



Washington Families Fund Systems Initiative Evaluation: 2012 Interim Report

Summary of Key Baseline and Early Implementation Findings

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Overview

The Washington Families Fund (WFF) Systems Initiative is a \$60 million comprehensive systems change intervention aimed at ending family homelessness. Implemented in three counties in the Puget Sound region of Washington State (King, Pierce, and Snohomish), the Initiative is guided by the Theory of Change that builds on proven and best practices as well as emerging new concepts from a number of communities across the United States. The Initiative, created over the course of several years by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), was approved in October 2007 and officially launched in 2009. Building Changes, a local nonprofit organization with a long history of working on homelessness issues at local, state, and federal levels, was designated in 2009 as the intermediary to operate the Initiative. The three communities were funded to conduct a three-stage planning process, culminating at the end of 2010 in multi-year implementation plans that are currently being put into action.¹

Westat, a national research firm with extensive background in the evaluation of program and system-level interventions for homeless families, has been commissioned to conduct a longitudinal evaluation of both the implementation and outcomes of the Initiative. This first set of coordinated reports documents both the baseline status of the systems for homeless families in each of the counties prior to the Initiative and the implementation of the Initiative in its first two years after the launch (2009-11). The reports are intended to provide a foundation of understanding of the Initiative and to provide formative feedback to BMGF, Building Changes, and stakeholders in the individual counties.

The eight brief reports, all under the title, *Washington Families Fund Systems Initiative Evaluation 2012 Interim Report*, are available on BuildingChanges.org. They include the following:

Executive Summary

Summary of Key Baseline and Early Implementation Findings

- I. The Role of the Funder
- II. The Role of the Intermediary
- III. The Role of the Evaluation
- IV. The Role of the Counties: Promising Practices
- V. Interagency Collaboration and Data-Driven Decision Making
- VI. Advocacy

Three sets of appendices include additional description and analysis of the implementation of the Initiative in each of the Initiative counties (Appendices I A-C); the role of selected organizations in the system and in the Initiative (Appendices II A-G); and the list of key informants for Westat's site visits in summer 2009 and February 2011 (Appendix III).

¹ Due to changes in the economic climate since the strategy was initially approved in 2007 and the length of time it took for the Initiative to unfold, BMGF has decided to extend the timeframe of the Initiative for an additional three years to allow for economic recovery and the complexities of the system change processes. The projects now will be implemented over the course of eight, rather than five, years.

This report provides a summary of the key baseline and early implementation findings of the Initiative. It begins by providing a context for the findings, including the development of the Initiative, its Theory of Change, and current operational structure. A brief description of the evaluation methodology is then provided, highlighting the evaluation purpose and focus, design, and methods. The majority of the report provides a summary analysis and appraisal of the baseline status and the Initiative's implementation to date within each county and recommendations to consider for each of the counties and for the overall Initiative.

The WFF Systems Initiative: Impetus and Theory of Change

The Foundation created the WFF System Initiative to assist the three counties in the Puget Sound area in creating reforms leading to reductions in family homelessness. The development of the Initiative involved an 18-month strategy planning process that was built on emerging innovative practices in the field as well as lessons from the Sound Families Initiative, BMGF's earlier initiative. The Sound Families Initiative was a \$40 million, seven-year initiative designed to develop more than 1,400 units of transitional housing for homeless families. The Sound Families Initiative evaluation, conducted by the Northwest Institute for Children and Families of the University of Washington School of Social Work, found more than half of families needed other supports to become self-sufficient. These findings, together with data that continued to show the same number of families experiencing homelessness each year in the Puget Sound, led the Foundation to conclude that housing production alone cannot solve the problem. Broader reform was indicated to move the systems from "*managing* family homelessness to *ending* the problem."

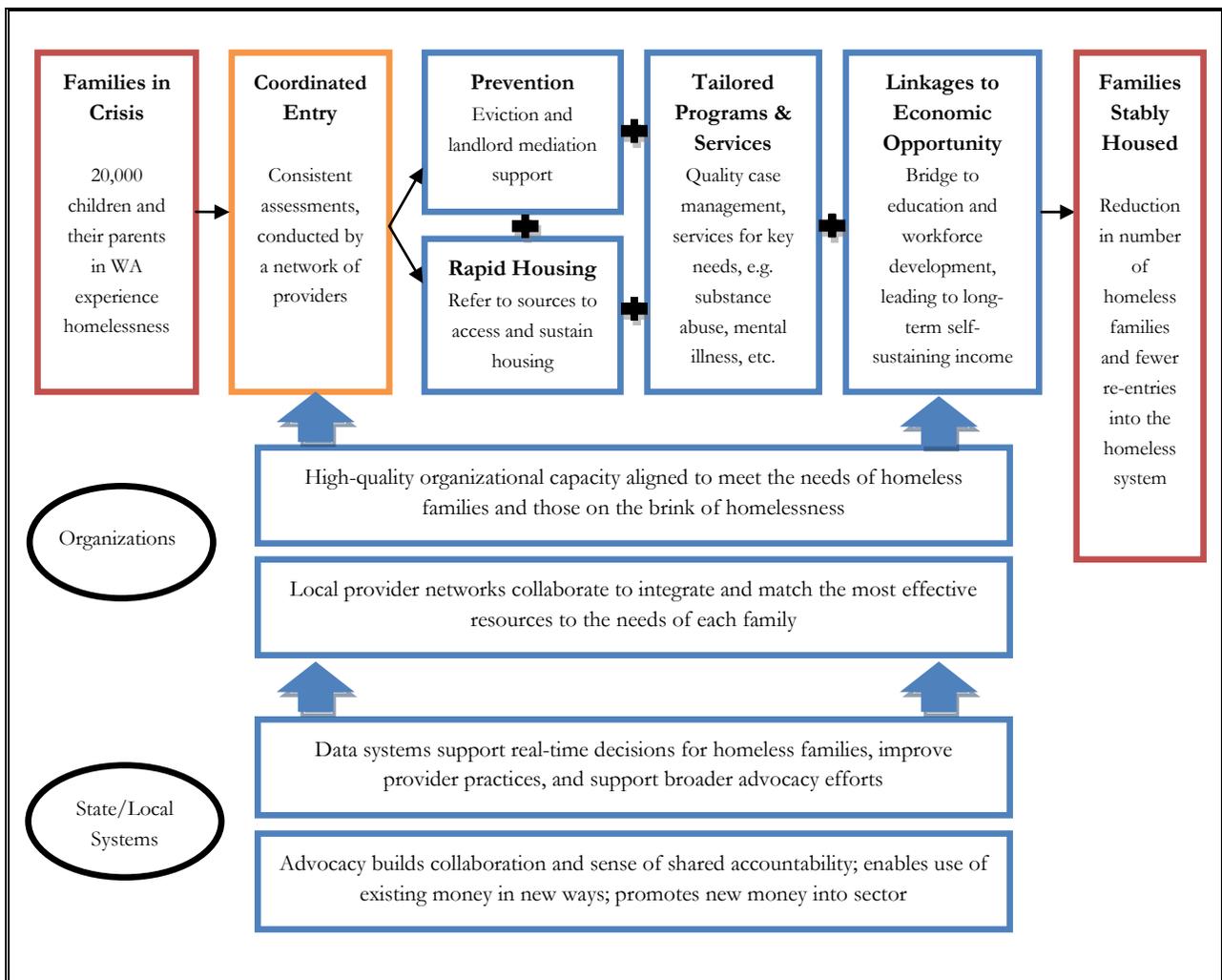
One of the key products from the Foundation's strategy development on the Initiative was a detailed Theory of Change (Figure II-1) to guide the work in each of the counties. The Theory has four areas of focus that are intended to operate simultaneously to bring about change in the systems serving homeless families in each county and to some degree, in the state as a whole. Each of these areas is reviewed briefly below.

The first "focus area" of the theory is the heart of the Initiative, outlining five programmatic pillars or areas of promising practices to reform systems serving homeless families. These pillars include the following:

- **Coordinated Entry:** A common point of entry or entry process into the system that includes a universal assessment protocol to match families to needed resources;
- **Prevention:** Resources that either divert families from entering shelter or that stabilize housing situations for families who are at risk of homelessness;

- **Rapid-Housing:** A system for quickly placing families who enter shelter into permanent housing, often with short-term rental assistance;
- **Tailored Services:** Services that provide for flexible, coordinated, and customized support to ensure that families are matched with the services needed to become residentially stable and self-sufficient; and
- **Economic Opportunity:** Services such as education, job training, and other employment preparation and support that help families become and stay residentially stable and move towards self-sufficiency.

Figure II-1. Washington Families Fund Systems Initiative Theory of Change



The expectation is that change will occur by engaging organizations with the capacity to implement the pillars. Focus Areas 2 through 4 are believed to be critical components to drive and support the effective

implementation of the programmatic pillars at the organization and systems level. These include effective collaboration and coordination among the providers and other stakeholders that provide for resources to support the pillars (Focus Area 2); data systems that provide reliable, accurate, and timely data to inform decision making at service and system levels (Focus Area 3); and advocacy for building awareness and support among policymakers and key third parties for reallocating existing resources and promoting new sources of funds (Focus Area 4).

The goals of the WFF Systems Initiative Theory of Change are to decrease the number of families who experience first-time homelessness; to decrease the number of families who experience repeat homelessness; for those who become homeless, to decrease the length of time they are homeless; and to ultimately produce a 50 percent reduction in family homelessness in each of the three counties by 2020.

The WFF Systems Initiative Operational Structure

Agents of Change

The Initiative has four different “agents of change” to support its implementation in the three targeted counties. The work of the four types of change agents is intended to support and enhance each other’s efforts over the course of the Initiative. The Foundation itself is a primary systems change agent, serving in several roles: as the initial and largest strategic investor of the infrastructure, the interventions, and other supports; as an Initiative co-manager; as a convener of groups locally, statewide, and nationally; as a generator of needed knowledge to continue to support ongoing learning in the Initiative; and as an advocate to push for needed reforms at local, state, and federal levels.

Building Changes operates as the intermediary organization for the WFF Systems Initiative. In this role, Building Changes co-manages the Initiative with BMGF and acts as the link between the county leads and others in the three counties and the state who are involved in the Initiative. As described in Chapter II, *The Role of the Intermediary*, Building Changes acts as an agent of change through its re-granting of BMGF funds for System Innovation Grants (SIG); by building the capacity of organizations through the provision of ongoing support and technical assistance; by networking individuals by convening meetings and groups; and by advocating for policy changes at state and local levels to support the Initiative.

The third type of agent of change is the lead organization for the Initiative in each of the three counties. These organizations plan, craft, and guide the work that is occurring “on the ground” in the five pillars of action. These lead organizations include the Housing and Community Development Program in the Seattle-King County Department of Community and Human Services, Pierce County’s Community Connections Homeless Program Office, and the Workforce Development Council of Snohomish County (WDCSC).

The fourth type of system change agent is the advocacy partner, of which there are many funded by BMGF to implement specific activities (e.g., media, advocacy, organizing) that are designed to create awareness of, and priority for, homeless families.

Funding

Each of the counties received \$200,000 from the Foundation, and King County received an additional \$100,000 from United Way of King County, to support the 18-month planning process that culminated in a tailored approach to addressing the five pillars (as well as the other three focus areas of the Theory of Change). This planning process included a Landscape Assessment Phase, a Strategy Development Phase, and an Implementation Phase. Each phase resulted in a product (Landscape Assessment, Strategic Plan, and Implementation Plan) that was vetted by both BMGF and Building Changes. Throughout these phases, BMGF and Building Changes provided supports to guide the process. This support included holding monthly meetings with each of the county leads, providing technical assistance, and sponsoring trips to best practices communities outside of Washington to learn how these communities developed and implemented programs associated with the five pillars.

Final county implementation plans were approved in the fall of 2010. With the plans approved, each county became eligible for system infrastructure support from BMGF and SIG grants from Building Changes. BMGF's infrastructure grants are intended to support staffing, capital, and technology investments to support systems change work. The counties can apply for an infrastructure grant each year for a total of five years. In 2010, the Foundation awarded King County \$1 million and Pierce and Snohomish Counties \$750,000. In 2011, the Foundation awarded King County \$687,000, Pierce County \$588,000, and Snohomish County \$400,000 in infrastructure grants. There are no requirements for the counties to match these infrastructure funds with other public resources.

The SIG grants are intended to support targeted investments to local nonprofit providers to support the implementation of the pillars. The purpose of these grants is to foster the re-alignment of both targeted and mainstream resources towards integrated, promising practice programming for homeless families. Throughout the span of the Initiative, Building Changes will receive more than \$30 million from BMGF to re-grant as SIGs. In order for organizations to receive these funds, there needs to be a match of \$2.50 of primarily public funds from ongoing funding streams for each requested SIG dollar. The county leads are responsible for ensuring that the proper match of public funds is secured for the SIGs. Once the SIGs are awarded the allocation of public funds is tracked by Building Changes. The SIG grants are intended to be made in multiple waves contingent upon achievement of clear milestones at specified intervals.

Additional funding is provided to support Building Changes as the lead intermediary, to provide advocacy grants to a range of organizations to create awareness of and support for ending family homelessness, and to support the cross-site evaluation.

WFF Systems Initiative Evaluation

The overall purpose of the evaluation is to provide the Foundation with a mechanism to learn systematically about the process and outcomes of the Initiative as it evolves in order to make mid-course corrections where warranted as well as contribute to the broader literature on family homelessness and systems change.

Four study components are included in the evaluation design: a systems study component, an organizational-level component, a family-level component, and a cost study. Table II-1 outlines for each study component the study design and the methods of data collection.

Table 1. Study Components

Component	Design	Data
Systems Level Track implementation of Initiative, changes in each system, and aggregate outcomes	Comparative longitudinal case study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three WFF counties • Two contrast counties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual site visits • Ongoing • Documents • Web-based provider surveys • Existing data
Organizational Level Examine impact of Initiative on providers in the system	Case studies of one shelter provider and one other provider in each county	Enveloped within systems data
Family Level Assess system’s effects on families and outcome	Longitudinal comparative cohort design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early cohort (2010) of 150 families in each county • Intervention cohort (2013) of 150 families in each county • Constructed comparison groups of families in non-WFF counties (from state data) 	Cohorts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person interviews conducted by Westat (baseline, 4, 12, 18 months) • State data Control group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State data
Cost Component Assess costs of implementing pillars and system	Gross and net costs of selected areas within each pillar	Enveloped with systems, organizational, and family-level data collection

The evaluation is being conducted over an eight-year period and is systematically tracking the implementation of the Initiative, the system changes that occur, changes that occur in individual

organizations, and the impact of the system changes on the experiences and outcomes of families entering the homeless service system. Comparison data at the county and individual family level will assist the evaluation in discerning the changes that appear to be due to the Initiative rather than due to other factors in the broader context. The cost component will help to assess the costs, cost savings, and cost shifts related to serving families in a coordinated system compared to the status quo.

The nature and size of the WFF Systems Initiative, the comprehensiveness of the evaluation, and the multiple levels of data collection and analysis (i.e., system, organizational, and family) have created several challenges for the evaluation. These include collecting, organizing, and sharing large quantities of data in a timely fashion, knowing how to focus data collection without knowing exactly where systems changes will occur, and targeting a diverse population of families using the system.

Implementing the Five Pillars

Table II-2 displays the status of each of the pillars in the three counties as of February 2012. As the table shows, in their implementation plans, the three counties all placed more initial attention on coordinated entry/ centralized intake than any of the other pillars. The goal of coordinated entry in all three counties is to streamline the process of accessing housing and services for families and to better match families according to their needs. Pierce County’s centralized intake system for homeless families and individuals, Access Point for Housing (AP4H), was launched on January 31, 2011. Snohomish County launched its Investing In Families pilot project in July 2011. In King County, the coordinated entry and assessment plan was scheduled to be launched by April 2012.

Table 2. Status of the Implementation by County as of February 2012

County	Coordinated Entry	Prevention	Rapid Housing	Tailored Services	Economic Opportunities
King	○	○	--	--	--
Pierce	●	●/--	○	--	--
Snohomish	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙

Legend

- Full system implementation
- ⊙ Pilot/partial implementation
- Ready to launch
- Under development

As indicated in Table II-2, King County is preparing to launch prevention activity in tandem with its coordinated entry system, with a focus on diversion and targeting families most at risk for homelessness. Also, King County, with its housing stabilization approach, is undertaking a number of development activities in preparation for rolling out reforms that touch upon rapid housing, tailored services, and economic opportunities, but in a staged approach.

Pierce County initially incorporated prevention assistance as part of its centralized intake system; however, the system experienced unanticipated high demand for prevention services, and the county now plans for AP4H staff to no longer conduct assessments, but instead to refer at-risk families to community providers. For rapid housing, Pierce County is developing a catalog of affordable housing options and implementing a landlord liaison program. Finally, programs for tailored services and economic opportunity are under development.

Snohomish County is implementing all pillars with a pilot sample of 75 families, though with less emphasis on rapid housing than the other pillars.

The sections that follow describe the approach each county is taking to address each pillar. Each section begins with a brief synopsis of the baseline conditions across the three counties prior to the Initiative, followed by a description of the change in practice that is occurring or about to occur in each county. Table II-3 provides a synopsis of the approach of each of the three counties across the five pillars.

Coordinated Entry

Baseline (as of 2009). In King and Pierce counties, there was no “system” of entry. Families in need of shelter or housing called 211, went directly to a shelter provider, or, in Pierce, called a shelter availability line to check on vacancies. In both systems, families calling 211 (or the shelter availability line) were provided a listing of organizations to contact. The burden was placed on families to navigate housing systems with multiple uncoordinated points of entry, necessitating many calls to check in with multiple providers and, for those providers that had wait lists, to check in regularly to see if a slot had opened. In addition, there was no matching of shelter to needs. There was neither a common intake process among housing providers nor centralized information on the eligibility criteria for the different providers. Unfortunately, this meant that families often spent considerable time, effort, and at times, expense, to search for housing for which they were not qualified.

Snohomish County operated a coordinated entry system for families called Coordinated Case Management (CCM). 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. Once intake was complete, families were placed on a computerized wait list for housing. Providers with available housing slots would reference the CCM data management system to identify families who met their program’s eligibility criteria. However, there were not enough shelter and transitional housing units to take people off the wait list in a reasonable amount of time. Under the CCM system, families 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 refer them to services.

Implementation Plans and Progress (as of February 2012). King has designed a coordinated entry system that is managed by a single provider, Catholic Community Services, with families calling into 211 being screened and then referred to one of eight intake locations. After an intake assessment, families will then be referred to a housing provider based on the match of their needs and the capacity and services of the provider. The coordinated entry system will use the county's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to capture intake and assessment data and facilitate the matching of families to agencies. This system is scheduled to launch in April 2012.

In January 2011, Pierce County implemented a centralized intake system, AP4H, which is operated by Associated Ministries. Families either visit an AP4H office or call a single AP4H telephone number and undergo a 15-minute screening interview. If a family is determined eligible for housing assistance, an in-person assessment is scheduled at one of five offices. This assessment is used to determine a family's level of needs and to match it to available housing. Since its initial launch, there has been some strengthening of the system. Initial challenges were experienced because not all staff or resources were in place, nor was the assessment tool finalized. The overwhelming need required the system to stop accepting requests in person, and have all requests come by telephone to allow the staff to manage the volume.

Snohomish has a coordinated entry process based on a "no wrong door" approach. A coordinated intake specialist administers the screening and assessment tools that categorize families into high, medium, and low need and triages them into one of three paths. Low-need families are provided one-time assistance, such as a referral to a service agency or assistance with utility bills. Medium- and high-need families begin working with a housing specialist who can assist them with locating housing and a navigator who works with them to develop a self-sufficiency plan and brokers needed services. Although the pilot project began this process with a single provider, the longer term plan is to roll out the process to all providers in the county who serve families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. There is also a focus on providing case management and access to services to families who may be waiting for housing.

All three counties are incorporating a screening for eligibility and an intake assessment to determine families' level of need into their coordinated entry plan, with HMIS supporting the process. Data collected through the process are expected to improve each county's understanding of the needs of its homeless family population and guide implementation of the Initiative.

Prevention

Baseline (as of 2009). Although a range of prevention assistance was available in each of the three counties, the programs were typically small, uncoordinated, and offered one-time financial assistance such as short-term rental subsidies, eviction prevention, utility assistance, and other types of one-time assistance. Across the counties, prevention funding was provided without additional services (such as

case management) accompanying it and generally had eligibility criteria that exclude homeless families (e.g., proof of employment. Moreover, none of the counties had data to support an understanding of the need for, or effectiveness of, prevention services. This was in part because the limited prevention funds were disbursed on a first-come, first-served basis that did not promote a solid understanding of the level of need in the community.

Table 3. Status of the Five Pillars

King	Pierce	Snohomish
Coordinated Entry		
Coordinated Entry and Assessment (CEA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Families call 211, are screened, and are referred to meet with assessment specialist - Assessment specialist conducts a uniform assessment and matches families to array of housing options available 	Centralized Intake (AP4H) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Families call AP4H and receive 15-minute screening interview, followed by in-person assessment - Family referred to available housing program that matches needs 	Coordinated Entry and Assessment (Pilot) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinated intake specialist administers uniform screening and determines level of need (low, medium, high). - Housing resource specialist and/or service navigator work with medium- and high-need families to access housing and services
Prevention		
Focus on Flexible, Expanded Resources Targeted to Stabilization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shelter diversion where possible as part of the CEA - ECAP program in place providing funding assistance and housing relocation - Additional prevention plans under development and slated for Phase 2 	Focus on More Coordination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initial pairing of prevention with coordinated entry system discontinued due to inability to meet unanticipated high demand - AP4H staff now refer families to the providers who have prevention assistance 	Early Warning System with Range of Diversion/Prevention Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early warning system: partner organizations trained to use a brief screening tool to identify families with housing instability
Rapid Housing		
Housing Stabilization and System Transformation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aligns case management practices, tailored services, and economic opportunities to focus on housing stability 	Housing Locator System and Landlord Liaison Project (LLP) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing locator is website of available public and private affordable housing. - LLP will recruit 250 landlords to participate, will offer tenant education, landlord/tenant outreach; and a risk pool of funds to incentivize landlords 	Housing Stabilization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing specialist has access to flexible funds - Exploring options for a web-based housing locator application, to enable any provider in the county to assist families in locating suitable housing

Table 3. Status of the Five Pillars (continued)

King	Pierce	Snohomish
Tailored Services		
Housing Stabilization and System Transformation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transforming organizations to provide housing-focused and strengths-based services through professional development and peer networking 	Tailored Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Matching families using HMIS with organizations that specialize in their unique needs - Providing technical consultations to help agencies develop a customized approach to serving families 	Tailored Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop systems and processes for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o using the Snohomish County Self-Sufficiency Matrix to assess families' service needs o making appropriate referrals o providing flexible funds o creating a family self-sufficiency plan
Economic Opportunities		
Housing Stabilization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designed to maximize linkages to existing economic and educational opportunities by accessing mainstream system benefits and tax credits and exploring opportunities to coordinate housing and employment services 	Engaging Systems to Provide Economic and Education Navigation Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategies to be developed include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Intensive employment and education navigation services o Cross-system partnerships with workforce development providers o Cadre of employers receptive to working with the target population 	Developing Unified Outcomes-Based System for Employment and Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrate housing and employment service delivery through employment navigators and co-location of services - Collaborate with community colleges to provide training to families in the system

Implementation Plans and Progress (as of February 2012). The strategy in all three counties is to have a more systemic focus on prevention that includes access to services with financial assistance. In all three counties prevention and/or diversion services are to be coupled in some way with coordinated entry.

Although King County plans to incorporate a prevention/diversion focus as part of the coordinated entry process, the specific details in King County are scheduled for Phase 2 of its implementation plan. Phase 1 prevention efforts focus on diversion services targeted at families most at risk for homelessness. Another prevention-related effort that is underway is a project with the City of Seattle and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) to provide funding for temporary financial assistance and housing relocation and stabilization services, including landlord negotiations, housing stability case management, financial empowerment services and budgeting, and security and/or utility deposits to organizations to assist low-income families and individuals at risk of homelessness.

In January 2011, Pierce County released a prevention program combined with its centralized intake system. The centralized intake agency, Associated Ministries, received an additional \$335,000 of funding to provide an estimated 250 to 399 at-risk families with short-term financial and case management assistance. However, within four months it had expended all of its prevention dollars and could no longer serve at-risk families. Once funds were expended, AP4H discontinued conducting intake assessments on at-risk families, but referred them to other prevention providers in the community.

Snohomish County is planning on developing an early warning system that would allow service providers throughout the county to identify and serve families at risk of homelessness before they lose their housing. As part of the early warning system, Snohomish County included as referral partners in the Pilot Project organizations that serve low-income families who are at risk of homelessness in the future, such as WorkSource Snohomish County, Everett Public Schools, and Head Start. The plan is that when Investing in Families rolls out across the county, organizations that serve at-risk families will use the coordinated entry screening tool to determine the level of need of their clients and be able to make appropriate referrals. As of February 2012, plans for selecting the agencies that would provide prevention assistance and for the prevention system were underway.

Rapid Housing

Baseline (as of 2009). In 2009 and even through 2011, the concept of rapid housing was relatively new in all but King County, and few programs were in place across the three counties. The federally funded Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing (HPRP) had been recently introduced, but there were few other resources available to move families into housing or to support them while they transitioned into permanent housing. (In King County, Journey Home, Stable Families, and the Landlord Liaison Project were notable exceptions.) Even for the more than 1,400 units of transitional housing that were developed as part of the Sound Families Initiative, there had been a cliff of services; the contracts for housing were longer than the contracts for services, and a number of programs were faced with the prospects of operating the housing without services.

At baseline all of the counties also had a similar focus on the continuum of housing: that is, families generally moved from shelter to transitional housing before moving to permanent housing. Few families moved directly from a homeless situation to housing and even more rarely from shelter into permanent housing. Several factors across and within the counties perpetuated this continuum and prevented movement directly into housing, including the lack of affordable housing, the lack of housing subsidies to increase access to market-rate housing, a reliance on transitional housing, and a philosophical tension between supporting the existing continuum of care and having rapid housing, with many providers believing that moving from emergency shelter through transitional housing to permanent supportive housing was both beneficial and necessary to connect families with the supportive services needed to maintain permanent housing.

Implementation Plans and Progress (as of February 2012). King 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 but also to align case management practices to focus on shortening families' length of stay in shelter and placing families in permanent housing, and then focusing on housing stability. To guide the process, the county has conducted a survey of providers to assess their readiness for change, brought in speakers to examine different models for the housing (i.e., Grand Rapids, Columbus, Chicago), met with 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.

As of February 2012, Pierce County was ready to launch rapid housing activities that are closely modeled after programs in King and Spokane Counties. In January 2012, the nonprofit agency Metropolitan Development Corporation (MDC) received a one-year award from Pierce County and Building Changes to implement the county's housing locator system and Landlord Liaison Project. MDC will offer tenant education classes, active outreach with tenant and landlords, and maintain a risk pool of funds to incentivize landlords to rent to homeless families. In addition, in the spring of 2011 Tacoma Housing Authority received a three-year award from Pierce County and Building Changes to implement a pilot that provides families with prevention, rapid housing and tailored services, and offers Section 8 housing vouchers to up to 50 families that have a child enrolled in McCarver Elementary School.

Using the pilot, Snohomish County has begun to work towards its plan to develop a system for accessing and addressing housing stability, including engaging private sector landlords to provide housing to families at risk of homelessness. Although its initial intent was to develop a Landlord Liaison Project, the county decided a standalone Landlord Liaison Project was not sustainable. Rather, the county has decided to have the housing resource specialist serve as a landlord liaison, performing outreach to landlords and working to develop and nurture relationships with them. The county leads also are working with the Housing Consortium to explore options for web-based housing locator applications that might facilitate accessing housing for any provider in the system. As the pilot expands countywide any of the provider agencies could reach out to the housing locator or use the web-based program to help match families with appropriate housing units.

Tailored Services

Baseline (as of 2009). At baseline, all three counties lacked an organized system of services for homeless families. Different homeless providers provided different services; there was no common protocol or definition for case management, and there was a concern that families could be served by multiple case management systems, resulting in repeated assessments or service plans that were not well aligned with one another. In addition, all three counties lacked formal agreements between homeless and mainstream service providers. Rather, the policies and practices of different service systems frequently conflicted or were redundant, slowing the pace of many families to become self-sufficient. Moreover, 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 the services

received by them. This often reportedly led to families receiving only a portion of the services they needed. Many services were noted as particularly difficult to access for families. Services noted as particularly difficult to access for families in one or more counties included mental health services for adults as well as substance abuse services, such as in-patient chemical dependency treatment for a family in which the child is not removed from the home, detoxification services, subsidized child care, more physical health services, dental care, and services focused on education and employment. In addition, providers in Snohomish County noted that most often case management services were not available until a family becomes homeless and they often end when a family secures permanent housing.

Implementation Plans and Progress (as of February 2012). All three of the counties have begun to implement their plans for tailored services. The plans in King and Pierce are focused on reconfiguring case management practices across providers in the system, while efforts in Snohomish are focused on determining families' service needs and streamlining access to those services.

King 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 county is developing a toolkit that includes professional development and training opportunities to guide these activities. Moreover, the coordinated entry process will focus on matching families with providers who offer appropriate levels of services to address their needs. The county leads are also trying to connect to mainstream services and provide training to foster a peer networking community.

Pierce County has initiated several activities outlined in its Implementation Plan. These include assessing the organizations to document the services currently provided by the program or via community partnerships and program eligibility requirements, providing technical assistance to assist organizations in incorporating a tailored services program model, and developing plans to contractually define what services each organization is supposed to provide.

Snohomish County has developed a system for accessing and addressing families' service needs using the Snohomish County Self-Sufficiency Matrix and developed a process for making referrals to an appropriate generalist or specialist based on those needs. Assessment information and data on service receipt are recorded in an "open" data system and shared across providers. Snohomish County has also developed a flexible fund to be used by the Navigator to help access needed services. Finally, Snohomish County has also funded two organizations to increase families' access to services (e.g. mental health services and legal services) that were otherwise difficult to access in the community.

Economic Opportunities

Baseline (as of 2009). The major homeless service providers for families across the three counties were providing education and employment services that included money management, fixing credit, developing resumes, job searching, and interviewing skills, but they had little potential or capacity to be

taken to scale. Mainstream providers of services, education, and employment training also were not systematically linked with the homeless and housing programs, and there were no specific mechanisms to ensure these agencies were serving homeless clients. The lack of coordination between these systems has resulted in a duplication of the services, the development of data systems (HMIS and SKIES) that are not compatible with one another, and, most important, likely gaps in services for families once they complete their housing programs.

Several factors may account for this lack of coordination between homeless and housing providers and mainstream providers. Not all homeless and housing providers embrace workforce development and traditional workforce development services reportedly are geared to serving those easier to employ. In addition, institutional and benefit requirements and regulations make it difficult for families to obtain the education and employment training they may want and need. Similarly, the Temporary Assistance for Need Families (TANF) WorkFirst has many regulations, and case managers may interpret these regulations variably. Some key informants suggest that some case managers may stress jobs over training for families and that working itself may serve as a barrier to getting ahead.

Implementation Plans and Progress (as of February 2012). The plans to integrate economic opportunities in King County and Pierce County primarily focus on making connections with education and employment providers, determining the range of services available within the community, and streamlining the process of connecting homeless families to those services.

King County is working on economic services as part of its 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 Stabilization 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.

Pierce County's primary focus in the early years of the Initiative is to engage education and workforce development agencies in the homeless service system. They have implemented a number of pilot programs that focus on improving economic opportunities for homeless families. For example, Washington Women's Employment and Education (WWEE), a local workforce development provider, has started to provide transitional housing and rental assistance services to homeless families as well as connecting them with education and employment opportunities to support housing stability. The Pierce County Housing Authority and four nonprofit housing providers are piloting a program to collaborate with Workforce Central, the local Workforce Investment Act agency, to provide career assessment, goal setting, job training, and placement services to homeless families in the county.

Increasing access to economic opportunities is a primary focus of the Systems Initiative in Snohomish County and largely drove the decision to identify WDCSC as the fiscal agent. The plan in Snohomish County focuses on the integration of services provided by mainstream providers and housing providers

by coordinating funding, realigning programs to work in conjunction with one another, and co-locating service delivery. The county has implemented a number of programs, based on collaborations between housing providers and the local community colleges, to provide education and vocational training to families in shelter and transitional housing. It has located WDCSC staff at the housing providers to provide some services onsite and facilitate families' access to the WorkSource center. The county has also authorized a number of providers to be Washington State Connection sites, which allowed them to check for benefit eligibility for their clients and to assist them with applications.

Supporting the Counties: Interagency Collaboration, Data-Driven Decision Making, and Advocacy

Focus areas 2 through 4 in the Theory of Change describe three areas of activity that are believed to be needed to support the reforms undertaken in each of the counties. Some of the activities are expected to be county specific whereas others are expected to occur at the state or federal level in support of the local work. The baseline status of each of the areas and what has occurred through the Initiative thus far is briefly described.

Interagency Collaboration

As outlined under Focus Area 2, interagency collaboration is intended to integrate and match the most effective resources to the needs of the families. Prior to the Initiative, the three counties had varying degrees of interagency and leadership vehicles for homelessness. As of February, all three counties had funders' groups that set funding priorities for homelessness. Building Changes is a member of each group.

In King County, the Committee to End Homelessness (CEH) was and still is 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 that is composed of four committees: the Governing Board, the Interagency Council (IC), the Funders' Group, and the Consumer Advisory Council. 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, the United Way of King County, and more recently, Building Changes, coordinates the funding along established priorities. This group is cited as the group most instrumental for coordination and collaboration for the system and for families. During the summer of 2011, an Implementation Advisory Group for the King County Initiative also was created to advise the Family Homelessness Initiative lead staff in support of the CEH's Funders Group Investment priority.

In Pierce and Snohomish counties, there was no centralized leadership for the homeless service system. In Pierce County, the theme of disconnectedness was apparent in our examination of funders' priorities during the baseline period. Funders tended to have individual sets of priorities. The county did have one vehicle of collaboration, the 2163 Funders' Group. This oversight group, which includes leadership from Pierce County, the City of Tacoma, and the City of Lakewood, was developed to streamline the funding process. The Pierce County Department of Community Services administered the funding.

Unfortunately, during our 2009 interviews, several stakeholders reported that the Department of Community Services was difficult to work with. Upon being awarded the Initiative, Pierce County and its Initiative Steering Committee took a significant role in providing leadership for the homeless system and formed several committees, with representation from a broad range of organizations to guide the development of the strategic and implementation plans. As a result of the planning work the Steering Committee was conducting for the Initiative, and with the assistance of Building Changes, an Oversight Group of Funders was created to oversee and execute the Initiative. Members of this funders' group signed a Compact for Change, agreeing to meet every quarter and create policy alignment and funding strategies that oversee the Implementation Plan.

Similarly, in Snohomish County, there was general consensus that there was no single agency that led the homeless family system prior to the Initiative. Rather, there were pockets of leadership, such as the Housing Consortium, the Homeless Policy Task Force, the Homeless Policy Oversight Committee, and the Human Services Council. Because Snohomish County is a relatively small community, there was a great deal of collaboration and leadership among individual housing providers as well. Yet there was some tension surrounding funding because there was limited homelessness funding, providers did not have a lot of power with respect to how funding decisions were made, and the county was fragmented about how the money was spent. In the spring of 2011, the county started convening the Snohomish County Funders' Collaborative, composed of representatives from both government and nongovernment organizations that have a financial interest in serving the low-income population in Snohomish County. This group includes representatives from the county, WDCSC, Building Changes, the United Way, and other local foundations. It meets bimonthly 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.

Data-Driven Decision Making

Data-driven decision making, as described in Focus Area 3 of the Theory of Change, is predicated on the assumption that data systems that provide accurate, reliable, and timely data on homeless families can guide decisions, improve provider practices, and support advocacy efforts. The HMIS, intended to be the main source of data on homelessness, had a number of issues and challenges in all three counties that inhibited its usefulness. All three systems had considerable capacity to capture and report on significant amounts of data, but none were operating at capacity prior to the Initiative. Data quality was cited as a problematic issue. All three HMIS systems were operating as "closed systems," not allowing other agencies to have real-time access to client information. In 2009 and 2010, in response to these issues, the Foundation convened a Data Summit and a series of Workgroup meetings to identify ways to improve data availability, quality, and use.

In the past two years, there has been significant improvement in each of the counties' HMIS systems. Each of the counties is now participating in a statewide, coordinated HMIS strategy and works in partnership with the Washington State Department of Commerce. Moreover, the Initiative as a whole has been examining ways to strengthen the data available at the state level, with efforts focused on individual housing authorities and education.

In King County, perspectives regarding Safe Harbors (King County's HMIS provider) have improved since the baseline visit. The new director of Seattle's Housing Department (who was hired in 2010) has taken a strong interest in Safe Harbors and has moved it to reside with the IT and Quality Assurance division. There has also been movement in King County to require reports with Safe Harbors to match up with the state HMIS in order to have invoices paid. Data integration continues to be the way several of the agencies participate, though data were now unduplicated (which was viewed as a huge accomplishment from a year prior). Pierce County upgraded its HMIS system and hired new staff to provide technical assistance with providers. Interviews with county and provider-level stakeholders during 2011 report that participation in HMIS is now close to 100 percent, and there have been improvements with regard to the timeliness and quality of data entered. Also, HMIS is the underlying database for the county's Centralized Intake system. The county reports being able to use the data captured to support decision making for future program planning. Snohomish has 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 with an opening can access any of the wait lists to find eligible families. In addition, data are being collected through a special contract with a consultant who is providing real-time formative feedback on the implementation of the pilot from interviews with staff and families involved in the pilot.

Advocacy

Advocacy, Focus Area 4, has been defined as building awareness and support among policymakers and key third parties about emerging strategies to end family homelessness, a sense of shared accountability, and a broad base of support for reallocating existing resources and promoting new sources of funds. As of February 2012, the Foundation and Building Changes had implemented a variety of efforts under the general rubric of advocacy, including the following:

- Meetings with government officials, including extensive and ongoing contacts with municipal, county, state and federal officials to help foster and support policies and programs that can help to prevent and reduce homelessness;
- Policy papers that synthesize existing research and best practices implemented by various communities and propose strategies to prevent and reduce family homelessness;
- Pilot projects aimed to reform both mainstream and homeless services systems;
- Site visits and learning trips for participants in the three counties and the state to communities across the country where innovative practices and reforms are underway;
- Participation and leadership of Foundation staff on Funders Together to End Homelessness, a national network of funders supporting grant making to end homelessness; and

- Funding of nearly 30 grants to a range of organizations in the counties and across the state intended to both increase visibility of family homeless and mobilize support for needed policy changes.

The meetings with government officials at all levels have been the major vehicle to educate them about the Initiative and how they can provide support. State agency officials and others working at policy levels report increasing understanding of what the Initiative entails and what it is designed to accomplish.

Many of the grants funded to advocacy partners have had a central focus on increasing public awareness of family homelessness. For example, a set of grants was provided to Rotary International Districts to increase the business sector's awareness of family homelessness and gain its support and influence for policies and system changes that could advance the interests of the Initiative. The multiplicity of efforts as well as the targeting of a variety of sectors and different levels within those sectors appears to be well positioned to create awareness and in turn support. The advocacy agenda, however, is very broad and not well tied into the work of the counties.

Several of the advocacy activities are specifically designed to promote and create a shared sense of accountability among those involved in the Initiative. The learning trips, for example, are aimed at creating a sense of "we are all in this together" and how efforts can be coordinated and combined to tackle the problem. Participants on the trips noted that they have helped to spark ideas as well as bond stakeholders together. Attendees noted that the trips helped in the development of plans to support the Initiative locally, but there was some concern that the communities visited are quite different than their own and thus present some challenges in understanding how practices can be replicated.

A key desired outcome from the advocacy efforts is to actually spark change at the policy and practice levels that can ultimately lead to reduced homelessness. This work almost always entails reallocating existing resources or obtaining new resources dedicated to the change. For example, Building Changes is working with the leaders in the state's Children's Administration, leaders in the housing authorities, and others to reposition the transitional housing created under Sound Families as supportive housing for homeless families involved in the child welfare system. This work is a prime example of efforts that could result in reallocation of existing resources.

Key Features of the Approach Taken by BMGF and Building Changes

Across the four focus areas of activity, the Foundation and Building Changes have an active role in shaping and guiding the work, and in some cases, have direct involvement in the activity. There are several characteristics of their leadership and how they approach the work that helps to understand how the activities fit together and the nature of implementation thus far. These features are described below:

Taking a Developmental, Somewhat Organic, and Adaptive Approach

The approach to designing and implementing the Initiative has been explicitly developmental. The Initiative itself was created through an 18-month multistage strategy development process, and the counties, guided by the Initiative's Theory of Change, spent the first year and a half of the Initiative immersed in a three-stage planning process. As the counties begin to implement their strategies, they, as well as the Foundation and Building Changes, have adapted to changes that have occurred in the broader context. The changes in context also have changed the Foundation's expectations with respect to the timeframe in which it expected to see results occur. The state's fiscal condition in 2011 and the outlook for 2012 was one of the factors that prompted the Foundation to extend the timeframe of the Initiative from five years (2010–14) to eight years (2010–17), giving it more time to unfold and stretching the dollars over a longer period of time.

Learning from Best and Promising Practices

From design through implementation, learning from best and promising practices across the country has been an unmistakable attribute of the Initiative. Early on, the Foundation had an eye on what practices were in place in other areas of the country and whether and how they may influence the Initiative model. Since that time, there has been a continued focus on learning from others, whether that has occurred through visits to specific communities where a practice is in place, having site representatives or other experts come to the Puget Sound to present to the counties, or attending conferences, such as the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) Family Homelessness Conferences and other trainings. A key aspect of these trips is that they typically include several representatives from each county as well as the state.

Fostering Peer Learning

Peer learning and information exchange, particularly among the three counties and the lead organizations of the three counties, was fostered by BMGF through the trips and sessions mentioned above, and through other individual exchanges. As the Initiative has moved to implementation, the level of exchange appears to have increased through Building Changes' efforts. Monthly tri-county meetings, begun in early 2011, are a key forum for cross-county exchange as well as special convenings and sessions that bring in outside speakers.

Influencing Others, Gaining Visibility

Although the Initiative is concentrated in the three counties in the Puget Sound, it has gained visibility at the state and federal level. The visibility is largely promoted by both the Foundation and Building Changes, and is aimed at getting public and private support for the Initiative and the county efforts, as well as helping to influence policy and funding that could support the three counties. These have included a 2010 trip that brought representatives from each of the counties and the state to Washington, D.C.; learning trips to the strategy sites and programs by key leaders from federal departments, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH); several of the Foundation's advocacy grants, particularly those that focus at the state level; convenings such as Silos to Systems, in November 2011; and policy papers.

Following a Theory of Change, but Opportunistic

The Theory of Change has provided a template upon which to build the individual county initiatives and to guide the efforts of the Foundation and Building Changes. The model also provides flexibility to create and seize opportunities. A key example of an opportunity seized by the Foundation is building on the work of Dennis Culhane, in order to increase the potential that the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Integrated Client Database may access additional data, such as public housing authority data and education data.

Creating Bridges to Address Problems and Gaps

The Foundation and Building Changes have conducted some convenings in an effort to address some problems that involve different actors across the systems, often operating in separate “silos” but serving the same populations. As noted, at the start of the Initiative, none of the HMIS systems in the three counties was operating at a level that could support the Initiative. The Data Solutions Work Group, initiated by the Foundation and Building Changes, was developed to bring together voices across the state and the three counties to determine how best to improve the data systems.

Accomplishments, Stakeholder Appraisal, Challenges

Key Accomplishments

The WFF Systems Initiative has made great progress in implementation since its official launch in March of 2009. Despite being clouded by the worst recession since the Great Depression and the subsequent elongated impact on the state and local economies, the Initiative has been able to take hold in all three counties. Among the key accomplishments of the Initiative up through February 2012 are the following:

- After engaging in planning for nearly 18 months, *each of the counties has begun or is about to launch activities in one or more of the pillars.*
- All counties now have *operating funders’ groups* to guide the work of this Initiative and the broader homeless portfolios in the counties.
- *Progress has been made on the HMIS front* in all three counties. As of February 2012, all three counties had systems that are up and running, providing data to guide decisions, and getting more involved in the workings of the Initiative. Each of the counties’ HMIS systems will play a pivotal role in capturing the data on the process and the assessments of coordinated entry.
- The Initiative has *an operational and active intermediary* that is increasingly taking over the management of the Initiative, awarding grants, offering technical assistance and ongoing support to the counties, fostering collaboration and coordination among agencies, convening groups on key issues, and promoting policy change. Two noteworthy accomplishments of

Building Changes included the Silos to Systems convening in October 2011, a key event that was well-received and appears to be having longer effects on the thinking and work of the counties, and leading an effort to get legislation passed at the state level that permits telephonic consent for HMIS data collection and thus ensures a more open coordinated entry process in the three counties.

- *A variety of advocacy activities have occurred*, including the awarding of over 30 advocacy grants to a variety of organizations across a range of sectors, to broaden awareness of family homelessness and the role of the Initiative, and to garner support for its efforts.
- *A longitudinal evaluation has been funded and is underway, providing feedback* from its systems data collection efforts and more recently from the family data collection efforts, and has helped to spark improvement in the counties, especially with respect to the HMIS.

Stakeholder Appraisal

Through our site visits in 2009 and 2011, we gathered information from stakeholders in the three counties and the state that helped to appraise the work of the Foundation to date. Among the positive aspects noted by stakeholders are the following:

- *The systems focus of the Initiative.* The work has brought individuals together, outside of their “silos,” to focus on the inefficiencies of the system. One interviewee noted that, during the planning stage, some of the individuals designing the county plans were stymied at first on how to develop a system that could impact homelessness without adding housing. They were told by BMGF that Foundation funding for additional housing capital was off the table and as they looked at the system, realized that they needed to focus on the inefficiencies in the system.
- In addition, having funding for infrastructure development as well as funding for specific activities was viewed positively. The infrastructure funds were viewed as a jumpstart to the system and the SIG dollars were considered important leveraging funds. Other funding by the Foundation, such as providing some support for the Benefits Portal, a one-stop shop application website for DSHS benefits, also was noted and favorably recognized.
- *Bringing in new players into ending homelessness.* The leadership of the Foundation and Building Changes, along with that of others, was credited with bringing school systems into the mainstream work of homelessness.
- *The advocacy and bridge-building work.* Noted by several interviewees was the value-added by being brought to Washington, D.C. to meet with federal government officials as well as the trips to and contacts with other communities.

There also were aspects about the design and implementation of the Initiative that were not received as positive by stakeholders, providing some constructive criticism of the Foundation's role to date. These include the aspects described here:

- *Having extended planning processes.* The length of the planning process was noted by interviewees in all counties. The Foundation itself had an elongated process of development that was then followed by a three-stage planning process in the counties as well as a development and planning process for Building Changes. Interviewees noted that they kept hearing "that change was going to happen," but it seemed to take a long time to occur.

In addition, not all planning processes were optimally aligned. Specifically, Building Changes was selected as an intermediary in March 2009, but did not have the capacity to take the responsibility on completely at that time. The original plan had been for the Foundation to select and fund Building Changes first, help them build capacity, and then provide them with the funding to re-grant to the counties for planning. In this way, Building Changes could provide deeper support to the counties in the planning process. However, the Foundation and Building Changes agreed that it would be important for the Foundation to fund the counties directly so that they could begin their planning processes while Building Changes was building its own capacity. The consequence of the Foundation's direct funding role with the counties, together with its active co-management role, is that the counties viewed the Foundation as the main driver and were confused as to the role that Building Changes was to play.

- *Confusion as to who is in charge.* There continues to be confusion about the intermediary's role, primarily at the county level by those most engaged in the Initiative. This is due in part to the Foundation's direct funding role with the counties, as described above, as well as other factors. Several interviewees, especially at the county level, saw BMGF, not Building Changes, as having the lead role in implementing the Initiative. For example, there was confusion and some frustration, about which entity (BMGF or Building Changes) has the authority to approve plans for the SIG funds. As the Initiative was getting implemented, there was concern in all three counties that Building Changes could not make decisions, such as what constitutes a match, without getting the Foundation's approval. The county leads viewed the county planning process and initial grant-making as taking an inordinate amount of time, reflecting some flexibility but also indecision. At the time, the Foundation had provided the counties with the planning and infrastructure grants and had been the main funder. Many in the counties were yet unaware of Building Changes' role in the Initiative.
- *Funding and match expectations.* In the initial stages of implementation, there was considerable confusion as to the level of the match and what could be used as match for SIG activities. It was noted that the Foundation initially announced the funding without providing details on the restrictions and this lack of information led to high expectations among providers. Once the information unfolded over the course of a year and a half, there was frustration. In particular, at

least one county lead expressed that they felt caught in the middle of trying to explain why the funding was taking so long and why there were not getting large sums of funds, struggling to explain what could be funded and the match requirements without sufficient explanation from the Foundation.

- *A focus on families exclusively.* In Snohomish County in particular, the Initiative's focus on homeless families, excluding youth and single adults, has been a bone of contention among providers, the government, and other funders in the county. Initially, a range of community agencies were interested in the initiative. Agencies that did not serve families terminated their participation and expressed concern that the amount of match required as well as the efforts needed at different levels of government would result in depleting resources for the other homeless subgroups (with particular concern for youth, as there had been some prior focus on chronic homelessness). Consequently, at least one of the funders interviewed noted that it will redirect its resources to the gaps that are left by the Foundation.
- *The missing "sixth pillar."* Concerns continue about the lack of affordable housing and housing subsidies in the counties, and the Foundation's unwillingness to fund housing capital. Despite the presence of the third pillar (rapid housing), several of the individuals whom we interviewed in the three counties questioned the plausibility of the Initiative to be able to achieve its long-term goals without a "sixth pillar" (funds to increase the supply of affordable housing) in the Theory of Change.
- *The downsides of having an active funder.* Some concerns were raised about the Foundation's active role. Staff from the Foundation is more involved in the day-to-day work of the Initiative than is typical of other funders. At times, Foundation staff is perceived to be driving the agenda more than warranted and "having an opinion about everything," leading to lengthier planning processes. In addition, as noted, the active role of BMGF in the co-management of the Initiative has created challenges in the perception of Building Changes' ability to make decisions on its own as well as being viewed as the Initiative leader.
- *Shifts in priorities.* The WFF Systems Initiative is viewed by some as a new plan placed on top of the existing Ten Year plans. In addition, the Initiatives' focus on shifting from an emphasis on shelter and transitional housing to rapid housing has required some community-based organizations, many of which have been in operation for over 20 years, to reshape their business models. Many of these models have shelter and transitional housing at their core and, ironically, a number of the organizations built their stable of transitional housing through the leadership and funding of the Foundation's Sound Families Initiative. A sentiment voiced by several interviewed was the desire for the Foundation to continue to support the transitional housing that it helped expand through the Sound Families Initiative.

Recommendations

We offer six recommendations based on our analysis of the early implementation findings. Each is described below. The first five are directed to all stakeholders involved in the Initiative; the last recommendation is specifically directed to both the Foundation and Building Changes to work to clarify the role of the intermediary.

Re-Examine the Theory of Change

Implementing such a comprehensive Initiative with so many pillars and focus areas continues to have the potential of being splintered or not having enough funding or energy in any one set of activities to have impact or meaning. Even at this juncture, the counties have placed more attention on certain pillars than others, and although the goal is to move on to other activities, continued challenges with the initial efforts such as those confronted by Pierce County in implementing coordinated entry and prevention could inhibit their ability to move on to other areas.

Although the Theory of Change has provided both general direction and great flexibility for the Initiative, it may be useful to take stock of what has been learned to date, and whether there are specific changes or additions that would be useful to make at this time. Even if a conscious process of review only serves to reaffirm the usefulness of the Theory of Change as is, it would be a process that would be useful for galvanizing support and reaffirming the importance of the model. This taking stock would be most useful if conducted by the stakeholders most invested in the Initiative, including the county leads, leads from the housing authorities, staff from the Foundation and Building Changes, and other key actors from the counties and the state.

Develop an Agreed Upon Approach to Rapid Housing

The system's entrenchment in the status quo continuum of housing in each of the three counties and stakeholder concerns about the "sixth pillar" suggest the need for greater attention to how to move the needle away from "building more housing" to new innovations. This focus on transitional housing was perpetuated by both the investments made by the Foundation's earlier initiative, Sound Families, and over a decade of federal funding dedicated to this resource, albeit without evidence of its effectiveness in improving the stability of families. The consequence of having so much transitional housing appears to have cemented it as a permanent and needed fixture in the system. Moreover, as families move into transitional housing, the urgency of finding permanent housing often is put on hold for 18 months.

The Initiative is attempting to move the systems from a continuum posture to one that is focused on rapid housing, with consideration of the substantial supply of existing transitional housing units as an asset that could be put to more efficient and effective uses. Much of the change that needs to take place in the coming years will require change in both attitudes and behaviors of case managers, program directors, funders, and others. Moving from a continuum of care mentality to one that focuses on the urgency of permanent housing will require organizations and individuals within the systems to change their philosophical orientations, to be open to innovative and nontraditional approaches to serving families, and to repurposing existing housing resources to new and better uses.

Given that the Foundation promoted and funded much of the transitional housing, there will likely be skepticism as to whether this new approach is also expected to be a “flash in the pan”. However, there is a need to try out new approaches that are both more cost-effective and capable of serving greater numbers of families with a wider variety of needs than can be served by transitional housing. It is important that all involved in the Initiative work together to assess what is working and why, and what changes need to be considered in best to meet the needs of homeless families and increase their stability. The approach needs to be flexible so that providers can be offered support as they adapt their business models to accommodate these new directions in the system.

Continue Tri-County Work

The monthly tri-county meetings provide a needed opportunity for the counties to share their experiences and learn from one another. As the Initiative continues to unfold, it will be important to continue to understand and study the differences among the counties and how they impact the implementation process and the outcomes. For example, one area of exploration may be to understand the advantages and disadvantages of having a workforce development agency as the county lead in Snohomish rather than a county agency.

In addition, for some pillars, such as coordinated entry, the differences among the counties in their shelter systems necessitate that the work be done at a county level. Work on some pillars, however, may benefit from a more explicit cross-county effort. In particular, the three counties all seem less certain about how they will tackle the pillars of prevention and tailored services compared to plans for the other three pillars. These areas are the most challenging conceptually and, to some degree, are challenging practically as well, and may need additional support from both the Foundation and Building Changes.

One area in which a tri-county approach may augment individual county efforts is the work with workforce system. There may be considerable benefit to working across the three counties to engage the Workforce Development Councils (WDCs). Understanding the strategies and partnerships that are possible, regulations that are barriers, how they can be hurdled, and other activities may be best addressed as a three-county initiative. The actual implementation of the strategies and partnerships will likely need to occur at the individual county level, but the initial engagement and strategy development could be a joint effort.

Broaden Mainstream System Involvement

Creating systems change for homeless families necessitates not only the involvement of the homeless and housing system, but other mainstream systems that have an influence on the stability of families and their progress toward self-sufficiency. The work with the child welfare system is one major step in this area. Other mainstream systems that may need to be connected with soon, in addition to the workforce development system mentioned above, include health and behavioral health, education, and possibly criminal justice and legal systems. Some of this work is happening within the counties on a small scale, but more systemic involvement may be required, especially where regulatory and

accessibility barriers exist for homeless families that can be addressed at a broader level for all three counties. Involving representatives from these agencies on the WFF Leadership Committee may be one cross-site strategy for engaging them into the Initiative. Within the individual counties, expanding the funders' group to include representatives from these systems may be another strategy for engagement and systems change.

Hold Ongoing Opportunities for Examining Data and Learnings

Perhaps combined with the reflection on the Theory of Change, a meeting in the next year that focuses on lessons learned to date based, in part, on the data provided through the HMIS, this evaluation, and other evaluation and data collection efforts could be potentially powerful and could help to model a process of data-driven decision making. In addition, given some of the potential limitations of the family level data, it would be useful to have regular reviews and feedback by stakeholders involved in the Initiative. This would provide an opportunity to determine how well the data reflect the broader context and the ways in which other qualitative data could be used to address the gaps.

Work To Clarify the Role of the Intermediary

The Initiative needs greater clarity as to the role of the Intermediary, Building Changes, vis-à-vis the Foundation, especially with respect to making decisions regarding the work of the counties, but also at the state level and in other interactions. Much of the work in the early stages was more organic rather than following a prescribed strategy of which organization was responsible for which activities. Some of the confusion stemmed from the timing of the initiative launch which occurred before Building Changes had developed the full capacity required to manage the initiative on its own. When implementation began, Building Changes' had a few staff working on the Initiative, with one staff person working closely with the Foundation having the most central identity with the counties. Some of the confusion also likely stems from the active role that the Foundation plays and the recognition that it is the major funder of the Initiative. Confusion about roles with active funders is the second most commonly reported challenge for intermediaries (Fieldstone Alliance, 2008) and therefore is something to be expected, but it must also be explicitly addressed and reconciled. As Building Changes assumes more of a funding role through re-granting to the counties, its stature and leadership role will likely grow. It will be important for the Foundation to let Building Changes assume this role while reducing or even eliminating any direct decision making role with the counties if the desire is for the organization to assume a strong intermediary role. Building Changes, in turn, will need to strengthen and broaden its reach in the counties to ensure that it continues to help guide and manage the Initiative. Having a stronger organizational presence in the counties, state, and nationally will help to build its recognition not only as the lead in this Initiative, but a leading force in family homelessness.

In addition, one role that Building Changes may need to strengthen as implementation unfolds is as capacity builder of organizations involved in the Initiative. Much of its work in capacity building and ongoing support has been with the county leads. As the Initiative's programs demand shifts in the business models of the housing organizations, for example, Building Changes may be in a prime position for working with these organizations to enhance their capacity to make these changes. They may be able to do this in conjunction with the county leads or in ways that cut across the three counties.