers to cooperate and collaborate with the WFF Systems Initiative process. Plans are to use a peer learning group model, so as programs go through this transition they will meet and connect with one another.

Outcomes as of February 2012

Awareness

Stakeholders were generally aware of the plans at the time of our visit but had a number of questions and concerns. Several questioned the plausibility of housing individuals without an increased availability of housing stock. They noted that rapid housing assumes a vacant supply of housing, which did not exist at that time. Several wondered what the different housing options would be, what the length of stay would be, and what transitional housing would look like in the new system. Several noted the possible opportunities were much broader if they could bring in the flexible use of funds. Regarding case management, one respondent noted the struggles families have after two years of case management and wondered how much case management can be expected to turn the tides.

Pillar 4: Tailored Services

Baseline Status

In 2009, providers we interviewed reported that there was no "system" of services for families who are homeless. The services that existed were often viewed as being embedded in the system of homeless services in general and were less coordinated for families. These services generally differed by homeless provider, and were fragmented across providers.

Case management was the main vehicle for connecting families to services, and typically provided through shelter and housing, Three programs, Journeys Home, Pathways to Home (set up to connect people to mental health and health care), and Transition into Permanent, also had McKinney-Vento services-only grants to follow families for six months after permanent housing placement. Journey Home, described above, provides long-term case management, transitional housing, and placement in permanent housing. Pathways to Home case management program, operated by Valley Cities, is targeted to the highest need families. The Pathways's case management teams include case managers with clinical expertise who follow families wherever they go and try to get them into transitional housing and eventually permanent housing. The third program, Transition into Permanent, is focused on families who move from transitional housing to permanent housing. All three agencies shared a common assessment tool.

Moreover, while case management was commonly provided to families, county stakeholders reported concern about the lack of consistency in service provision. This concern was recognized prior to the Systems Initiative, and in 2007, a Committee to End Homelessness (CEH) Workgroup in King County explored options to enhance case management training in core competencies. This Case Management Standards Workgroup identified 12 core competencies in which case managers need to be skilled and knowledgeable if they were to be effective in helping people obtain and maintain housing. Once the standards are identified, CEH plans to work with local educators to support the inclusion of these standards in local certificate and degree training programs, as well as to create a low cost/accessible brown bag training series to share knowledge and local best practices as they relate to these core competencies. Unfortunately, as of 2011, this plan was not put into place, and during our site visit, several interviewees noted that the focus has been geared more towards single adults than families.

Lastly, a major challenge mentioned by the individuals we interviewed was a lack of services. Gaps in services cited by providers include in-patient chemical dependency treatment for a family in which the child has not been removed from the home, subsidized child care, and limited mental health services for adults without a Tier-3 diagnosis. Several providers mentioned that accessing DSHS-funded mental health services for children is much easier than for adults. Also, families involved in a focus group cited difficulties with child care. One parent noted that though DSHS will pay for child care, she felt there was a lack of training for providers to take care of a child with special needs. Another said that it is difficult to find providers with whom she was comfortable. Finally, another parent noted that although DSHS will provide transportation for children between home and school, there are no services that provide transportation from home or school to their child care provider. This provided a significant barrier for parents who are trying to work or go to school.

Summary of Strategic and Implementation Plans

The county's Implementation Plan outlines a process for increasing collaborations with mainstream systems, including fostering relationships and exploring which programs and opportunities could be involved in collaboration. It was anticipated that system-level work would begin during Phase 1 (i.e., establishing workgroups, building partnerships, creating cross-training, creating a program of joint investment), but the larger task of pursuing new resources or realigning existing mainstream system funding would not occur until Phase 2. The plan is to achieve these goals:

- Improve access to mainstream benefits and services for homeless and at-risk families; and
- Build a working collaboration between the family homeless system and mainstream service systems that focus on children.

Status as of February 2012

The county is working on tailored services as part of the housing stabilization approach. The plans call for reconfiguring case management practices, developing a model assessment tool for case managers, realigning program requirements to support housing stability case management, and exploring opportunities to coordinate housing and employment services funding at the system level. The focus is to align case management practices so that they are focused on housing placement and stability and to tailor service programs to be flexible and responsive to the needs and priorities of families. The toolkit under development is the major activity that will guide these activities. The county also plans on incorporating some professional development in the toolkit and offering web-based and class-based programs with infrastructure funding. Moreover, the coordinated entry process will focus on matching families with providers who offer appropriate levels of services to address their needs, especially regarding domestic violence, mental health, chemical dependency, and permanent supportive housing disability resources. In addition, the county leads are also trying to connect to mainstream services and providing training to foster a peer networking community.

Pillar 5: Economic Opportunities

Baseline Status

In 2009, a key gap identified by many stakeholders was access to services, education, and training that not only help adults obtain employment, but that help them obtain employment that provides a living wage and increases self-sufficiency. Major homeless providers reported offering basic services, such as money management and assisting with debt and credit issues. However, the traditional education and employment providers were not systematically linked with the homeless and housing programs, and programs were limited in what they could provide. During our site visit in the summer of 2009, some interviewed suggested that there needed to be more receptivity on the part of the homeless and housing providers to embrace workforce development; others suggested that the traditional workforce development services have been geared to those easier to employ. In addition, interviewees noted that mainstream benefit requirements can make it difficult for families to obtain the education and employment training they may want and need. For example, for families on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), DSHS would pay for only certain types of educational programs. As stated by one mother in a family focus group during our 2009 site visit, "I'm in school for phlebotomy, for a nine-month program. I'm getting retrained. DSHS doesn't approve of a Masters' degree because it's longer

than 12 months." Similarly, TANF's WorkFirst program has many regulations, and case managers may interpret these regulations in a varied manner. Some informants suggest that some case managers may stress jobs over training for families receiving TANF, and that working itself may serve as a barrier to getting ahead.

The county recognized this service gap prior to the launch of the Systems Initiative, and as with the tailored service pillar, King County's homeless service community has had economic opportunities on its agenda for several years. In February 2007, the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) issued a report, *Taking Health Care Home Initiative,* which identified different strategies for helping homeless individuals to access employment, and for connecting employment services into the housing and service systems. In 2008, the King County Funders' Collaborative focused on ways to improve educational opportunities for low-income adults. Through the pooling and realigning of funding, they established the College for Working Adults, an educational program that increased students' ability to obtain postsecondary certificates and degrees.

There has also been movement in trying to connect with SkillUp Washington, Washington State's Workforce and Education Funders' Collaborative. In 2009, SkillUp convened an "Economic Opportunity Steering Committee" focused on determining how to help homeless families achieve self-sufficiency through employment training and access. Based on the committee's recommendations, King County's Department of Community & Human Services created and launched *Project Self-Sufficiency for Families and Singles*, in October 2009, that links educational, vocational, and employment opportunities to housing and other support programs.

Finally, King County has been working with the local Workforce Development Council (WDC) to improve the employment opportunities for homeless people. This work has included trying to establish partnerships between the WDC and the housing authorities to focus on families ready to enter market rate housing; efforts to help families to obtain and stay in training programs that improve their competitiveness for higher wage jobs; integrating access to work supports in their workforce preparation; working with employers in industries that have both high demand and high wage-paying jobs to see how the WDC can meet employer demand as well as connect workers with these opportunities; and working for reforms in unemployment insurance.

Summary of Strategic and Implementation Plans

The county's Implementation and Strategic plans outline a set of activities designed to maximize links to economic and educational opportunities to increase financial security, including the following:

- Developing tools for improving client and provider understanding of economic opportunities and resources available to help connect families to those opportunities, including tools for working effectively with local employment office and community colleges.
- Creating training opportunities for housing stabilization staff on employment and benefits, resources, workforce systems, establishing strategic partnerships, accessing mainstream resources, job development best practices, and so forth.
- Creating training for employment staff on housing and support services, resources, and so forth.
- Integrating education and economic opportunities planning into the client intake and assessment process, including the housing stability action plan. Assisting clients in developing

readiness for employment, exploring a suitable career pathway, and preparing for the transition into employment or education opportunities.

- Expanding support to families in accessing mainstream system benefits and tax credits; providing assistance in determining how much they can work without losing benefits.
- Exploring opportunities to coordinate housing and employment services funding at the system level in order to provide packaged resources to families experiencing homelessness (e.g., employment and education navigators at the WorkSource locations who are dedicated to providing services to families in partnership with housing providers).

Status as of February 2012

The county is working on economic services as part of the Housing Stabilization approach. The plan outlines a set of activities designed to maximize linkages to economic and educational opportunities to increase financial security, including tools that will increase client and provider understanding of the economic opportunities available, training opportunities for housing stabilizations staff and for employment staff, an employment focus as part of the housing stability action plan, and opportunities to coordinate housing and employment services funding at the system level in order to provide packaged resources to families experiencing homelessness. Career Connections has received System Innovation Grant (SIG) funding to work with the housing case managers to do training, much like a housing navigator approach, as well as some additional funding to work with programs on job placement, employment, and education.

FOCUS AREA 2: INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

In 2009, CEH was considered the main leadership body on homelessness issues in King County. CEH is a broad coalition established after adoption of the Ten Year Plan in July 2005. CEH is staffed by 2.5 FTE. The governing board includes the mayors of the cities, the sheriffs, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) along with the King County Interagency Council on Homelessness (KCICH). The KCICH includes agency directors, department heads, and some providers, and the group meets monthly. There also was a Consumer Advisory Council that was self-governing. The Consumer Advisory Council included about 15 individuals who were currently homeless and selected from provider nominations.

The initial concept was that the IAC would decide what policies would be implemented. However, it was difficult for providers to make some of the tough decisions that arise, and the governing board generally relied on the staff for making decisions. Therefore, the CEH eventually developed the Funders' Group, composed of the King County Department of Community and Human Services, Seattle Office of Housing, King County Housing Authority, the Gates Foundation, and the United Way of King County. There previously had been funder coordination at the deputy level, setting the stage for the formal establishment of a Funders' Group. Funders from the east and south side of the country were invited to sit at the table and be involved. The group established five priorities and then worked to see how much funding each had. They asked each funder to develop a budget for the five priorities for the next five years.

There was general consensus that despite the lack of a coordinated entry system, agencies that serve homeless people worked very closely together. For example, one provider said, "Our region has communication and coordination. Funders are coordinated and there are long-standing relationships

and partnerships." Providers agreed that better coordination among the various services systems that homeless families have contact with was essential for improving service delivery.

Advocacy at the system level for families was integrated with that for single adults. There was not a separate family-focused advocacy. The key advocacy groups noted were the Seattle-King County Coalition on Homelessness and the Washington Low-Income Housing Coalition.

There was a mix of opinions at the time concerning the extent to which homeless and mainstream service providers were coordinated. Some of the individuals we spoke with agreed that there was some evidence of productive coordination between mainstream and homeless service providers. Other providers described the dearth of coordination between homeless providers and mainstream services. For example, one stakeholder said, "Homeless providers are very separate and doing everything themselves—and not accessing all of the mainstream services that exist."

Summary of Strategic and Implementation Plans

The county's Implementation Plan recognizes the ability of existing vehicles of coordination to help support the effective implementation of the plan moving forward. The plan highlights CEH and the four bodies within its governance structure: the governing board, the Funders' Group, the interagency council (IAC), and the consumer advisory board. The IAC was to be restructured, with task forces developed and meeting in between IAC meetings. The advisory committee for this Implementation Plan was proposed to operate within this structure as a task force that would provide strategic direction and reporting progress on implementation strategies to the IAC. Recommendation would also be heard by the Funders' Group and the Governing Board. The IAC would determine membership, though it was proposed that it include a broad spectrum of stakeholder groups.

Status as of February 2012

During our site visit in February 2011, the IAC was undergoing restructuring. CEH and its bodies, particularly the Funders' Group, continued to be cited as the group that was most instrumental for coordination and collaboration for the system and for families. The specific groups that were brought together to develop the Implementation Plan also were cited as key coordination vehicles, but were considered more ad hoc and temporary. Other vehicles cited as important for coordinating people and efforts included the WFF Leadership Committee (though it was noted that it meets only quarterly and does not function as an "anchor of activity") and the Coalition for the Homeless.

Also, during the summer of 2011, an Implementation Advisory Group for the King County Initiative was created and had its first meeting. It is advising the Family Homelessness Initiative lead staff in support of the CEH's Funders' Group investment priority. The Advisory Group meets monthly and consists of community partners, funders, and field experts from diverse agencies and specialties from across the county.

FOCUS AREA 3: DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

Baseline Status

As of 2009, neither the county nor homeless housing providers had the capability to conduct data-driven decision making. While the county required agencies receiving federal and state funds to use Safe Harbors, the local HMIS system, the majority of providers were using their own systems and exporting HUD-required universal elements to Safe Harbors. Providers were also submitting incomplete and poor quality data. According to the providers we interviewed, data quality was cited as a problematic issue. It was reported that in 2008, Safe Harbors was only able to un-duplicate 50 percent of the records in the system because providers were not putting in enough information about the clients they served. Entry of full Social Security numbers was voluntary, and clients could opt out of any of the fields. Even though providers were required to enter full names and at least the last four digits of the Social Security number, it was difficult to match clients across records and reduce duplications. Another concern raised about the HMIS was the inability to conduct a point-in-time capacity count because of the poor quality of the exit data. Unfortunately, Seattle and King County lost $1 million in HUD funds in 2008 because of poor data quality.

Furthermore, Safe Harbors operated in a closed system not allowing other agencies to have real-time access to client information. One reason for this was providers' concern about protecting client confidentiality. However, the closed system environment further limited the county's ability to make data-driven decision making, and understand the needs and experiences of homeless families once they enter the system.

In response to the issues identified above, the Foundation held a Data Summit in May 2009, and had formed a Data Solutions Workgroup to tackle the problems with the data systems across the three counties. King County representatives participated in these meetings.

Status and Outcomes as of February 2011

Since the baseline visit, there has been a realignment of Safe Harbors. The new director of Seattle's Housing Department has taken a strong interest in Safe Harbors and has moved it to reside within the IT and Quality Assurance Department. There has also been an increase of staff from 6 FTEs to 8 FTEs.

Participation has reportedly increased from 55 percent to 85 percent program coverage in the past year. At the time of our visit, 329 programs were using Safe Harbors; 800 people had been trained, and there were 477 active users (that is, they have logged in the system in past 30 days).

Perspectives regarding Safe Harbors had improved since the baseline visit, and the new director had been credited with giving it leadership and making it accountable. Data integration continued to be the way several of the agencies participated, though data were now unduplicated (which was viewed as a huge accomplishment from a year ago). There continue to be concerns about the quality of the data, about the effort to do double and sometimes triple entry of data for various systems, and the need for more interactive training.

The State is now requiring HMIS participation for agencies that receive HUD funding, and there is movement to require reports with Safe Harbors to match up or else invoices will not be paid. There is the expectation that for every month the agency sends an invoice, the report in HMIS will match the number of clients served.

Also, the county has recently negotiated an agreement with Safe Harbors to capture all the data associated with coordinated entry and assessment. The county leads have been working closely with Safe Harbors and Adsystech to make sure the system can do the scheduling automatically when the call comes into 211. Assessment data will be collected and entered into Safe Harbors first for families already in the system, and then for all families entering the system.

Appendix I B: Pierce County

FOCUS AREA 1: PROMISING PRACTICES

Overview of the System at Baseline

In 2009, the WFF Systems Initiative was launched and Pierce County began developing its plan for creating a homeless service system. As part of this Initiative, Westat reviewed county documents and visited various stakeholders to gain a baseline understanding of the homeless service system in Pierce County. The following is an overview of the configuration of the homeless service system in Pierce County as of 2009.

In 2009, the evaluation team found that Pierce County had no homeless service system in place. Various stakeholders noted the lack of cohesion in the system with no underlying mission and goals for serving homeless families. In fact, stakeholders referred to Pierce County's system as a "collage" and "fragmented"; composed of 39 homeless family housing and service providers with individual business plans and competing for limited available funds. Each of these agencies operated with different eligibility criteria and program criteria for serving families.

These 39 providers (17 housing providers and 22 service providers) operated 58 programs for families, and these programs were predominately located in Tacoma, Washington. The 2008 Pierce County Homeless Housing Inventory counted 56 emergency shelter units, 420 units of transitional housing, and 45 units of permanent supportive housing for homeless families. According to the county's Homeless Housing plan the high percentage of families in transitional housing was a reflection of how the community resources were targeted over the past decade. This finding was supported in interviews with stakeholders and the Point in Time (PIT) counts documenting a growth of homeless families in transitional housing units over time.

These housing agencies also belonged to various committees. The Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness as well as the Continuum of Care and Road Home Leadership Committee gathered and disseminated information among its members and to other pertinent audiences (e.g., governments, policymakers, and non-housing service providers). The Coalition to End Homelessness focused primarily on identifying issues, opportunities, challenges, and gaps in services for the homeless. However, according to our baseline interviews, the Coalition was referred to as an "echo chamber" that did not provide leadership in regards to family homelessness issues.

In 2009, the evaluation team also found a lack of leadership with regard to family homelessness. Similar to the fragmented provider system, there was a core group of community agencies that did not coordinate in terms of funding or service delivery. Pierce County's Department of Community Services was the lead agency in charge of allocating federal, state, and local housing funds. The county's Department of Human Services was responsible for the administration of services in four areas: aging and long-term care; chemical dependency; developmental disabilities; and mental health. In 2009, the Department of Community Services and Department of Human Services worked together to develop the plan for the WFF Systems Initiative, although the homeless housing funds were largely administered by the Department of Community Services. Unfortunately, during our baseline site visit, several interviewees suggested that the Pierce County Community Services department did not engage participating agencies in a gainful manner.

Pillar 1: Entry into the Shelter System

Baseline Status (2009)

As of our site visit in 2009, the county did not have a centralized intake system in place for homeless families to access emergency shelter or transitional housing in Pierce County. Rather, the burden was placed on families to navigate a housing system with multiple uncoordinated points of entry. The process for obtaining housing was largely provider-centered, and not focused on homeless family needs. There was no common intake process among housing providers. The evaluation found that providers did not coordinate with one another, but focused on their internal goals in developing their intake and assessment policies. Moreover, according to the county's Landscape Assessment, housing providers were reluctant to provide details regarding their intake criteria, nor were they open to a coordinated intake system or open Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The following provides an overview of a family's process in navigating the homeless housing system. This information was collected from the county's Landscape Assessment, and from interviews with county leadership, providers, and families during our site visit in 2009.

According to the 2009 Point in Time Count, there were 398 homeless families in Pierce County. Eighty-five percent of the families (338 families) were residing in transitional housing, 13 percent (50 families) in emergency shelter, and 3 percent (10 families) were identified as living on the street. In 2009, Pierce County's system for housing homeless families was composed of 17 housing providers with 476 emergency shelter or transitional housing units available to homeless families. Seventy-one percent of these units were located in Tacoma.

In order to access the housing system, the majority of homeless families either contacted a housing provider directly, or called two phone information lines—the United Way of Pierce County's 211 telephone system or Associated Ministries' shelter availability telephone number. These telephone systems were referral only, and did not place families on a wait list. Families were provided with a list of organizations to call for available shelter beds and transitional housing units. However, providers and families reported that these lists were not always current in terms of housing availability. Also, since the telephone systems were referral only, there was no assessment of whether a family met eligibility requirements for specific housing.

Once families were provided a list of housing programs, families had to be proactive in seeking housing assistance by making a number of calls. Not all housing programs maintained wait lists, and often those programs with a wait list required families to make a weekly call to maintain their spot on the list. During the 2009 site visit, Westat had an opportunity to speak with families about their experiences with accessing the shelter and transitional housing system. Families noted the difficulties in accessing the housing system. Families cited making several calls to find housing, asking friends for help, or asking their Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) case managers about how and where to seek help.

Once housing became available, providers scheduled families for an intake appointment. However, there was no common intake process among housing providers. If a family was not eligible for a specific housing program, there were no formal mechanisms in place to help them obtain other housing assistance. Unfortunately, since this information was often discovered during intake, a family may have

spent considerable time and effort searching for housing for which they were not qualified. Moreover, since there was a lack of coordination in the system, families would often have to repeat the same information to another housing provider when contacted for an intake appointment.

Summary of Strategic and Implementation Plans

Pierce County's Strategic and Implementation Plans lay out a strategy and objectives associated with coordinated entry, assessment and referral to the homeless housing system. The first objective is for the creation of a centralized intake system operated by a single organization that is accessible to all families. The second objective for the system is to match those in need of prevention or housing to the provider that best fits their circumstances   The Implementation Plan also provides the following details with regards to implementing a Centralized Intake Assessment and Tracking (CIAT) system that serves all families at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, and in need of prevention or housing services. This includes enhancements to the HMIS system, and a training of providers about the new system. Additional details regarding the design of the CIAT system are for the following:

- The CIAT system will be centralized in one organization with at least two field sites where a comprehensive intake can be completed.
- The hours of operation will extend beyond the normal business day to allow for families working during the day to gain access outside of their workday.
- A single telephone number will be used to reach the CIAT.
- An initial telephone screening is completed to determine if the family has homeless prevention or housing needs (this can occur on a walk-in basis as well).
- If eligible, each family is offered a face-to-face comprehensive intake assessment within one business day of the phone screening.
- Each assessment will include a conversation about career planning, and education and employment possibilities will be required topics.
- Matches are made for housing or prevention based upon the assessment data and the agency profiles to ensure each family receives services from an agency best suited for them.
- Each assessment is entered into the HMIS database real-time (laptops with wireless cards will be available for outreach assessments) and made available to the "receiving agency" with permission from the family.
- Services beyond housing and prevention that are assessed as needing attention will be outlined for the receiving agency to ensure those services are provided or brokered for the family.

Finally, the Implementation Plan details a timeline for several CIAT-related activities to occur. During the third quarter of 2010, the county plans to release a request for proposals for CIAT, and award the grant to a centralized agency in the fourth quarter of 2010. Also, during the fourth quarter of 2010, the county plans to upgrade the HMIS system; communicate with providers, funders, and officials about CIAT; and have county staff and the CIAT agency participate in a Building Changes-sponsored learning opportunity in Grand Rapids, Michigan. These activities will set the stage for a launch of the CIAT system in the first quarter of 2011.

Status as of February 2012

On January 31, 2011, Access Point for Housing (AP4H), Pierce County's first coordinated entry system for homeless families and individuals was launched. After an open bidding process in the fall of 2010, Pierce

County and Building Changes awarded Associated Ministries $670,000 to operate the system. According to interviews with the county leads, this decision was based on multiple factors including: the agency's history of providing services in the community; its past experience with operating a coordinated intake system for the City of Tacoma's HPRP program;[1] and a proposed coordinated entry system that was strongly aligned with the elements outlined in the county's Implementation Plan. In developing the plan for AP4H, Associated Ministries proposed that the process would begin with families calling a telephone number or directly requesting services at AP4H offices. Families would then undergo a 15 minute screening interview to determine eligibility for prevention or housing services. If the screening determined a family eligible for assistance, AP4H staff would schedule an in-person assessment interview within one business day. The assessment data would then be used to refer a family to the available housing program that best fits their housing and service needs. Also, in situations where housing is not immediately available, Associated Ministries' staff would provide light case management to families.

Since AP4H represented a significant shift in how families would navigate the homeless housing system, and in how providers would accept families into their housing programs, the county leads and Associated Ministries held numerous outreach and training sessions. The county launched a public campaign on the local television channel a month before AP4H was launched. The county also had plans in place to have advertisements with the AP4H telephone number posted on bus stops and have flyers posted at various community organizations, such as food banks and local shelters, by April 2011. Given the overwhelming call volumes on the first day of operation, the advertising campaign was cancelled. In addition, the Associated Ministries and county leads jointly held training sessions with staff from housing programs a few months before the system was launched, and they continued to hold monthly training sessions throughout much of 2011. The county also used a portion of the infrastructure dollars from the Gates Foundation to support the implementation of AP4H by hiring a new HMIS staff person and upgrading the system. These data system improvements are discussed in greater detail in Focus Area 3.

Unfortunately, there were components that were not fully in place before the launch of AP4H, which contributed to significant startup challenges for the system. One major startup challenge was that Associated Ministries was not fully prepared for a January launch date. AP4H's central operations were based in the agency's main office in Tacoma. However, the space was not sufficiently configured to receive clients for screenings and intake appointments (e.g., a small lobby without seating space for a number of people). Associated Ministries had also hired, and was not able to train, many of the intake and assessment staff a week before the program launch. Another component that was not in place prior to AP4H's implementation was that there were no satellite offices to screen and conduct intake assessment for families in rural areas of the county. Finally, the intake and assessment tool for coordinated entry was not finalized as of implementation. The tool was largely based on the intake assessment used in the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing (HPRP) pilot, and did not include strengths-based or employment-related questions.

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[1] In 2009, the City of Tacoma received a three-year award of $1,182,864 to implement a HPRP program. The City subcontracted with Associated Ministries to pilot a coordinated entry system, with a common intake form, specifically for the HPRP program. This coordinated entry system referred homeless individuals and families to five prevention and rapid housing providers in Tacoma.

Not having these components in place hindered AP4H from effectively responding to prevention and housing assistance requests. This challenge was compounded by AP4H receiving an unanticipated high volume of calls, almost four times the number of households projected. As a result of this, AP4H experienced a backlog of voicemails, and families did not undergo an intake assessment or receive the planned prevention or housing referral within the next 24 hours. Also, shelter and transitional housing providers reported having empty beds or housing slots while waiting for AP4H referrals.

Since our site visit in February 2011, we have had the opportunity to gather updated information from the county leads in regards to AP4H, and they report that the system is fully implemented within its first year of operation. Within the first quarter of system implementation, four AP4H satellite offices, based at local shelters and food banks, were opened in rural areas of the county. The intake and assessment tool was completed and incorporated into the HMIS system by March 2011. Also, the enhancements to the HMIS system were completed such that AP4H intake staff are able to enter assessment data real-time into HMIS as the interview occurs, as well as match clients to programs based on the agency profiles in HMIS. In addition to the HMIS agency profiles, providers enter potential and future bed openings into DropBox, a county web-based system that facilitates the matching of clients to programs with available housing.

Moreover, the county leads report that they were able to meet jointly with Building Changes and Associated Ministries staff to make course corrections to the system to alleviate several of the startup challenges addressed in the sections above. One major change is that AP4H is no longer a centralized system for prevention services, and this change is discussed further in the Pillar 2 section below. Another course correction is that Associated Ministries used their resources to bring additional AP4H staff to conduct intake and assessments. By September 2011 intake assessments were scheduled within two business days after a screening was completed. Also, by September 2011, the system was able to readily make referrals to housing providers. Finally, the data collected by HMIS was used to inform many of these changes, and the county's ability to conduct data-driven decision making is examined further in the section devoted to Focus Area 3.

Outcomes as of February 2011

Awareness
Data regarding the high volume of calls suggests that families are aware of how and where to seek assistance. We also found that providers were aware of the new system, and they reported telling any families who contacted them for housing to first seek assistance through AP4H. However, there was some confusion about how the system should operate. This is most likely because even though the county and Associated Ministries conducted several training sessions with provider agencies, there were inconsistencies among the staff attending. Also, the county and Associated Ministries staff reported that they recognized that trainings occurring during the planning and initial implementation phase, and at times mid-course corrections were needed.

Acceptance and Participation

Providers reported that there was a spirit of collaboration in working together and with the county in preparing for AP4H. They felt that the county was making a concerted effort to develop a system with their input; however, several providers, especially those in rural areas of the county, did not think there was a need for coordinated entry. They felt the new system would add an extra unnecessary layer in a

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family's search for housing assistance since they could generally find resources for them in a short period of time.

Interviews with other stakeholders in the community resulted in mixed reviews. Overall, stakeholders felt there was a need for coordinated entry, and many saw great potential for coordinated entry. However, some stakeholders felt that the county was overemphasizing this pillar instead of economic opportunity. In particular, representatives from public housing authorities and workforce development agencies voiced concern about the relevance of the assessment without the incorporation of questions related to service needs, particularly in the areas of employment and education. In general, they were concerned that the new AP4H system would fulfill the county's tracking needs with its ability to track and report how many families are in need of prevention or housing assistance, but would fall short in matching families to the services they need to achieve housing stability and self-sufficiency.

Pillar 2: Prevention

Baseline Status

In 2009, there were limited funds for prevention assistance available countywide, and these funds had restrictions on the amount and frequency of money that could be allocated to a single family. This assistance was primarily composed of the payment of a single month of rent or utilities, and this assistance could only be provided once per year. In general, there were no services attached to this financial assistance, with a few providers requiring families to participate in a budgeting class in order to receive prevention funds. In addition, there was no coordination of prevention services among different agencies, and a lack of data to support the understanding of who was in need of prevention services , when these services were needed, and what types of services would help a family maintain housing stability.

In order to receive prevention services, families self-referred themselves by either calling 211 or calling agencies directly for prevention services. According to the county's Landscape Assessment, approximately 24 percent of housing agencies offered some sort of prevention service, and others referred clients to 211 or other agencies who offered prevention services. These agencies used funds from the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) program and from private funders to provide these prevention services.

Once contacted, agencies offered prevention assistance to families on a first-come, first-served basis. And, with limited funds available, prevention providers reported that the funds were generally expended within the first few days every month. According to the Landscape Assessment, if a family contacted an agency after funds were expended, about 50 percent of these agencies placed families on a wait list for prevention services. These agencies estimated the number of people on these wait lists ranged from seven to 500. Moreover, many agencies had restrictions, which varied by funding source, on who could be served and the type of prevention assistance available. For example, one provider agency noted being able to provide prevention services only to veterans. Another provider noted their prevention dollars had restrictions, such as prevention dollars could not be used to cover client's late rental fees. Other agencies noted they could only provide funds to families who could provide a three-day eviction/"pay or vacate" notice.

In addition to a limited supply of prevention assistance, the evaluation also found that services were not coordinated among agencies. For example, while some organizations in the community (i.e. schools, utility companies, DSHS case workers, and food banks), may also interact with the same families in need of prevention services, there were no mechanisms in place to offer a coordinated response for at-risk families.

Finally, the county and provider agencies did not have data to support an understanding of the need for or effectiveness of prevention services. Families were not formally enrolled into services with the housing provider, and thus not entered into HMIS. In addition, since the limited funds were disbursed on a first-come, first-served basis, the county did not have a solid understanding regarding the level of need in the community.

In 2009, the Pierce county and the City of Tacoma each received a three-year award of $1,182,864 to implement a HPRP program. This project, funded through 2012, increased the amount of funding available for prevention services, and allowed agencies to offer more than a single month of financial assistance and case management services.

Summary of Strategic and Implementation Plans

According to Pierce County's Strategic and Implementation Plans, there are two key objectives associated with prevention. The first is to coordinate and expand the prevention resources throughout the community by helping families find natural supports, providing prevention resources that are flexible to family needs, and by having prevention services include longer term planning. The second objective is to make a system shift to prevent homelessness by coordinating the services (such as intake and case management) associated with prevention and housing, and to develop early warning systems with partnerships with community organizations.

The Implementation Plan also outlines a timeline for prevention activities to occur. During the third quarter of 2010, the county plans to release a request for proposals for prevention, and award the grants in the fourth quarter of 2010. Then, in the first quarter of 2011, the prevention resources will be launched in conjunction with the CIAT system, representing a systemic shift to prevention of homeless at the front door. Finally, by the third quarter of 2011, the county plans to expand the coordination of prevention funding and services.

It should be noted that the HPRP project, funded in 2009, was not fully implemented when the county developed Strategic and Implementation Plans for prevention in 2010. Therefore, the county could not rely upon HPRP outcome data to inform the development of the plans described above.

Status as of February 2012

On January 31, 2011, Access Point for Housing (AP4H), Pierce County's first coordinated entry system for homeless prevention families and individuals was launched. After an open bidding process in the fall of 2010, Pierce County and Building Changes awarded $335,000 to Associated Ministries to provide coordinated prevention services, as well as operate the centralized intake system, AP4H. According to interviews with county staff, the funders thought the process would ease the burden for at-risk families by immediately routing families to prevention services, as opposed to being referred to another agency.

Associated Ministries proposed the following process for providing prevention assistance to at-risk families in the community. Once an at-risk family is determined eligible for prevention services, it would then be routed to an in-house prevention specialist for services. The focus would be to provide families with shallow rent subsidies immediately, and, if needed, offer a graduated subsidy plan that would extend rental assistance. As part of the prevention assistance, families would also receive case management services to help connect them to services available in the county and to re-gain housing stability. Associated Ministries planned for the case management to be flexible to a family's needs, and believed it would most likely consist of contacting families on at least a weekly basis with a face-to-face meeting at least once per month, until the family is connected with a service provider or no longer needs prevention services.

As described in the section on Pillar 1, as the county leads and Associated Ministries prepared for the launch of AP4H, they also included information about the availability of prevention services in the outreach and training materials, and made enhancements to the HMIS system to track requests and receipt of services. However, as detailed in Pillar 1, the centralization of services encountered several challenges. With respect to prevention services, the largest challenge was the unanticipated high demand for prevention services. With $335,000 of funding, Associated Ministries projected serving up to 250 to 300 at-risk families with three months of financial and case management assistance. However, within four months, Associated Ministries had expended all of their prevention dollars, and could no longer provide at-risk families with rental assistance.

Throughout this period, the county leads report that they met jointly with Building Changes and Associated Ministries staff to make course corrections to the centralized intake system for prevention. Once funds were expended by Associated Ministries, AP4H discontinued conducting intake assessments on at-risk families, but referred them to other prevention providers in the community. Moving forward, the county plans for AP4H to continue taking calls for prevention assistance, but no longer conduct a full screening or match at-risk families to the most appropriate prevention. Instead, AP4H staff will refer at-risk families to the community providers who have prevention assistance.

Moreover, even though the system encountered challenges in implementing prevention activities in 2011, the county leads report that they were able to collect useful data on how to inform future efforts. The county's progress in data-driven decision making is examined further in the section devoted to Focus Area 3.

Outcomes as of February 2011

Awareness

Data regarding the high volume of calls suggests that families are aware of how and where to seek assistance. We also found that providers were aware of the new system, and they reported telling any families who contacted them to first seek assistance through AP4H.

Acceptance and Participation

System change efforts focused on prevention and economic opportunity were met with considerable support by the majority of stakeholders interviewed. Several interviewees noted these pillars represented a significant paradigm shift for serving homeless families, and could have the largest impact on ending family homelessness. Providers were especially supportive of the prevention activity, noting

that prior prevention assistance most likely caught families when it was too late (i.e. requirements that families needed an eviction notice), and that families needed more than just financial assistance. However, while providers were supportive of additional resources for prevention activities in the community, a few were apprehensive about Associated Ministries delivering these services since the agency did not have prior experience with offering this assistance.

Pillar 3: Rapid Housing

Baseline Status

In 2009, the concept of rapid housing did not exist in Pierce County, except for the introduction of rapid housing funds made available by HPRP. The evaluation found that the system faced two primary challenges in order for this pillar to be implemented. The first challenge, reported widely by providers and other county stakeholders, was that the county had a shortage of housing subsidies and public housing to make housing affordable to the target homeless populations. According to Pierce County's Landscape Assessment, it was estimated that there was a need for 30,000 units of affordable housing for all low-income populations. However, the county's housing inventory count indicated there were 16,515 total units of affordable housing available for both individuals and families. The Pierce County Housing Authority (PCHA) and Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) owned and operated 11,012 (67 percent) of these affordable housing units. The remaining units were created through multiple public funding sources that target homeownership, domestic violence victims, and special needs housing.

The county also had market rate housing stock available, but this was largely unaffordable for the homeless family population. The Washington Center for Real Estate and Research conducted an Apartment Market Survey, and found that in 2009 the average fair market rent for a 2-bedroom apartment was $804 with an average vacancy rate of 6.1%. Assuming a 30 percent contribution of income towards rent, a family would need an annual income of $32,160, and an hourly wage of $15.47, to afford a two-bedroom apartment in Pierce County. It was unlikely that a homeless family could afford these apartments since a constant theme heard among housing providers was that families who left shelter or transitional housing often did not have the educational or economic experience necessary to afford market rate housing.

Another identified challenge was that there was confusion among providers and other stakeholders about the concept of rapid housing. The majority of interviewees defined rapid housing as a family being placed in transitional or permanent housing. Also, a number of interviewees defined rapid housing as housing first. The overall sentiment was that community organizations providing services for homeless families were doing a good job in housing families into time-limited housing programs. Interviewees substantiated this belief with data from the annual PIT counts that found only a few families experiencing street homelessness and the majority of families living in transitional housing arrangements. In sum, interviewees noted that the conventional continuum of care process was sufficiently housing homeless families, and the system needed to focus on economic opportunity activities to help families afford market-rate housing upon program completion.

Summary of Strategic and Implementation Plans

Pierce County's Strategic and Implementation Plans outline a strategy associated with rapid housing. This strategy is to coordinate housing availability, and to develop a landlord incentive project. The Implementation Plan did not provide specific details on the strategy, but it did provide a timeline for

activities. During the first quarter of 2012, the county will initiate work to coordinate housing resources, and a landlord liaison project will be implemented in the third quarter of 2012.

It should be noted that the HPRP project, funded in 2009, was not fully implemented when the county developed Strategic and Implementation Plans for rapid housing in 2010. Therefore, the county could not rely upon HPRP outcome data to inform the development of the plans described above.

Status as of February 2012

The county is on track with its plans to implement rapid housing activities in 2012. In January 2012, the nonprofit agency, Metropolitan Development Corporation (MDC) was awarded $238,000 to implement the housing locator and landlord liaison project, closely modeled after the programs in King and Spokane counties.

In 2011, Pierce County contracted with Bowman Systems, the vendor for its HMIS system, to customize, to Pierce County's needs, a housing locator system application called HousingPoint. The housing locator system is a website that catalogs the public and private affordable housing available in the county within each school district, with the intent to keep families from moving between school district and interrupting their children's education. With this system developed, MDC will recruit the property owners and managers of 250 properties affordable to households at 60 percent area median income to participate. The Pierce County Housing Authority will offer tenant education classes two times a week to help improve tenants' and prospective tenants' understanding of their rights and responsibilities and provide a certificate of completion to be given to landlords. The program will also provide outreach to landlords and tenants, and have a risk pool of funds to incentivize landlords to rent to homeless families.

In addition to the landlord liaison project, in 2011 the Tacoma Housing Authority received a three-year award of $911,091 from a number of funders, including the county and Building Changes, to implement a prevention, rapid housing, and tailored services pilot program. This program offers a Section 8 housing voucher for up to 50 families with a child enrolled in McCarver Elementary School. McCarver Elementary School has the highest rates of homelessness among its families and the highest rates of population turnover in the Tacoma School District. In order to receive this voucher, head of households are required to be involved with their child's education and keep their child enrolled in school, work on developing an employment career path for themselves, and to regularly share their progress with the housing authority.

Outcomes as of February 2011

<u>Acceptance and Participation</u>

It is unclear whether the community will be responsive to rapid housing efforts, or whether significant system change efforts will occur with this pillar. The overall sentiment is that rapid housing is not a high priority pillar for homeless families in the county. In fact, the county's Implementation Plan does not have details for how this pillar will be implemented. Also, according to interviews, the general belief is that the organizations providing services to families who experience homelessness are currently doing a good job housing them in shelter or transitional housing units. During interviews, numerous stakeholders thought the Initiative should place more emphasis, and therefore funding, on having well-

functioning prevention and economic opportunity programs that will help alleviate the housing challenges at-risk and homeless families encounter.

Pillar 4: Tailored Services

Baseline Status

In 2009, the majority of housing providers in the county reported their services were tailored to the needs of families. However, it was unclear as to what specific services were offered to families, and the extent to which they were provided. Agencies did not have a standard protocol for determining what services needed to be provided, and how these services should be delivered. Also, the majority of programs did not have formal agreements in place to coordinate service provision among agencies.

In 2009, Westat and the county leads conducted a survey to 23 local housing agencies representing 41 programs for homeless families in order to understand what types of services were offered. Approximately 69 percent of the agencies reported offering services that were tailored to the needs of a particular family. The remaining 31 percent offered the same services regardless of the specific needs of the families. All of the agencies reported providing case management services. However, the definition of case management varied by agency. One interviewee even described case management as a "fuzzy concept" that may have completely different meanings across agencies.

In addition to case management, surveyed agencies commonly reported directly providing these services to families: housing search assistance, application assistance for benefits, budgeting classes, and assistance with obtaining food and clothing. Programs reported referring clients to other agencies for more intensive treatment services, such as chemical dependency counseling, mental health counseling, child care, or education and employment preparation. However, the vast majority of these agencies referred clients offsite for these services without formal partnerships or memoranda of agreement. This lack of formal agreements indicated that providers did not closely coordinate with one another in serving homeless families.

Summary of Strategic and Implementation Plans

Pierce County's Strategic and Implementation Plans outline three strategies related to the tailoring of services for homeless families. These strategies are to match families with housing or prevention organizations that specialize in their unique needs; to ensure organizations are tailoring their services to the needs of clients; and to ensure families are not only referred, but assisted through the entire process of seeking and receiving services. To facilitate the process of matching families to agencies, the HMIS system will have a description for each agency that describes its service expertise. Also, county staff will conduct technical consultations with each housing provider agency to help it use assessment data from the centralized intake agency and develop a customized approach to serving families. According to the implementation timeline, this work is slated to begin in the fourth quarter of 2010 with the hiring of a tailored services specialist to conduct technical consultations, and by the third quarter of 2011 housing providers will have incorporated a tailored services approach to serving families.

Status as of February 2012

The county has initiated several of the activities outlined in the Strategic and Implementation Plans related to tailored services. However, the work was more of an undertaking than initially expected and is behind the timeline outlined in the plans.

By April 2011, enhancements to the HMIS system were completed and profiles for each of the housing programs participating in AP4H had been integrated. These profiles aid the system in matching families to providers with available housing for which families are eligible.

Also, in December 2010, the county hired a staff member to work with 22 housing providers in preparation for the implementation of tailored services. This county staff member began immediately meeting with housing programs to understand the types of families served, the array of services provided by the program or through community partnerships, the program's requirements in terms of family participation, and the program's decision-making processes in regards to the services offered, frequency and dosage of services. In 2011, staff from Building Changes and the City of Tacoma also assisted the county with this organizational assessment process as part of their technical assistance offerings for the Initiative. According to a report by county leads, all of Pierce County's housing programs will have a completed organizational assessment by March 2012. This information will be used to develop a technical assistance plan and peer learning opportunities to support agencies in developing a tailored service approach in serving homeless families.

Outcomes as of February 2011

Acceptance and Participation

The county plans to incorporate tailored service requirements part of its providers' contract renewals in 2012, and it will subsequently monitor providers on their tailored service requirements. The county leads believe that providers are fully aware of this change, and they do not anticipate negative reactions from providers once the process is in place, for the most part.

Pillar 5: Economic Opportunity

Baseline Status

In 2009, education and workforce development agencies in the county were not well connected to the homeless service system. These agencies provided education, job training, job search preparation, and job placement services to clients, but there were no specific mechanisms to ensure these agencies were serving homeless clients. Without this coordination between housing providers and education and workforce development agencies, there was a significant gap in helping homeless families maintain housing stability once they complete housing programs.

Summary of Strategic and Implementation Plans

Pierce County's Strategic and Implementation Plans outline objectives related to engaging systems to provide economic and education navigation services for homeless families. These objectives follow:

- Create and enhance intensive employment and education navigation services for target population;

- Build cross-system partnerships between homeless housing/services and workforce development providers;
- Develop a cadre of employers receptive to working with the target population;
- Provide capacity-building training and technical assistance to agencies serving the target population to ensure staff have resources to connect clients to economic opportunities; and
- Evaluate the effectiveness of employment and education programs and incorporate learning into program improvements.

In order to achieve these outcomes, the Implementation Plan discusses the need to engage education and workforce development agencies, and provides a timeline for doing so. In the fourth quarter of 2010, the county plans to strengthen partnerships with Workforce Central (the local WIA provider), colleges, and trade schools, and by the third quarter of 2011 the county expects for these agencies to have the necessary knowledge and skills developed for providing services for homeless families. Then in the first quarter of 2012, the county plans to provide technical employment assistance to housing providers, and develop evaluation criteria for the education and workforce systems' responses to homeless families.

Status Update

Taking into consideration that in 2009 employment and education agencies were entirely disconnected from the homeless service system, the county has made considerable progress with engaging several organizations into the Initiative. The county has multiple plans and pilot programs in place with a focus on improving economic opportunities for homeless families. This includes engaging Workforce Central in developing education and employment-related questions to AP4H's intake and assessment process. Also, a local workforce development provider, WWEE, has developed housing programming, such as transitional housing and rental assistance programs that are targeted towards homeless families. There has not been a formal evaluation of the effectiveness of WWEE's programming, but interviewees noted that the partnership with WWEE was successful in housing families and connecting them with education and employment opportunities needed to maintain housing stability. Finally, In February 2011, Workforce Central initiated a pilot program with Pierce County Housing Authority and four nonprofit housing providers currently serving homeless families with a Washington Families Fund grant. An employment navigator from Workforce Central coordinates with the housing agencies to provide career assessment, goal setting, job training, and placement services for their families.

Outcomes as of February 2011

Awareness and Participation

System change efforts focused on prevention and economic opportunity were met with considerable support by the majority of stakeholders interviewed. Several interviewees noted these pillars represented a significant paradigm shift for serving homeless families and could have the largest impact on ending family homelessness. In particular, housing providers viewed education and employment as the critical link to housing stability for families. In fact, one of the local housing authorities reported that the primary challenge in Pierce County is not the lack of available housing, but that families' lack the employment-related skills and history to attain market-rate housing. Moreover, interviews with local employment agencies revealed enthusiasm about the Initiative providing opportunities for collaboration with housing providers. These collaborations will help these employment agencies develop a better

understanding of how to provide services for homeless families, a population that has largely been neglected in their current service offerings.

It should be noted that while providers overall were enthusiastic about economic opportunity activities, a few voiced concern that the Initiative may fall short, and not place families into living wage jobs to support their entrance into market-rate housing.

FOCUS AREA 2:
INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

Baseline Status

In 2009, Pierce County's network of homeless service providers consisted of several types of systems (i.e., government, foundations, housing providers, service providers, and faith-based organizations). Thirty-nine agencies within the county used funds from various sources to provide housing and homeless services to families. According to interviews with county staff, the funding sources used to operate these programs often intersected, causing competition among homeless services providers for common resources.

Also according to the county's Landscape Assessment, these homeless services providers used varying business models to perform similar activities and provide similar services. Although organizations sometimes entered formal agreements with other organizations for services (e.g., mental health services), there were few significant partnerships between agencies. Interviewed participants also described the lack of significant partnerships among agencies. When asked to describe the current homeless family service system, interviewees said there is no "system" and that each agency works independently with individual priorities, eligibility requirements, intake processes, program models, discharge criteria and processes, and information systems. Interviewed providers also reported that there was no centralized leadership for the homeless service system in Pierce County.

This theme of disconnectedness was also apparent in our examination of funders' priorities. Funders within Pierce County tended to have individual sets of priorities. The county did have one collaboration, the 2163 Steering Committee, but this is for a single funding source. This Steering Committee, composed of leadership from Pierce County, the City of Tacoma, and the City of Lakewood, and four small cities and towns, was developed to streamline the funding process for 2163 dollars. As of 2009 a common application for organizations to apply for 2163 funds had been developed. The Community Services Department of Pierce County administered the funding. Unfortunately, during our 2009 interviews, several stakeholders reported that the Community Services Department was difficult to work with. A few stakeholders even reported that the Department often chose favorites when awarding funds and sometimes even discouraged some agencies from applying for funds.

Status Update

Over the course of 2009 and 2010, Pierce County and the Steering Committee for the WFF Systems Initiative have taken a significant role in providing leadership for the homelessness system. Several committees, with representation from local universities, housing authorities, workforce development agencies, public schools, and private funders, were formed to guide the development of the Strategic

and Implementation Plans. In addition, an oversight group of funders was created to oversee and execute the Initiative, as well as the entire homelessness system in Pierce County. This group is composed of local funders from the County's Department of Community Connections, the City of Tacoma, Human Rights and Human Services, the City of Lakewood, Building Changes, the United Way of Tacoma/Pierce County, the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation, Tacoma and Pierce County Housing Authorities, and Pierce County Workforce Development Council. Members of this funders' group signed a Compact for Change agreeing to meet regularly and create policy alignment and funding strategies that oversee the Implementation Plan.

In addition to the Funders' Group, the county has made progress in creating partnerships with workforce development agencies and with the local McKinney-Vento liaisons. However, the county has encountered some challenges with developing collaborative relationships with prospective partners, such as DSHS and local colleges and trade schools.

Outcomes as February 2011

<u>Level of Coordination</u>

In regards to the extent of their involvement with the planning and implementation process, we found that while interviewees noted they were a member of a workgroup or committee, there was often general confusion about which committees they were serving on, their respective roles and responsibilities, and plans for the overall Initiative. One explanation for this lack of clarity is that, along with the committees organized specifically for the Initiative, interviewees were also involved with other committees such as the Building Changes' WFF Leadership Committee, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Data Solutions Workgroups, and other local workgroups organized by the Tacoma-Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness. Another possible explanation for the lack of awareness is that some interviewees noted that because of other work obligations, they did not have consistent attendance for the planning committees and workgroups. Finally, the county leads reported that since their recent system change efforts have largely been focused on the centralized intake system, this could contribute to lack of awareness about plans for other systems change activities.

It should be noted that throughout our interviews with various stakeholders we sensed community spirit and collaboration. There were multiple reports of leadership from the County Executive and the Department of Community Connections planning staff. This is a noticeable change compared to the baseline data collection when the community expressed the sentiment that there was no leadership in the homeless system for families.

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FOCUS AREA 3:
DATA DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

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Baseline Status

As of 2009, the county or homeless housing providers did not have the capability to conduct data-driven decision making. While the county required agencies receiving federal and state funds to use HMIS, the majority of providers were submitting incomplete and poor quality data. The county leads reported that data entry was not consistent among programs, and the data was not entered in a timely manner at the agency level. This rendered any reports to be unreliable and largely useless. Also, the HMIS was

operating in a "closed" system that did not allow agencies to share clients' information with other agencies who might be serving the same families.

Status Update

The county reported using a significant portion of the infrastructure dollars provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to perform a countywide system upgrade of its HMIS system. This resulted in quicker system operations, a more sophisticated report-writer, and a friendly user interface that facilitates data entry for end users. In 2011, the county also hired a full-time staff person to provide technical assistance to providers and troubleshoot issues with the HMIS. Finally, the HMIS system was developed to support the rollout of AP4H.

Outcomes as of February 2011

Status and Use of HMIS

The county reports that participation in the HMIS system is close to 100 percent, and it has seen great improvements in the timeliness and quality of the data received by provider agencies. During interviews with providers, they also noted a new ease with using the system, and reported that technical assistance from the county staff has been helpful.

Moreover, the county and Associated Ministries have been able to capture information about those families seeking and receiving services through centralized intake. This ability to capture information supported them in making decisions for future program planning. They were able to track the number of assistance requests received per month, alter AP4H's staffing patterns to answers calls in a "live" manner, and conduct intake assessments within 48 hours. The data also helped the county understand who was in need of assistance. The county leads report that in the first year of AP4H, 85 percent of the calls received were from families, and the majority of these families were requesting prevention assistance. The county leads also report learning that African Americans are significantly overrepresented in the pool of clients requesting services. They represented over a third of the calls, yet they only represent 7 percent of the population in Pierce County. The county is using this data to develop plans for how to effectively target families and provide prevention assistance in Year 2 of the Initiative.

Appendix I C: Snohomish County

FOCUS AREA 1: PROMISING PRACTICES

Overview of the System at Baseline

Current Configuration of the Homeless Service System

The Snohomish County Homeless Policy Task Force (HPTF) has led the planning and development of Snohomish County's Continuum of Care (CoC) System for the homeless for 15 years. The HPTF is a countywide, community-based planning group encompassing nonprofit organizations (including those representing people with disabilities), government agencies (including Snohomish County Human Services, Snohomish County Office of Housing and Community Development, Washington State Department of Corrections, and Washington State Department of Social and Health Services), public housing authorities (including Housing Authority of Snohomish County, Everett Housing Authority, and Tulalip Housing Authority), faith-based and other community-based organizations, homeless providers, housing developers, veterans' representatives, homeless representatives and advocates, and mainstream resource providers (including Compass Health, the Community Health Center, and Snohomish Health District).

In 2006, HPTF published a 10-year plan, entitled *Everyone At Home Now.* The plan is based on a movement toward ending rather than managing homelessness. The plan outlines six long-term policy initiatives that will create the sustainable solutions necessary to end homelessness by the year 2016. These are (1) to expand affordable housing coupled with appropriate support services where need is most prevalent; (2) to expand homeless prevention services; (3) to develop a community wide access system to minimize the duration and impact of homelessness and maximizing effective resource allocation; (4) to base the development of new housing stock and services upon accurate need and capacity data; (5) to provide funding to maintain existing housing and services that demonstrate measurable outcomes and overall progress towards ending homelessness; and (6) to develop housing coupled with appropriate support services targeted for chronically homeless persons.

The January 2009 Point in Time Count for Snohomish County showed 44 families with children residing in emergency shelter, 277 residing in transitional housing, 33 unsheltered families, and 46 families living "doubled-up."

There are 14 providers of emergency shelter, with a total number of 254 units, including both shelter beds and motel vouchers. There are 19 providers of transitional housing, with a total of 534 units, and there are 8 providers of permanent housing, with more than 2,000 units (including housing subsidies). These providers are composed of both nonprofit and faith-based agencies.

Housing providers tend to specialize in different populations. Housing Hope serves families, the YWCA primarily serves women with children, and Volunteers of America serves both families and individuals. Interfaith Associates of NW Washington is the only emergency shelter reserved for families. However, males over the age of 14 are not permitted, which makes this an impractical choice for many families who do not want to separate. The Salvation Army is the only cold weather emergency shelter in the area. There is strong support among the providers for maintaining this system of separate niches,

although some county leaders believe this system discourages competition and innovation in service delivery.

Pillar 1: Entry into the Shelter System

Baseline Status

At the time of our site visit in 2009, Snohomish County operated a coordinated entry system for families called Coordinated Case Management (CCM). CCM was developed in 2007 in response to a need for a single entry point for homeless families. It was housed at Volunteers of America, in Everett, and was operated by two case managers. Families who called 211 or contacted participating providers directly were referred to CCM. When they called CCM, they were administered a brief screening tool to determine the types of housing for which they were eligible. At that time, families could specify that they were looking for emergency shelter, transitional housing, or both. Once intake was complete, families were placed on computerized wait list for housing. Families were expected to call CCM at least once a month to maintain their position on the wait list. CCM case managers would routinely clean the list of families who were no longer calling in. Providers with available housing slots would reference the CCM data management system to identify families who met their program's eligibility criteria.

The goal of the CCM system was to create a more direct pathway to housing. However, noted both in the Landscape Assessment and during interviews with providers and families in the system, there were not enough shelter and transitional housing units to take people off the wait list in a reasonable amount of time. Families suggested that prior to CCM if they called the right place at the right time they could often be placed into housing immediately. Under the CCM system, they often waited between six and nine months to receive housing. Moreover, families did not receive needed services while they were on the wait list because there was no system in place or funding available to assess families and give them referrals.

At the end of June 2009, there were 1,114 households (2,729 family members) seeking shelter and/or transitional housing in Snohomish County through the CCM intake process. Of these households, 88 percent of them reported being homeless at time of intake. The number of families with children on the waiting list for emergency shelter was 659, up 18 percent from May 2009 when 558 families with children were on the waiting list. There were 930 households with children seeking transitional housing in June 2009; 199 more families than were seeking transitional housing in May, an increase of 27 percent over one month. Of all the households, thirteen percent sought only shelter, 41 percent sought only transitional, and 46 percent sought both (Landscape Assessment).

During our site visit in 2009, providers and community leaders expressed a great deal of support for making changes to the system so that it worked more efficiently.   However, they also wanted to honor the system that was already in place.   The County leads noted that when they spoke about specific changes, providers tended to cling to what they already had. During the planning process there was a great deal of debate about whether coordinated entry would consist of a single point of entry (as was the intention of CCM) or whether it would be a coordinated process with many points of entry.

Strategic and Implementation Plans

The *Investing in Families* (IIF) Strategic and Implementation Plans present a strategy for coordinated entry and assessment for families at risk of or experiencing homelessness that outlines two key objectives. First, the county will develop a uniform screening/initial assessment system to triage families into high, medium, or low need. Then, it will identify one entity through a competitive bid process to provide coordinated entry services to 50–100 families participating in the pilot project. This entity would conduct coordinated entry with a navigator, employed by the county, who would conduct the screenings and assessments, address immediate housing needs, develop an individualized self-sufficiency plan, and broker needed services.

Status Update (as of January 2012)

CCM was dissolved as of December 2010. In its place, 10 participating providers are each maintaining their own wait lists of generally 50–100 families or individuals (depending on whom they serve). Together they developed a uniform one-page screening tool. Data about these families is entered into a ClientTrack data system, which includes all required Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data elements. This data system is "open," such that any of the participating providers can access any of the wait lists to find eligible families if they have an opening. While families are on these wait lists, the providers work with them to access needed services and referrals.

In the first half of 2011, the County hired a Navigator. She worked with the county leads, Annie Laurie, and a representative from HMIS to create the screening and assessment tools that would be used to categorize families into high, medium, and low need and to further assess their service needs and outline the housing and service criteria on which level of need would be determined. They also determined that the navigator role would be divided into three positions. A coordinated intake specialist administers the 20-question intake and determines the initial path for each family. The housing resource specialist serves families who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness (within 30 days). The navigator serves families who not at imminent risk of homelessness and have a number of other service needs.

In June, Catholic Community Services Western Washington (CCSWW) won a Systems Innovation Grant (SIG) from Building Changes for $20,000 (which served as a match for $100,000 provided by Snohomish County EHP money), to implement the coordinated entry system, including positions for a coordinated entry specialist and a housing resource specialist to work alongside the navigator. In June, the Workforce Development Council of Snohomish County (WDCSC) also received a SIG grant in the amount of $369,600 from Building Changes to establish a flexible fund for families participating in the pilot project.

The county also identified and entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the organizations that would refer families to the pilot project. This MOU outlined how many families each organizations could refer and when between July 18, 2011 and October 7, 2011 those referrals could happen. Table 1 lists the organizations and the number of referrals per organization. The referral organizations, deliberately chosen because they serve diverse groups of families, including those with low, medium, and high needs, and the schedule for making referrals was developed by an ad hoc work group of the Strategic Advisory Coordinating Committee. The county also established an MOU with service delivery partners under the *Investing in Families* pilot project.

Table 1. Investing in Families Pilot Project Referral Partners

Organization	Number of Referrals
Interfaith Family Shelter	3
Project Self-Sufficiency	4
WorkSource Snohomish County	6
Sky Valley Community Service Organization	6
Everett Housing Authority	3
Project CATCH	4
Immigrant and Refugee Forum	6
Coordinated Intake Registration Lists (determined by CCSWW)	10
Take the Next Step	6
Familias Unidas	6
Everett Public Schools	3
Monroe School District	3
Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program	3
Snohomish County Jail	6
Head Start	3
Housing Authority of Snohomish County (HASCO)	3
Total	**75 families**

The pilot project launched in July 2011, as planned. The navigator's office was re-located to CCSWW in Everett so that the coordinated intake specialist, the housing resource specialist, and the navigator would be co-located. As of December 2011, all 75 families had been referred to coordinated entry, triaged into one of three paths, and served by the housing specialist and the navigator, if necessary.

During this time, the Housing Authority of Snohomish County (HASCO) was awarded 50 Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers. The Investing in Families Strategic Advisory Coordinating Committee agreed that the 50 FUP voucher recipients could also be enrolled through the IIF Coordinated Intake Process.

The pilot project is being run out of both an urban and a rural location. One office is located in Everett, where CCSWW is headquartered, and the second office is in Monroe, where CCSWW staff operate coordinated entry through a new WDCSC center. This center opened in the fall of 2011 when St. Vincent DePaul renovated a building and rented half to WDCSC for $1 per year to operate the WorkSource Monroe center. The coordinated intake specialist and the navigator spend a few days each week in Monroe.

As part of a plan to roll out Coordinated Intake across the county, an additional Coordinated Intake center is about to open at Volunteers of America in Everett. Their staff has been trained on how to administer the Coordinated Intake paperwork, how to enter the data into the data system, and where to refer people.

Outcomes (as of February 2011)

Awareness

The providers felt that they were not as involved in the development of the implementation process as they were in the earlier two phases. Moreover, they did not seem to understand that the coordinated entry system that was being tested in the pilot project would not be rolled out countywide. It seems that many of them believe if the process is successful, more Navigators will be hired as coordinated entry roles out countywide. The county leads assured us this message had been well communicated to the providers, so they were unsure why there were lingering questions about this.

Acceptance and Participation

As of February 2011 none of the providers were directly participating in the pilot project because it was not yet operational. The providers seemed supportive of the Initiative generally, but almost all of said that they had too many unanswered questions to know for sure how things were going to play out. They are also frustrated by how long it is taking for the plan to take effect ("2½ years of planning is a heck of a long time"). The frustration is compounded by the plan for a pilot study that would only serve 50–100 families the first year. While they said they understood the rationale for the pilot study, there was still disappointment that so few of their families will be served by it.

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Pillar 2: Prevention

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Baseline Status

One of the long-term policy initiatives outlined in the Snohomish County Ten Year Plan was to expand homeless prevention services. However, at baseline, Snohomish County did not have extensive prevention services or a coordinated system for accessing and/or administering those services.

In 2009 homelessness prevention services were primarily available through two programs, the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) Program and the Emergency Shelter Homelessness Prevention (ESHP) Program. Funds from these two programs provided emergency shelter, homelessness prevention, and case management to individuals and families who were homeless or were at risk of homelessness. The prevention portion of the funds was used to keep families from becoming homeless through the provision of emergency rental assistance (Landscape Assessment). Snohomish County also received Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) funds or rapid housing and homeless

prevention through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, to provide the first month's rent or temporary rental assistance. Interviews with case managers revealed other prevention services included landlord-tenant mediation, foreclosure or eviction prevention, assistance with paying utility deposits, security deposits, first/last months' rental deposits, major and minor home repair services, and weatherization services (site visit notes). However, government officials, providers, and families all indicated that there were insufficient amounts of available services to meet the needs of the community. The amount of money available for short-term rental assistance was limited and was often gone within the first few days of the month. Moreover, there was limited legal assistance for families to mediate tenant-landlord conflicts, to prevent evictions, or to assist with foreclosures (Landscape Assessment).

The Snohomish County network of Family Support Centers often served as the first point of contact for many families seeking assistance with housing and related needs, including prevention and early intervention services. The seven centers are located in throughout the county with one center each in Darrington, Lake Stevens, Lynnwood, Stanwood, and Sultan as well as two centers in Everett (Landscape Assessment). However, there was no system in place to identify families who may be in need of prevention services. According to the Landscape Assessment, the system at baseline did not intervene early enough or aggressively enough to serve families who were at risk of homelessness, the public school system was underutilized as a first line of defense against homelessness for vulnerable families, and families requiring prevention services did not have access to case management assistance or receive referrals to other services in conjunction with prevention assistance.

A number of the homeless individuals we met with indicated they had received prevention services before becoming homeless. However, they noted, it required a great deal of effort to piece together enough resources to be beneficial and, even then, they only managed to delay foreclosure or eviction for an additional month or two.

Strategic and Implementation Plans

The *Investing in Families* Implementation Plan lays out a strategy for prevention that includes two objectives. These are (1) to develop an early warning, outreach, and diversion system for families and youth who are at risk of homelessness, including training of partners and dissemination of a 5–10 question screening tool intended to capture housing stability among other items, and (2) to use best practices research to develop a menu of diversion/prevention services to include, but not be limited to, mediation, information, referral, coaching, family strengthening, and access to financial assistance and supportive services.

Status Update

As part of the early warning system, the county leads included referral partners in the *Investing In Families* Pilot Project organizations that serve low-income families who are at risk of homelessness in the future, such as WorkSource Snohomish County, Everett Public School, and Head Start. These families are referred to the coordinated intake specialist, who administers a one-page screening tool to determine their level of need. If they do not have immediate housing needs, they are provided with prevention services, such as one-time rental assistance and bus passes. The plan is that when *Investing In Families* rolls out across the county, organizations that serve families at risk of homelessness will use the one-page screening tool to determine the level of need of their clients and be able to make appropriate referrals.

As part of the pilot project, Volunteers of America was awarded a SIG grant from Building Changes for $32,040 (which served as a match for $32,040 of a Consolidated Housing Grant) to provide prevention services. They also received a SIG grant in the amount of $9,834, a match for $24,568 Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) money, to fund a dispute resolution center so that tenants and landlords who are experiencing conflict can work to resolve those conflicts before they escalate to eviction. An additional SIG grant was awarded to Snohomish County Legal Services (SCLS) for $30,429 (which served as a match for $76,071 of CSBG money) for a team of two legal advocates who represent families by filing briefs, preventing eviction notices from being filed, and putting a stop to eviction notices that have already been filed so that the family can stay in their housing.

Outcomes (as of February 2011)

Awareness

Although some providers were aware of efforts to include prevention and diversion activities in the pilot project and to enroll in the pilot families who were at risk of homelessness, at the time of our site visit in February 2011, none were aware of specific prevention plans. There were limited prevention resources available in the county. Awareness of prevention resources varied across the providers.

Acceptance and Participation

There were no data collected on acceptance or participation during the site visit.

<center>**Pillar 3: Rapid Housing**</center>

Baseline Status

At baseline, there were not many rapid housing services available in Snohomish County. In fact, a significant barrier in the system was the lengthy wait list to housing. The goal of the CCM system was to create a more direct pathway to housing. However, there were not enough shelter and transitional housing units to take people off of the wait list in a reasonable amount of time. The ability to move families into permanent housing was severely limited by the lack of availability of housing subsidies. Both the Housing Authority of Snohomish County (HASCO) and the Everett Housing Authority (EVA) had extensive wait lists for housing subsidies. In 2009, only 11 families were taken off the HASCO wait list, which had over 5,000 families on it. The EHA wait list had not been open to new families since 2004.

Additionally, there was not enough affordable housing in the community because of high housing and land prices and poorly regulated growth. It was noted that the county was not always in accordance with Washington State's Growth Management Act, passed in 1990, which ensured that affordable housing was included in every jurisdiction's comprehensive development plans. Snohomish County had several organizations that were working to address barriers to affordable housing; nevertheless, there were insufficient local dollars to address affordable housing needs (in part due to loss of the Real Estate Excise Tax revenues for housing) by providing financing for such things as predevelopment loan funds, bridge financing, land banking, and the preservation of existing affordable units.

The Landscape Assessment noted that shortage of affordable housing units and housing subsidies was particularly marked in rural areas of Snohomish County, and that the lack of affordable housing acted as a deterrent to families at every point in the housing continuum. This shortage resulted in some families re-entering shelters or experiencing recurring homelessness.

At the time of our site visit in 2009, there was also a reluctance to move away from the traditional continuum of care approach towards a housing first approach. Providers repeatedly mentioned that the process of moving from emergency shelter through transitional housing to permanent supportive housing was both beneficial and necessary to connect families with the supportive services they needed to maintain permanent housing. Providers argued that Snohomish County needed more service-enriched housing programs with services onsite to provide stable long-term housing. Providers said they understood the importance of a housing first model but many believed there were other needs that need to be addressed before permanent housing is in place. County leaders indicated that this reluctance to embrace a new service model by the primary providers serving families presented a barrier to establishing a successful rapid housing agenda.

Individuals from throughout Snohomish County argued that without additional money for housing the Systems Initiative would not be successful. Some organizations, including HASCO, suggested that Gates needed to fund additional housing subsidies if they wanted fewer homeless families in the system.

Strategic and Implementation Plans

The *Investing in Families* Implementation Plan lays out a strategy for rapid housing that includes plans to develop a system for accessing and addressing housing stability, including developing and implementing a continuum of housing assistance and support services and to develop a housing supply continuum, including developing and implementing a program that would engage and incentivize private sector landlords to provide housing to families who are at risk of homelessness; creating a plan to generate affordable housing units; and developing a best practices system of emergency shelter. These plans include utilizing $1.1 million in Neighborhood Stabilization Program Phase 1 funds to provide housing for 10 families in the pilot project and utilizing Neighborhood Stabilization Program Phase 3 funds to expand the stock of housing available to low-income families.

Status Update

Just prior to our site visit in February 2011, the Housing Consortium had been hired, with infrastructure money, to develop a Landlord Liaison Project. They had proposed three different options for how a Landlord Liaison Project might work but the county leads felt unable at that time to choose which option, if any, to pursue until they received greater indication of what funding might be available to support this in coming years. Once the *Investing In Families* pilot project was launched, the county leads decided a standalone Landlord Liaison Project was not sustainable in Snohomish County. Instead the landlord liaison functions have been incorporated into the housing resource specialist position, which reaches out to landlords and works hard to cultivate relationships with them. The county leads are planning on maintaining a position for a housing locator/landlord liaison as the pilot expands countywide such that any of the participating provider agencies could reach out to the housing locator to help match families with appropriate housing units. The housing locator would have access to a flexible fund account to help families with security deposits for rent and utilities. Further, the county was exploring options for creating a web-based housing locator application, which would enable any provider in the county to assist families in locating suitable housing.

Of the first 46 families in the pilot project who needed assistance with housing, 29 (63%) of them received some type of housing. Nearly half (44%) received some type of permanent housing, and only 23 percent were placed in an emergency shelter or motel.

Types of Housing Accessed or Retained by IIF Families*	Number/Percent of Families*
Emergency Motel	6 (20%)
Emergency Shelter	1 (3%)
Temporary Subsidized Housing with Services	5 (17%)
Temporary Subsidized Housing without services	5 (17%)
Permanent Subsidized	7 (24%)
Permanent Unsubsidized	6 (20%)
Temporary Support to Stay in Private Housing	1 (3%)
Total	29

* Data from Annie Laurie Armstrong's evaluation of families in the IIF Pilot Project.

Outcomes (as of February 2011)

Awareness

There were no data collected on acceptance during the site visit.

Acceptance and Participation

There was some skepticism raised about the potential success of the Initiative without additional funding from HUD for permanent vouchers. It was noted by at least one interviewee that it would have been preferable to have the Gates Foundation providing continued financial support for the wrap-around services associated with the Sound Families units.

One provider admitted that he was unsure of how the pilot project would address rapid housing, but he expressed concern that families in the pilot project would be given priority in housing over families who had been waiting longer in order to achieve the goals laid out in the Implementation Plan.

Pillar 4: Tailored Services

Baseline Status

Although there was a wide range of services available in Snohomish County at baseline, the delivery of those services was both insufficient to meet the needs of the population and disorganized across providers.

During our site visit, providers noted that there was insufficient availability of some services. Specifically, they indicated a need for more physical health services, dental care, mental health services, substance abuse and detox services, and services focused on education and employment. They also noted that among some populations all services were difficult to secure. For example, families on the CCM wait list and those in permanent housing often did not receive the services they needed. As noted in the Landscape Assessment, most services were not available until a family becomes homeless and they often ended when a family secured permanent housing. To address this issue, the providers argued that Snohomish County needed more service-enriched housing programs with services onsite to facilitate stable long-term housing.

Snohomish County had recently passed a one-tenth of one percent sales tax increase that would be used to fund mental health and chemical dependency services. The Snohomish County Human Services Department was in the process of developing a plan for how this money would be used.

The system was also somewhat disorganized. Many families were served by multiple case management systems. As a result, families repeated assessments or developed service plans that were not well-aligned with one another. The Landscape Assessment noted that policies and practices of different service systems frequently conflicted or were redundant, slowing the pace of many families to become self-sufficient. Additionally, many providers did not know if families were following up with the services to which they had been referred. The data systems that tracked the services families received were "closed" systems. That is, providers were not able to access assessment information gathered by other organizations or services received by them. This often led to families receiving only a portion of the services they needed. As one provider noted, "There's no guarantee that one person will get all the pieces they need. Just because they're getting one service, there's no guarantee that they are getting others, because the system is so disjointed." Finally, across the board people whom we interviewed pointed out the need for tighter integration between case management, service receipt, and economic opportunities so that families could move more quickly towards self-sufficiency.

Strategic and Implementation Plans

The Strategic and Implementation Plans lay out a strategy for tailored services that include plans to develop a system for accessing and addressing families' service needs, using the Snohomish County Self-Sufficiency Matrix; develop a process for making referrals to an appropriate generalist or a specialist navigator based on those service needs and to establish a flexible fund account to procure these services if necessary; and develop a system for creating a family self-sufficiency plan and for continued, coordinated case management, such that the navigator will continue to support the family until the family is connected to a case manager through a housing, health, economic opportunity, or other service program, at which point the case manager will assume responsibility for working with the family on achieving the outcomes identified in its self-sufficiency plan. In order to support these efforts, the county leads will also identify one entity through a competitive bid process to provide family counseling and family law services for families in the pilot project as well as other families in Snohomish County experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness and redeploy the one-tenth of one percent resources to deliver wrap-around recovery and prevention services.

Status Update

As of our site visit in February 2011, limited work had been done on tailored services as part of the *Investing In Families* pilot project. At this time, one provider mentioned losing some funding for mental health services because the county changed its funding cycle from calendar year to fiscal year to align with the Initiative and that it changed its priorities for the Community Service Block Grants (CSBGs) such that they could no longer be used for case management.

Between February 2011 and February 2012, a number of efforts on tailored services had been implemented for families participating in the pilot project, including access to dispute resolution, legal services, and family counseling services as well as the services received through the navigator. As part of coordinated entry, the navigator administers an extensive assessment tool to determine families' service needs and their position on the Snohomish County Self-Sufficiency Matrix. She then works with families to develop a self-sufficiency plan and helps them to access the services they need to work on that plan. Building Changes funded a SIG grant in the amount of $369,600 to WDCSC to provide for a flexible fund to be used by the navigator to help access needed services.

Additionally, Building Changes funded a SIG grant in the amount of $60,091 to the YWCA (match for $150,229 provided by CSBG) to provide mental health services to families including (1) mental health counseling for parents with mental health issues and parents with co-occurring disorders, (2) family and couples counseling, (3) children's therapy, and (4) support groups and life skills classes.

In the first year of the pilot project the county leads have been trying to develop a way to maximize the web of services for families who need to access mainstream services. They have convened a number of work groups to discuss this process. Moving forward, they are going to develop a plan to do more alignment of mental health, chemical dependency, and parenting services.

Outcomes (as of February 2011)

Awareness

Providers were unaware of how tailored services would be implemented in the pilot project. Representatives from community behavioral health departments and the public school districts seemed very eager to be involved in the Initiative and to collaborate with housing providers to better identify and serve families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, but none spoke of specific involvement thus far.

Acceptance and Participation

Providers expressed enthusiasm about developing new tailored services programs, but they were unsure of what kinds of programs would be funded or when that funding would begin.

Pillar 5: Economic Opportunities

Baseline Status

At the time of our baseline data collection in 2009, there were a wide range of services for economic opportunities available to homeless families in Snohomish County. Those services were offered through shelter and housing providers or through the WDCSC. However, there was very little coordination between these two systems, which provided a significant barrier to serving families in the most efficient and effective ways.

The major homeless service providers for families in Snohomish County (Housing Hope, the YWCA, and Volunteers of America) each offered employment and education training programs. These programs focus on money management, fixing credit, developing resumes, job searching, and interviewing skills. The YWCA operated a specialized program called the Displaced Homemaker Program, which provided the employment services to women, usually 40 years old or older. Those services included resume writing assistance, support groups, interview training, working wardrobe, and job search assistance. Housing Hope offered a similar class to low-income residents of Snohomish County called the College of Hope. The College of Hope provides general life skills classes, like creating a budget and understanding credit, as well as more specialized employment-focused classes, like resume writing and interviewing skills.

Similarly, many homeless families receive economic opportunity services through the federally mandated WorkSource Snohomish County, which is overseen by WDCSC. This system has a number of portals including two comprehensive one-stop centers, WorkSource Everett and WorkSource Lynnwood, two specialized centers, the WorkSource Youth Center and the WorkSource Aerospace Center, and smaller affiliated and connection sites, including locations in Monroe and Bothell. At these centers, families can access job training and job search services. The SKIES data, which tracks use of the WorkSource services, show that between July 1, 2005 and June 30, 2009, the WDCSC system served 1,118 homeless individuals with more than 70 percent receiving services through WorkSource Everett. WDCSC also operated outreach teams throughout the county that served, but did not specifically target, homeless families. These outreach teams provided job development activities, including contacts with potential employers for job placement, general dissemination of information on WIA programs and activities, and job training opportunities.

At the time of our site visit, both the housing providers and WDCSC noted that their two systems were often not well coordinated with each other. They provided similar classes to the same population but did not work together to coordinated housing and employment services and they each operated independent data systems, the HMIS and SKIES, that were not compatible with one another.

Among the challenges both the housing providers and WDCSC faced were the increased barriers to employment experienced by homeless families. For example, more and more employers were doing credit checks and substance abuse testing among their job applicants, which are problems that are more prevalent among the homeless population. Other significant barriers to employment were transportation and child care. The WDCSC noted that parents who are homeless could not necessarily accept available jobs. They must have a large set of supports already in place that would allow them to get and maintain employment.

Strategic and Implementation Plans

The Strategic and Implementation Plans lay out a strategy for employment services that will develop and implement a unified, outcomes-based system for employment and education that is knowledgeable in and responsive to the obstacles and needs of families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, utilize U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funds to provide allied health care training to families in the pilot project and to families receiving TANF and utilize public and private funds to support the expansion and launch of social enterprises that extend the range of employment activities available to families in the pilot project.

Status Update

At the time of our site visit in February 2011, it was unclear how plans for economic opportunities were going to unfold. A number of housing providers had developed plans to access economic opportunities for their residents. They had proposed those plans to the county leads and were waiting to find out if they would be funded. The county leads indicated they were unable to make those decisions until the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation/Building Changes gave them a clearer idea of how Initiative funding could be used. For the most part, providers were moving forward with their plans, patching together funding from a number of other sources, but they were worried about the sustainability of those programs without additional funding from the Initiative. For example, Everett Community College (EvCC) was collaborating with two housing providers to run a unique project, "Property Works," which provided training and paid internships in property management or building maintenance to families in transitional housing. Representatives from the college (the Vice President of Instruction) and the providers were hoping that Initiative funds would provide coverage for that program in the future.

In the spring of 2011, Building Changes funded a SIG grant in the amount of $76,000 to Edmonds Community College (ECC) for a Creating Access to Careers in Healthcare (CATCH) training program for families in the pilot project. ECC was provided funds in the amount of $380,000 to fund this program. ECC is agreeing to reserve 18 spots in the program for families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and participating in the *Investing In Families* pilot project.

Additionally, Building Changes funded a SIG grant in the amount of $22,400 to the YWCA (which served as a match for $112,000 from WDCSC WIA money) to hire two employment navigators with an expertise in housing. The goal of these navigators is work with families to achieve two critical outcomes: (1) unsubsidized employment leading to wage progression to living wage jobs and (2) stable, secure, and sustainable housing. Relatedly, the YWCA is about to be certified (in March 2012) as a WorkSource connection site in Snohomish County. The YWCA staff has been trained on all of the necessary tools. They will be providing some services on site and referring some families to the WorkSource center. They will also be connecting families to training programs, such as the CATCH program, discussed above. CCS, Housing Hope, and Volunteers of America were also in some stage of the certification application process for becoming WorkSource connection sites. Certification as a WorkSource connection site will give each of these organizations access to the full array of online WorkSource resources including the statewide job back and job referral authorization. Data on job seekers is entered in SKIES.

Outcomes (as of February 2011)

<u>Awareness</u>

Providers seemed unaware of how economic opportunities would be implemented in the pilot project and whether any of the families they served would be included in those efforts.

<u>Acceptance and Participation</u>

There was a great deal of enthusiasm for collaborations between housing providers and the local community colleges and WorkFirst and WorkSource offices on projects that would increase the economic opportunities available to families in the housing programs; however, these efforts had not yet been integrated into the Initiative. Providers were unclear whether and how they would be involved in the Initiative.

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FOCUS AREA 2: COLLABORATION OF FUNDERS/COORDINATION

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Baseline Status

At the time of our site visit in 2009, there was general consensus that there was no single agency or organization that led the homeless family system in Snohomish County. Rather there were "pockets of leadership" all over. In recent years there had been some attempts to create coordinated leadership through the development of the Housing Consortium. The county provides some leadership but more often participates in efforts that begin elsewhere, such as the Homeless Policy Task Force or the housing providers themselves.

In part, because Snohomish County is a small community, there is a great deal of collaboration and leadership among housing providers. Providers indicate that there has been fairly good coordination and cooperation among the nonprofit communities and the government on policy and other things. There's been an effort in the community to work together instead of competing. The Housing Consortium is one structured way that coordination happens. It has monthly meetings to bring together community leaders and to provide a forum for communication in the community. Because Snohomish County is a relatively small community, most of the players know one another. They are all present on the same committees and at the same meetings. Much of the coordination happens informally at these meetings.

Leaders from the three predominant agencies that serve homeless families, Housing Hope, Volunteers of America, and the YWCA, work closely together in a collegial and collaborative spirit. They serve on the same committees (the Housing Consortium, the Homeless Policy Task Force) and see their overall mission as a collective one.

There is some tension surrounding funding. Most of the organizations that serve homeless families have to compete for the same, limited funding. The problem is that the providers do not have a lot of power in this community in terms of funding determinations. The county is somewhat fragmented about how money related to homelessness is spent. They indicate that they "sort of randomly go after money and hope to get some kind of package."

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The Homeless Policy Oversight Committee is a broad array of service providers, housing providers, and five action teams as an off-shoot. The Homeless Policy Task Force worked with the Mayor's office to make Project Homeless Connect happen in the summer of 2009. Sponsored by city of Everett and Snohomish County, the project pulled together about 300 volunteers, ranging from representatives from agencies to citizens from the community, to provide all kinds of services, including DSHS, haircuts, and public transportation coordination.

The Human Services Council is another avenue for coordination of issues pertinent to homeless families. At quarterly meetings providers talk about what services are available and existing gaps in service delivery. In developing the Consolidated Plan and program year 2005 Action Plan, Snohomish County staff consulted with members of the Housing Consortium and with a variety of public and private agencies that provide assisted housing, health services, and social services.

 At the time of our baseline site visit in August 2009 there was a great deal of frustration in the housing community that the WDCSC was chosen as the lead organization for the Initiative because it was believed that it did not know enough about housing or issues related to homelessness to effectively lead this project. However, throughout the planning process, WDCSC worked hard to engage the housing community, to listen to their ideas, and to share developments in the Initiative as it unfolded.

Strategic and Implementation Plans

The Strategic and Implementation Plans lay out a strategy for collaboration and coordination as follows:

- To create a governance structure to advise and oversee the implementation of the Snohomish County plan that reflects a communitywide collaborative effort in which all partners are invested and specifically recognizes the expertise of the Homeless Policy Task Force;
- To regularly convene the Strategic Advisory Coordinating Committee;
- To establish oversight meetings and processes for engaging with the Snohomish County government; and
- To identify and expand the Snohomish County Funders' Collaborative to increase funding opportunities for families and to mitigate any unintended impact of plan implementation on other populations.

Status Update

In planning for the *Investing In Families* Initiative, the county leads pulled together representatives from county and city government, the WDCSC, the major housing and service providers, mainstream services, the Homeless Policy Task Force, and the Housing Consortium to create a Strategic Advisory Coordinating Committee (SACC). The various members served on pillar-specific work groups to discuss the needs of the county and what the focus of the Initiative should be moving forward.

Once the Landscape Assessment and Strategic Plans were completed, in February 2010 and October 2010 respectively, these workgroups were dissolved, and the county leads took the lead on developing the Implementation Plan. During the site visit in February 2011, the providers said they felt that they were not as involved in the development of the Implementation Plan as they were in the earlier two phases, yet conversations with the county leads suggested there were "too many cooks in the kitchen,"

and too many differing opinions on what the plan should look like. In order to get it done, they took control of developing that plan.

The county leads were working hard at keeping the housing providers engaged in the process. To that end they (and BMGF) asked the director of the Housing Consortium to take a stronger leadership role in representing the Initiative to the members of the housing community, but as of February 2011, that had not yet occurred.

Throughout 2011, the SACC continued to meet on a monthly basis to provide policy level guidance. Once the pilot program began the SACC operated under a new governance structure that included an Implementation Management Team, composed of IIF Pilot Project supervisors, and an IIF Pilot Project Partnership meeting, composed of these supervisors and the front line staff at partnering organizations. The Implementation Management Team reviews project issues every two weeks and determines if (1) the issue can be resolved between a given supervisor and her/his direct reports, (2) the issue is procedural across agencies and needs to be resolved by the Implementation Management Team and communicated through the IIF Pilot Partnership which also meets every two weeks, or (3) the issue is a policy issue that must be taken to the SACC for review and decision during that body's monthly meetings. Considerable staff training is also conducted during the IIF Pilot Partnership meetings.

In the spring of 2011, the county started convening a funders' group, composed of representatives from both government and nongovernment organizations that have a financial interest in ending homelessness in Snohomish County. They meet bi-monthly to share information about the community's needs, including identifying service gaps, coordinating funding priorities, and streamlining application processes and reporting requirements. The scope of this work is broader than that of the WFF Systems Initiative.

Outcomes (as of February 2011)

Level of Coordination/Collaboration

Additional data collection is needed to determine if there have been improvements in the level of coordination and collaboration in the county.

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FOCUS AREA 3: DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

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Baseline Status

At baseline, there were a number of data systems being used in Snohomish County to track the use of housing and services among homeless families and to guide decision-making. Among these data sources were the annual Point-In-Time Count, the HMIS, SKIES, and DSHS.

In 2009 Snohomish County had a well-developed HMIS system, which had been in operation since 2008. In general, there is a high degree of participation in, and compliance with, the system. In 2009, family bed coverage for emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, and permanent supportive housing programs was 88 percent, 98 percent, and 97 percent, respectively. Many agencies entered data directly into HMIS. However, the three agencies that served the largest portion of homeless families

each ran their own data systems and exported the required data elements to HMIS's Client Track system on a quarterly basis. Several other smaller agencies also exported data rather than enter them directly into HMIS.

DSHS was another source of data about homeless families and the services they receive. Because Snohomish County did not have a strong data infrastructure for reporting and collecting information about homeless families, Snohomish County Human Services (SCHS) was in discussion with DSHS regarding a plan to link local providers to the state DSHS database rather than the HMIS database. SCHS was proposing to use money from the one-tenth of one percent sales tax increase to develop this system.

The Snohomish County DSHS had been working with the state DSHS to pull together counties that are interested in collaborating to pool money and fund full-time researchers to work at DSHS on the databases and provide county-specific reports on the state level to perform data analysis. These databases would track individual clients, but not put client names in the final reports. According to SCHS, most people in the county were unaware of this plan to collaborate with DSHS.

At the time, HMIS and DSHS data were not unduplicated, and DSHS could not provide county-specific reports. Clients in Washington State were not required to report identifying information to agencies, and without personally identifying information, there was no way to track clients between agencies using this data. Providers often got refusals for social security numbers, name, etc. DSHS would not be able to un-duplicate those cases, unless the state law was changed, making reporting of those elements required.

There were other data sources that also provide insight into the numbers and extent of family homelessness in Snohomish County. The Snohomish County Jail implemented a data collection system in late 2004 that tracked information on homeless incarcerated adults. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) collected data by each school district on the number of homeless children in the system. SKIES was an additional data system that tracks information on homeless people. SKIES was the data system that all the WorkSource systems in the state use. It tracked information on placement, services received, and self-sufficiency indices. However, SKIES did not collect information on marital status or number of dependents, so it could not distinguish between families and individuals.

Status Update

Coordinated Intake data collected on families participating in the pilot project and on families on individual providers' wait lists, are entered into a ClientTrack data system. This system includes all required HMIS data elements. It can also incorporate client goals, treatment plans, case notes, etc. This data system is "open," such that any of the participating providers can access any of the wait lists to find eligible families if they have an opening.

In 2009 the three largest housing providers for families were resistant to doing direct data entry; however, they have since agreed to participate in direct data entry even though this requires double data entry for some providers—mostly because this would allow Snohomish to participate in the AHAR which would give them stronger grant applications. Housing Hope is still hoping for a data integration solution, but until those problems are resolved they, too, are doing direct data entry.

The county contracted with Business Government Community Connections, whose principal investigator is Annie Laurie Armstrong, to conduct an extensive qualitative study of the families participating in the pilot in order to guide course corrections in their pilot. In particular, the county wants to make certain that the voice of the families was heard and that their needs were being met. She routinely shares information she is learning with the county leads and providers. As of February 2012, she has completed interim reports on the housing needs and the use of legal services by families in the pilot project. Future reports will cover employment, family counseling, uses of the flexible fund, and intersections/interactions among all of these domains.

Outcomes (as of February 2011)

Status and Use of HMIS

Snohomish had moved to an "open" data system, both for pilot project families and for other homeless families in the system, such that any of the participating providers can access any of the wait lists to find eligible families if they have an opening.

Implementation and Use of Other Data Systems

Although there were other data systems in use in Snohomish County, such as the SKIES system, there was no additional integration of these data with the HMIS. Moreover, HMIS had not received any additional funding to expand its role or capabilities.