



Washington Families Fund Systems Initiative Evaluation

Baseline Data on Homeless Families— Cohort 1

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Overview of Design and Methods

Cohort 1 Study Purpose

To provide a baseline/early intervention understanding of the functioning of the homeless service systems in the three Washington Families Fund counties, measured through the experiences and outcomes of families

Data are being collected on each family in 4 interviews in an 18 month period after entering non- domestic violence shelter

To measure the extent to which the systems improve their ability to serve families, the data from this cohort will be compared to a future cohort that will begin in late 2013 and also tracked for 18 months

Cohort 1 Sample

The sample includes 466 families who entered a shelter in King, Pierce, or Snohomish counties (excluding DV shelters) and who speak English or Spanish.

Recruitment began in October 2010 and ended in January 2012 in King County, April 2012 in Snohomish County, and July 2012 in Pierce County.

Data Collection

Data are collected from the primary parent, typically the mother. Data are collected on the primary parent's experiences and outcomes, as well as on a randomly selected child. Some measures apply to all family members.

A range of measures are used, many from standardized tools.

Qualifications

The goal was to obtain as close a census as possible; however, our sample likely underrepresents non-English/Spanish speaking families, families who leave shelter quickly, and families seeking DV shelter. Of the families who consented to be contacted and were eligible for participation, 78% participated in a baseline interview.

For most variables, data are relatively complete (reflecting 95% of the sample). Items are noted where more than 10 percent of the sample did not answer it.

Fact Sheet #1: Who Are The Families Being Served In Our Systems?

Summary Highlights

Families entering shelters in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties are similar demographically and in composition to families entering shelters in other regions of the country.

Family homelessness is associated with family separations, both voluntary and court-ordered.

Head of Household and Responding Parent (Table 1-1)

Generally single, female, young, U.S. born, and long-time Washington residents, though there is some important variation.

- Nearly a quarter of families are two-parent families.
- Over a quarter are headed by a young adult (25 or younger).
- Counties vary considerably, with more two-parent families in Pierce, more young parents in Snohomish, and more parents born outside the US in King.

Racial/ethnic minorities over-represented relative to the general population and to the poverty population.

Family Composition (Table 1-2)

The average family has 3-4 members, with about 2 children, but family size can range up to 8.

Families generally have young children; over two-third have a child 6 and under and 40 percent have a child 2 or under.

Pierce County families have fewer young children compared to King and Snohomish Counties.

Extent of Family Separation (Tables 1-3 & 1-4)

Across the three counties, 25 percent of the families have at least 1 and as many as 7 children living away; Snohomish and Pierce Counties have significantly more families with at least one child living away.

A total of 121 children are living away with prospects of returning. They were either voluntarily separated or separated due to CPS/court order.

Table 1-1. Demographic Characteristics of Head of Household/Responding Parent

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Head of household				
Single parent female-headed families***	65%	63%	55%	77%
Single parent male-headed families	5%	5%	6%	2%
Spouse or partner in household**	25%	24%	33%	18%
Nonparent/custodian	2%	3%	1%	1%
Age				
Mean	31	32	32	30
Range	17-69	18-69	18-60	17-62
% under 21	10%	9%	6%	14%
% under 25*	27%	27%	20%	35%
Race				
White***	40%	23%	43%	54%
African American***	25%	35%	27%	12%
Hispanic	17%	22%	13%	16%
Other Race	9%	10%	12%	5%
Multi-Racial	10%	10%	6%	14%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 1-1. Demographic Characteristics of Head of Household/Responding Parent Continued

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Place of birth/residence				
% born in the US***	87%	76%	92%	92%
% living in Washington 5+yrs	80%	78%	77%	87%
% moved to the county prior to 2007*	65%	72%	56%	67%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 1-2. Family Composition

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Total family size				
Mean	3.0	3.3	3.1	2.7
Range	1-8	1-7	1-8	1-7
Number of children under 18				
Mean	1.7	1.9	1.7	1.5
Range	0-6	0-6	0-6	0-5
% of households with child 6 and under*	68%	69%	60%	76%
% of households with child 2 and under*	40%	42%	31%	48%
% of families currently pregnant	10%	8%	14%	8%
% of households with 1 or more adults in the Household (other than spouse/partner)	3%	6%	1%	3%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 1-3. Extent of Child Separations from Families

	Tri-County Total (N=446)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
# of children living away				
Mean	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.6
Range	0-7	0-5	0-7	0-5
% of families with 1 or more*	27%	19%	30%	33%
% of families with children temporarily away	25%	19%	37%	17%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 1-4. Children Temporarily Living Away

	Tri-County Total (N=121)	King County (N=23)	Pierce County (N=61)	Snohomish County (N=37)
Of the children temporarily living away				
Reasons living away ²				
CPS or court removed	33%	43%	33%	27%
Other parent/family member has legal custody	19%	22%	25%	8%
Choose to live with other parent	0%	0%	0%	0%
Chose to have them away while homeless	4%	4%	7%	0%
Chose to have them away for another reason	21%	13%	10%	46%
Child is living independently	1%	0%	0%	3%
Shelter does not allow	2%	0%	0%	5%
Some other reason*	16%	10%	26%	8%
Where they are living	(N=117)	(N=23)	(N=62)	(N=32)
With other parent	38%	22%	39%	50%
With grandparent	25%	30%	23%	25%
With other relatives	14%	30%	11%	6%
In kinship care arrangement	3%	0%	2%	6%
In foster care**	14%	13%	21%	0%
On their own	1%	0%	2%	0%
Someplace else	6%	4%	3%	13%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Fact Sheet #2: What Have Been the Families' Housing and Homeless Experiences?

Summary Highlights

Families have moved an average of every four times in the year prior to entering shelter.

Their most recent place prior to shelter was most often not their own, but a doubled-up situation in which they stayed less than two months. However, over half of the respondents had had a lease in their name at least once during the year.

To try to avert homelessness, 70 percent of families sought and received help. The most commonly received help involved finding housing and receiving money for either rent, utilities or a security deposit.

Forty percent of the families have experienced homelessness at least once before.

Those who have experienced multiple episodes of homelessness in their lifetimes have more challenges and barriers to housing than other families, especially first-time homeless families.

Residential (In)stability in the 12 Months Prior to Entering Shelter (Table 2-1)

Families have moved, on average, approximately every three months in the year prior to entering shelter, with 20 percent having had more than 5 moves (up to 14 moves).

Families have spent an average of 139 nights in their own place and 55% had their name on the lease for at least one of the places in which they lived during the past 12 months.

Last Place Stayed (Table 2-2)

Being doubled-up with others was the most common place stayed just before entering shelter. Less than a fifth had their name on the lease in the place stayed just before entering shelter.

Families stayed in this place an average of 99 days; 16 percent of the families were in this place a week or less, while 10 percent stayed there the entire year.

Most frequently cited reasons for leaving this last place stayed include shelter becoming available; crowded conditions; financial reasons; they were asked to leave; and to become more independent.

Prevention Services Received (Table 2-3)

In the 12 months prior to entering shelter, 70 percent of families received at least one resource to help prevent homelessness. Fourteen percent of families tried to receive at least one resource but did not receive any.

The most common prevention resources families sought and received included help in finding housing; getting money for rent, utilities, or a security deposit, or help with eviction.

The experience appeared comparable across the three counties.

Prior Homeless and Doubled-Up Experiences (Table 2-4)

Forty percent of the families have experienced literal homelessness at least once in the past; 20% have experienced it at least once before in the past two years.

The average age of first homelessness is 27. Sixteen percent first experienced homeless under the age of 18.

The vast majority of families have lived doubled-up with others at least once in their lives and 78 percent have lived doubled-up at least once in the last two years.

Examining Differences Among Families with Different Homeless Experiences (Table 2-5)

Sixty percent of the families are first time homeless families. Twenty-six percent have been homeless 1-2 times prior to this episode, and 14 percent have been homeless 3 or more times in their lifetime.

Those who are homeless more frequently (especially 3 or more times in their lifetime), compared to first time homeless families, are more likely to be headed by a parent who:

- Lacks a high school diploma or GED;
- Has had prior involvement in the criminal justice system;
- Has past and current mental health issues and service involvement;
- Has past and current substance abuse issues and service involvement;
- Has past DV experience; and
- Has past housing debt (only trending toward significance, however).

The groups do not significantly differ on current employment, income, or debt. They also do not differ on unmet needs for mental health or substance abuse services, or current parole.

Table 2-1. Residential (In)stability in the Prior 12 months

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Number of moves				
Mean	3.9	4.1	3.9	3.8
Range	1-14	1-14	1-10	1-11
Median	4	3	4	4
Longest place stayed				
Mean	266	277	275	246
Range	90-365	97-365	90-365	95-365
Median	270	283.5	288	240
Time in own place				
Mean # of nights	139	142	161	113
Range	0-365	0-365	0-365	0-365
Median	91	106	161	29
% with name on lease in at least one housing situation	55%	55%	54%	57%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<=.001

Table 2-2. Description of Last Place Stayed Before Entering Shelter

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Place stayed prior to shelter (most common responses)				
Doubled up	37%	43%	36%	32%
Own place	17%	17%	14%	19%
Parents' place	16%	17%	13%	18%
On street, other homeless situation	8%	5%	12%	7%
Length of time in last place stayed (nights)				
Mean	99	106	79	112
Range	1-365	1-365	1-365	1-365
% with name on lease at last place stayed**	18%	17%	11%	26%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 2-3. Prevention Services: Resources to Help Stay in Housing¹

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Help finding housing				
Received resource	56%	56%	48%	68%
Tried but did not receive	13%	15%	17%	8%
Money to pay own rent				
Received resource	24%	28%	17%	26%
Tried but did not receive	18%	18%	22%	15%
Money to pay mortgage				
Received resource	1%	0%	2%	0%
Tried but did not receive	1%	1%	1%	2%
Money to pay for a security deposit				
Received resource**	17%	15%	12%	25%
Tried but did not receive	8%	8%	7%	9%
Money to pay utilities				
Received resource	26%	28%	25%	26%
Tried but did not receive	5%	6%	4%	5%
Help to avoid an eviction				
Received resource	9%	11%	8%	7%
Tried but did not receive	13%	12%	15%	12%
Help negotiating with landlord				
Received resource	8%	10%	7%	5%
Tried but did not receive	4%	6%	6%	1%
Credit counseling				
Received resource	4%	6%	4%	3%
Tried but did not receive	1%	1%	2%	1%
Help with housing-related legal issues				
Received resource	5%	5%	4%	7%
Tried but did not receive	3%	2%	5%	3%
Received at least one resource*	70%	75%	61%	74%
Tried but did not receive at least one	14%	13%	16%	14%

*p<=.05 ** p<=.01 *** p<=.001

¹ For each resource we provide the percentage that tried to receive the resource and were successful in receiving that resource, and the percentage that tried and were unsuccessful at receiving the resource. Adding the percentage totals will give the overall percentage who tried to receive that particular resource. For example: 42% of all respondents attempted to receive money to help pay their own rent.

Table 2-4. Comparison of Different Groupings of Families Based on Prior Homelessness

	First time homeless (N=270)	Homeless 1-2 times in past (N=118)	Homeless 3 or more times in the past (N=63)
Human Capital			
% less than HS/GED**	26%	24%	46%
% currently employed	20%	18%	13%
% with no income	6%	8%	6%
Mean income	\$631	\$575	\$610
Median income	\$478	\$458	\$480
% with any housing debt	28%	39%	37%
% with any source of debt	84%	88%	95%
Mean debt	\$15,765	\$12,349	\$12,259
Median debt	\$3,299	\$4,410	\$3,240
Criminal Justice Involvement			
% with past felony conviction**	14%	17%	30%
% with jail time**	12%	14%	29%
% currently on parole	5%	9%	6%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 2-4. Comparison of Different Groupings of Families Based on Prior Homelessness (Continued)

	First time homeless (N=270)	Homeless 1-2 times in past (N=118)	Homeless 3 or more times in the past (N=63)
Mental Health History/Current Needs			
% ever had MH hospitalization**	10%	18%	24%
% poor MH functioning*** ²	17%	28%	38%
% at least one current MH indicator ³	77%	83%	86%
% receive MH services***	24%	28%	67%
% unmet need for MH services	11%	19%	11%
Substance Abuse History/Current Needs			
% ever had inpatient SA***	15%	27%	37%
% screen for current SA* ⁴	10%	17%	22%
% receive SA services***	12%	15%	26%
% unmet need for SA services	2%	2%	4%
Domestic Violence			
% DV ever*** ⁵	51%	74%	68%
% DV in past 3 months	9%	12%	7%

*p<=.05 ** p<=.01 *** p<=.001

² Mental health functioning is measured by the SF8MH Ware J, Kosinski M, Dewey J, Gandek B: How to Score and Interpret Single-Item Health Status Measures: A Manual for Users of the SF-8 Health Survey. Boston: QualityMetric; 2001.component. Those who score 40 or below are classified as having poor mental health functioning.

³ Mental health indicators include scoring on the SF8MH as having poor mental health functioning, in the moderate or severe range on the PHQ depression screening tool (Kroenke K, Spitzer RL. The PHQ-9: a new depression diagnostic and severity measure. *Psychiatric Ann.* 2002;32:509-515), and/or scoring in the moderate or severe range on the GAD-7 anxiety screener (Löwe B, Decker O, Müller S, et al. Validation and standardization of the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Screener (GAD-7) in the general population. *Med Care.* 2008; 46(3): 266-274.)

⁴ Screening for either alcohol abuse (per the RAPS4 Questionnaire) and/or drug abuse (Skinner, H. A. (1982). The Drug Abuse Screening Test. *Addictive Behaviors*, 7:363-371).

⁵ Indicating one or more of violent acts from a partner. Items adapted from Conflict Tactics Scale. Straus, MA., Hamby, SL., Boney-McCoy, S., Sugarman, DB. (1996). The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2). *Journal of Family Issues*, 17: 283-316.

Table 2-5. Homeless Background

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Prior homelessness				
% with at least 1 prior episode in lifetime*	44%	36%	44%	52%
% with at least 1 prior episode in past 2 years	20%	15%	19%	25%
Age first homeless	27	28	28	26
Prior doubled-up				
% with at least 1 episode in lifetime	85%	87%	84%	85%
% with at least 1 episode in past 2 years	78%	79%	77%	77%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Fact Sheet #3: What are the Health Needs of Homeless Families?

Summary Highlights

The majority of families have access to health care insurance and primary health care.

Need for mental health attention is high, and a fourth of the families have need for substance abuse attention.

Dental care is the highest reported unmet need (56%) of the health-related services.

Health Access and Insurance (Table 3-1)

Three-fourths had a physical exam in the past two years and over 73% have Medicaid, and 9% more have other health insurance.

Significantly fewer families in King County have medical insurance than families in the other two counties.

Those without Medicaid are older, are more likely to be employed, and have higher monthly incomes but they are not disproportionately experiencing homelessness for the first time.

Health and Behavioral Health Needs (Table 3-2)

Few respondents have severely compromised health but most (80%) have need for further mental health evaluation and a quarter screen positively for substance abuse problems.

Substance abuse needs are highest in Snohomish County, lowest in King County.

Current Service Receipt (Table 3-3)

Dental services represent largest area of unmet need of respondents across the three counties. Over half have unmet dental needs.

Table 3-1. Health Access and Insurance

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Has a source of medical insurance*	82%	69%	85%	91%
Medicaid*	73%	58%	76%	84%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 3-12. Health and Behavioral Health Needs (Head of Household)

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Physical health needs				
Poor physical health functioning *	13%	14%	17%	7%
Mental health history and current needs				
Hospitalized for mental health issue in lifetime	15%	10%	17%	18%
Have 1 or more mental health indicators	80%	82%	76%	83%
Poor functioning	24%	26%	21%	25%
Depression	67%	64%	68%	69%
Anxiety	48%	48%	49%	47%
Substance abuse history and current needs				
SA inpatient in lifetime***	21%	7%	21%	33%
Screen positive for alcohol or drugs*	24%	17%	26%	28%
Domestic violence				
In lifetime*	60%	54%	57%	68%
In last 3 months	9%	7%	11%	10%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 3-3. Receipt of Health and Behavioral Health Services (Head of Household)

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Physical health services				
Received*	58%	49%	62%	62%
Unmet need	13%	16%	10%	12%
Dental services				
Received	16%	19%	16%	12%
Unmet need	56%	54%	55%	58%
Mental health services				
Received***	31%	25%	27%	43%
Unmet need	14%	14%	12%	14%
Substance abuse services				
Received***	14%	5%	15%	23%
Unmet need	2%	1%	3%	2%
Domestic violence services				
Received	13%	16%	12%	11%
Unmet need	6%	2%	8%	7%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Fact Sheet #4: What is the Human Capital and Income of Homeless Families?

Summary Highlights

The majority of respondents have some level of education

Over 70 percent have a high school degree/GED or higher.

A greater percentage of respondents in Snohomish than the other two counties lack a degree.

Few respondents are working, but many more have recent job history.

A little over a fifth of the families are working, and significantly more are working in King County than the other two counties (especially Pierce).

Jobs are generally low-wage, less than full-time, and lacking benefits.

Over 60 percent have worked in the past year (nearly three-fourths of the families in King County), signaling potential work readiness for a majority of the families.

Families are poor and in debt.

The average homeless family receives less than \$500 in median monthly income.

Eighty-six percent have significant debt; the median amount of debt is \$3,525.

Education (Table 4-1)

Education level varies considerably between the populations of the three counties

- More families in Snohomish County (38%) lack a HS degree or GED than families in the other two counties (23-24%).
- King County has the highest percentage of families who either have attended some college or have a college degree (48%)

- Over 1/3 of the respondents (38%) have a vocational degree. Half of those vocational degrees are held by respondents with less than a high school diploma (10%) or with a high school diploma or GED (40%).

Employment History and Status and Current Education (Table 4-2)

Nearly all responding parents report having worked in the past.

A fifth of the respondents are currently working at one or more jobs now and over 60 percent have worked in the past year.

- Significantly more respondents in King County have worked in the past year (73%) and were working at the time they entered shelter (26%) than the other two counties.

A fifth of the respondents note that they are unable to work, due primarily to physical or mental disability or other health reasons.

A fourth of the respondents are enrolled in school.

Nearly half have contacted WorkSource in the past 3 months and a third are enrolled in Workfirst/TANF

- Of those who have contacted WorkSource or enrolled in Workfirst/TANF, nearly a fifth (19%) are currently working and 30 percent are enrolled in school (significantly more in King County than in Pierce or Snohomish). The majority have either a high school diploma/GED (34%) or some college (40%).

Profile of Current Jobs (Table 4-3)

On average, the respondents earn a little over \$11 an hour, with those in Snohomish making about a dollar more an hour and in Pierce making \$1 less than the average.

- Forty-one percent of families indicate they earn less than minimum wage
- Most jobs are permanent and offer opportunities for advancement, but few offer benefits. Snohomish respondents, in addition to making the highest average wage, also are more likely to receive benefits in their positions.

Those who currently hold jobs, compared to those who do not, are more likely to have higher education, a vocational degree, and fewer children.

Those who are not working are no more likely than those working to be enrolled in school, Work Source, or Work First.

Income and Benefits (Table 4-4)

TANF is the most common source of income (58%) across and in all three counties.

The median monthly income across all counties is less than \$500, with the highest in King County (\$646).

Less than 10% of the families across the three counties had no income in the month prior.

Nearly all families receive food stamps/SNAP and 60 percent of families who are eligible for WIC receive it.

Debts (Table 4-5)

The vast majority of families (86%) have debt, with the median at over \$3,000. The amount ranges to over a million.

The most common sources of debt are related to cable or telephone bills, medical bills, utilities, housing related issues, and student loans. The largest average amounts of debt are mortgage debt, medical debt, student loan debt, and other debts, including legal fees and tickets, especially in King County.

Table 4-1. Education (Head of Household)

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Less than high school diploma/GED**	28%	23%	24%	38%
Finished high school/Completed GED	33%	28%	40%	31%
Some college	30%	33%	29%	26%
College degree or higher**	9%	15%	7%	5%
Completed a vocational program	38%	42%	41%	32%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 4-2. Employment History and Status and Current Education

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Employment Status				
Ever employed	94%	93%	94%	95%
Employed in past year*	62%	73%	57%	57%
Currently working**	19%	26%	12%	17%
Currently unable to work	21%	16%	24%	22%
Education				
Currently enrolled in GED program**	5%	5%	1%	8%
Currently enrolled in other school	21%	27%	17%	19%
Enrollment in Work Programs				
Contacted Worksource is past three months	46%	45%	48%	43%
Enrolled in Workfirst/TANF	33%	35%	33%	32%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 4-3. Profile of Current Jobs (Head of Household)

	Tri-County Total (N=83)	King County (N=38)	Pierce County (N=20)	Snohomish County (N=25)
Income per hour				
Mean	\$11.0	\$10.6	\$10.2	\$12.2
Range	\$8 – \$30	\$8 – \$23.4	\$8.7 - \$18	\$8.6 - \$30
Hours per week				
Mean	26	25	28	25
Range	5 - 40	8 - 40	10 - 40	5 - 40
Permanent job	56%	64%	50%	48%
Temporary job	27%	21%	45%	22%
Seasonal/day labor	17%	15%	5%	30%
Offers benefits				
Any benefits*	17%	12%	6%	32%
Health Insurance*	16%	12%	5%	30%
Retirement	6%	5%	0%	11%
Paid sick days**	11%	7%	0%	26%
Paid vacation days**	11%	7%	0%	26%
Offers opportunities for advancement	59%	50%	74%	61%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 4-4. Income and Benefits

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Sources of Income				
Earnings, HOH***	20%	29%	12%	18%
Earnings, Someone else's	12%	14%	12%	10%
TANF* ⁶	58%	54%	54%	66%
SSI/SSDI	9%	9%	9%	9%
Child Support/Alimony	16%	17%	14%	18%
Help from family	6%	4%	8%	6%
VA benefits*	1%	0%	2%	0%
Unemployment*	5%	9%	3%	3%
Any other source (e.g. worker's compensations, GA, pension)	6%	10%	5%	5%
Amount of income in past 30 days				
Mean	\$614	\$754	\$519	\$569
Median	\$478	\$646	\$452	\$440
Range	\$0-\$2,430	\$0-\$2,430	\$0-\$1,960	\$0-\$2,300
% with no income	7%	6%	10%	5%
Access to benefits				
Receives food stamps/SNAP ⁷	96%	95%	96%	97%
Receives WIC ⁸ of those eligible	60%	58%	56%	67%

⁶ TANF is Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, a federal assistance program.

⁷ SNAP is Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, a federal food stamp program.

⁸ WIC is Women, Infants, and Children Supplemental nutrition program.

Table 4-5. Source and Amount of Debt

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
% with any debt	86%	86%	87%	87%
Amount of debt				
Mean	\$14,138	\$21,764	\$9,533	\$11,127
Median	\$3,525	\$4,145	\$3,100	\$3,299
Range	\$0-\$1,439,999	\$0-\$1,439,999	\$0-\$114,100	\$0-\$332,300
Sources of debt				
Cable/telephone/cell phone bill	47%	50%	44%	48%
Student loan debt	24%	30%	22%	21%
Medical bills	39%	38%	37%	42%
Utilities	36%	37%	36%	34%
Rent debt	28%	27%	32%	26%
Mortgage debt	1%	3%	0%	1%
Credit card debt**	19%	25%	11%	20%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 4-5. Source and Amount of Debt Continued

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Housing Authority debt	3%	3%	4%	3%
Friends and/or family debt	22%	21%	21%	25%
Check cashing	14%	8%	16%	18%
Payday loans	9%	5%	10%	11%
Bad checks debt*	3%	1%	6%	3%
Bank debt	3%	3%	3%	3%
Any other source (e.g. tickets, legal bills, or something else)	7%	3%	8%	9%
% with housing-related debt⁹	32%	32%	35%	29%

⁹ Housing-related debt includes money owed for back rent; a defaulted mortgage; back utilities, like gas, electric, or water; and money owed to the housing authority.

Table 4-5. Source and Amount of Debt Continued

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Amount of debt				
Cable/telephone/cell phone bill	\$552	\$428	\$685	\$559
Student loan debt	\$2,415	\$3,129	\$1,830	\$2,193
Medical bills	\$7,070	\$7,402	\$9,972	\$4,135
Utilities	\$486	\$443	\$545	\$470
Rent debt	\$2,898	\$2,985	\$3,236	\$2,384
Mortgage debt	\$297,833	\$316,750	\$0	\$260,000
Credit card debt**	\$3,718	\$4,124	\$4,139	\$2,976
Housing Authority debt	\$1,367	\$1,947	\$1,217	\$867
Friends and/or family debt	\$3,230	\$6,575	\$1,868	\$1,603
Check cashing	\$1,800	\$3,500	\$0	\$1,233
Payday loans	\$1,888	\$868	\$2,856	\$1,456
Bad checks debt*	\$1,004	\$180	\$1,142	\$920
Bank debt	\$463	\$660	\$309	\$420
Any other source (e.g. tickets, legal bills, or something else)	\$2,953	\$4,002	\$2,784	\$2,606

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Fact Sheet #5: How Do Families Enter the Homeless System?

Summary Highlights

Entering each of the county homeless systems prior to any systems change took time and stamina

- an average of over 3 months from the time help was sought
- making a median of 36 calls before getting help
- for those on shelter wait lists, checking in multiple times a week or every day

Families rate the process of finding shelter as stressful and frustrating, but were very satisfied with the assistance provided and found the agencies very respectful during the process.

Initial Help-Seeking (Table 5-1)

It takes families a median of 13 weeks to enter shelter from the time they initially seek help from the system.

Where they contact the system first differs depending on the county.

- 211 and shelter are the most common sources, and it is noteworthy that 20% of Pierce families came through Access Point for Housing.

Process of Getting Shelter (Table 5-2)

Sixty-one percent of the families had been on one or more waiting lists for shelter

- Shelters differ considerably across the counties in their check-in policies. Eighty-nine percent of families in Pierce County checked-in daily, compared to 13 percent in Snohomish County and 38 percent in King County.

Families made a median of 36 calls before getting shelter; three-quarters had to make 10 or more calls.

Problems Experienced in the Process (Table 5-3)

The three most common problems confronted by families in King and Pierce Counties include having to make multiple calls to an agency before getting a response, having to repeat the same information to multiple providers, and leaving messages that were not returned. In Snohomish County, in addition to

making multiple calls and repeating the same information, a common problem was not knowing where to go to get help.

Family Assessment of the Process (Table 5-4)

Families rate the process of finding shelter as stressful and frustrating, but were very satisfied with the assistance provided and found the agencies very respectful during the process.

Goodness of Fit (Table 5-5)

The majority of families (69%) report the shelter they finally received as being a good or very good fit for their families' needs.

Table 5-1. Initial Help-Seeking From the System

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Where sought help from the system				
211**	29%	31%	19%	37%
Access Point for Housing***	--	--	20%	--
An emergency shelter*	26%	29%	31%	18%
DSHS/CPS*	7%	5%	13%	4%
Another type of provider	4%	7%	3%	1%
Housing Authority	1%	1%	1%	1%
A community center*	5%	9%	3%	3%
Church/Religious Org.	9%	6%	6%	12%
Some other place (e.g. school, hospital, VA)**	19%	12%	5%	24%
Number of weeks between first formal contact and entering shelter				
Mean	29	28	22	35
Median	13	13	8	18
Range	0-580	0-209	0-580	0-526

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 5-2. Process of Getting Shelter

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Ever on emergency shelter waitlist	61%	64%	61%	58%
How often had to check-in to maintain position on waitlist	(N=269)	(N=92)	(N=93)	(N=84)
Every day***	48%	38%	89%	13%
Multiple times a week	11%	17%	2%	14%
Once a week	13%	18%	2%	19%
Once a month	6%	11%	2%	5%
Other	12%	7%	1%	29%
Not required to check-in	10%	9%	3%	20%
Average number of phone calls made before getting help				
Mean	120	145	100	114
Median	36	45	36	25
Range ¹⁰	0-999	0-999	0-999	0-999
% made 0 or 1 call	6%	3%	7%	7%
% made 10 or fewer	23%	17%	24%	27%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

¹⁰ The maximum number of calls families could report was 999.

Table 5-3. Problems Experienced in the Process

How often... (scale 1-4 with 1= never and 4=many times)	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Did you have to make multiple calls to an agency before getting a response? Mean	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.2
Did you leave messages to an agency that were not returned? Mean	3.1	3.3	3.1	2.8
Were you turned away from a shelter because there was no room available? Mean	2.8	3.0	2.9	2.5
Did you find yourself repeating the same information on your background to different providers? Mean	3.3	3.5	3.3	3.3
Did an agency give you complete information on the next steps of the process? Mean	2.7	2.7	2.5	2.7

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<=.001

Table 5-4. Assessment of the Process

(scale 1-4 with 1= not at all and 4=quite a lot)	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
How complicated was the process? Mean	3.1	3.1	3.0	3.0
How stressful was the process? Mean	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.6
How frustrating was the process? Mean	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.5
How respectful were the various agencies during the process? Mean	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.2
How confusing was the process in understanding the steps to follow? Mean	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.5
How much were your family's needs considered? Mean	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
How involved were you in making decisions in the process? Mean	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.1

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 5-4. Assessment of the Process (Continued)

(scale 1-4 with 1= not at all and 4=quite a lot)	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
Overall, how satisfied were you in how long the process took? Mean	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.8
Overall, how satisfied were you in how much choice you had in the process? Mean	3.1	3.8	2.7	2.8
Overall, how satisfied were you in the shelter/housing assistance that you received? Mean	3.4	3.6	3.3	3.4

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001

Table 5-5. Goodness of Fit

	Tri-County Total (N=466)	King County (N=156)	Pierce County (N=156)	Snohomish County (N=154)
To what degree do you think this shelter fits your family's needs? % reporting a good fit or a very good fit	69%	72%	66%	70%

*p<= .05 ** p<=.01 *** p<= .001