



BUILDING CHANGES

END HOMELESSNESS
TOGETHER



WASHINGTON FAMILIES FUND EMPLOYMENT-FOCUSED CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM MARCH 2012–FEBRUARY 2013

BUILDING CHANGES TRANSFORMS THE WAYS COMMUNITIES WORK TOGETHER TO END HOMELESSNESS

About Building Changes

Building Changes is a nonprofit organization working to end homelessness across Washington state. We foster collaborative partnerships with government entities, community-based service providers, and private philanthropy and harness innovative, evidence-based strategies to collectively address the barriers to housing stability. We support our partners to do this work through our grantmaking, capacity building, and policy guidance. As a result, people at risk will avoid homelessness, and those who are homeless will be connected to services that move them into jobs and homes.

About Our Approach

Building Changes is working to advance evidence-based, results-oriented solutions to ending homelessness. Our approach is a mix of both proven and promising practices, many of which are being implemented in communities across the country. We are learning as we go from our own programs and incorporating new ideas from other communities as we apply these strategies:

Prevention: Help people who are at risk of becoming homeless with services that stabilize them before they end up in shelter or on the streets.

Coordinated Entry and Assessment: For those who become homeless, simplify their access to housing and services by coordinating their applications and referring them to programs that have worked for people like them.

Rapid Re-Housing and other Housing Resources: Quickly provide the type, amount, and duration of housing assistance that each individual or family needs.

Tailored Programs and Services: Match the services to the particular individual's or family's needs instead of using one-size-fits all approaches.

Economic Opportunities: Help people stabilize their housing, long-term, by supporting educational and workforce development opportunities.

Evaluation: Collect data and continually evaluate the impact of these approaches in order to improve, and scan the country for innovative ideas to bring to our communities.

About This Report

We develop reports to help funders, homeless housing and services providers, government entities, and stakeholders from other systems learn from this work. See our Web site www.BuildingChanges.org for our library of other resources, including case studies, best-practice reports, plans, and toolkits.

Acknowledgments

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Washington Families Fund Employment-Focused Capacity Building Program

Introduction

Building Changes believes that creating employment opportunities and career pathways for vulnerable families is a key strategy in preventing, reducing, and ending family homelessness. Housing providers can play a key role in this strategy by integrating an employment lens within their services to engage and connect families to employment opportunities. However, many organizations that provide housing and case management to families don't have the program experience, staff skills, organizational structure, or community connections needed to develop employment programs. They need assistance in growing these capabilities so that they can create and prioritize employment programs as a means of improving families' economic stability.

Building on the learnings from the successful [2010 Economic Opportunities Initiative](#) and work on the 2011 HUD-funded [Getting to Work initiative](#) for AIDS service organization across the country, Building Changes developed a new program to assist organizations in the development and delivery of services and partnerships that increase employment and job training opportunities for the homeless families they serve.

The Employment-Focused Capacity Building Program was offered to Washington Families Fund (WFF) grantees, who had a range of experience in programming related

to employment services and partnerships. Implemented in 2012, the 12-month program combined training, individualized technical assistance, and peer learning with a structured capacity-building process to 12 participating WFF grantees in eight counties. (See Appendix A for list of participating grantees.)

These nonprofit organizations experienced program success in three key areas.

- Integrating a focus on employment into their program and partnerships;
- Demonstrating innovation and resourcefulness in expanding and repurposing services and resources;
- Forming effective partnerships with mainstream workforce systems.

Building Changes learned valuable lessons in how to better support partnership connections between organizations and community workforce partners going forward and the importance of helping organizations be realistic about their resources with an eye toward program development and sustainability.

This report provides an overview of the capacity-building program, examples of how organizations put their learnings to work, successes and challenges, and opportunities going forward that will continue to inform efforts to link housing and employment systems.

Program Elements

The 12-month program offered the following program elements:

- Agency self-assessment
- Project orientation and site visit
- Work plan and project outcomes
- Trainings: webinar and in-person
- Individual capacity building
- Progress reporting
- Evaluation
- \$1,000 stipend per nonprofit

Training and technical assistance

Building Changes' staff offered a combination of full-day and two-hour trainings designed to meet the capacity-building needs and goals identified by organizations through their assessments and work plans. Organizations made selections from the available training topics and participated in three to six trainings each. Building Changes also offered 79 hours of individualized technical assistance, which supported and enhanced these trainings.

Full-day trainings (55 hours)

Navigating the Community College System: Staff learned how to support families with enrollment in education and training programs and introduce them to resources including financial aid programs and student services.

Vocationalizing Your Services: Organizations learned how to integrate a vocational lens into their services, build staff skills and knowledge, and provide tools for better serving clients. (This topic was the most highly attended.)

Benefit Planning and Maximizing Work Incentives: Staff learned how to help families transition from public benefits (TANF, food stamps, housing subsidies) to paid employment and earned income.

Engaging and Motivating Clients: Staff built skills, knowledge, and tools for better serving clients.

Small group trainings

- Vocational Assessment
- Employer Engagement
- Vocationalizing Your Services
- Benefit Planning

Capacity building

Organizations worked primarily on building their internal capacity to engage, prepare, connect, and support clients in employment and job training opportunities. They focused on building stronger connections with mainstream workforce programs: including WorkFirst, local One-Stop programs, community and technical colleges, and community-based employment providers. Below are examples of how grantees used the program to vocationalize their efforts.

Job training/work experience opportunities using internal operations and/or social enterprises: Five organizations focused on expanding and improving job training and work experience services within their agencies. These organizations frequently partnered with their local WorkFirst Community Jobs providers and offered work experience placements to TANF recipients.

- The Opportunity Council in Whatcom County developed job training certificate programs with a local ReStore and with a neighborhood association doing sustainable agriculture.
- Both St. Margaret's in Spokane County and Serenity House in Clallam County explored social enterprise opportunities to expand work experience options for clients connected to their community donation and thrift shop operations.
- Serenity House plans to add job training in appliance repair and sales.



Employer partnerships and outreach: Six organizations participated in training and program development activities around employer partnerships.

- Hopelink in King County created a marketing brochure for job developers to use with local businesses.
- Helping Hand House in Pierce County developed a partnership with a new TJ Maxx store, which hired five clients.

Vocational assessment tools; career planning and work readiness assistance: Three organizations participated in training on vocational assessment and work readiness services.

- The Seattle-King County YWCA Young Parents Program developed a new vocational assessment tool to use with new program referrals.
- Valley Cities implemented a new, improved vocational assessment process in their work with homeless families.

Collaboration with mainstream workforce programs: Several organizations invested time in learning about local workforce programs and resources and developing referral agreements for their clients.

- Emergency Support Shelter in Cowlitz County developed new relationships with their local workforce providers in Kelso, Washington, for families impacted by domestic violence.
- Valley Cities and Friends of Youth in King County both developed employment-focused resource guides for staff and clients.
- Housing Hope in Snohomish County is now both a WorkSource Connection site and a Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) provider.
- Opportunity Council in Whatcom County and Transitions in Spokane County are becoming Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) providers and WorkSource Connection sites.

Additional areas of capacity building shared by multiple organizations:

- Improving services for youth, immigrants refugees, and limited English-speaking households
- Data collection; employment-related outcomes tracking
- Client motivation and engagement
- Benefit planning; work incentives and supports

Project Goals and Outcomes

Grantee work plans identified a total of 55 measurable project outcomes intended to increase agency capacity and result in an increase in persons accessing employment services and opportunities. The results show overall good progress and levels of achievement across the 12 organizations and the project. Project outcomes were within the following areas:

- Increase number of people served in employment, job training, and access to education
- Develop or expand interagency collaborations including referral systems or partnerships with workforce providers
- Improve effectiveness of services by increasing staff skills, knowledge, and vocational tools and strategies
- Expand programs or services by increasing access to mainstream workforce services

Organizations reported on progress toward the 55 individual project outcomes:

- 27 outcomes were completed
- 26 outcomes had progress made, but were not completed
- 2 outcomes were not completed

Additionally, Building Changes asked grantees to identify and track employment-related data for the families served by the programs. In order to become more vocationally focused, organizations need to know at any given time

how many families are participating in services, what programs are most utilized, and how many clients are gaining employment as a result. Most, but not all, organizations were able to put data tracking into place.

Evaluation and Results

Building Changes used three tools to evaluate the effectiveness of this project.

Capacity self-assessment

Each organization completed an agency capacity self-assessment tool at the beginning and at the end of the project. Eleven out of the 12 organizations showed an increase in overall capacity related to employment services. The average rating, on a scale of 0-125, increased by 22 points between the pre- and post-assessment.

Goals achievement

See Project Goals and Outcomes above.

Post program survey

Organizations responded to a post-program survey about the quality of Building Changes services, challenges they foresee going forward, and their progress (see Appendix B). Respondents indicated that the support they received from Building Changes staff was constructive and useful and that the training materials were clear and understandable. Overall agencies stated that their involvement in the project had been worthwhile.

A majority indicated that they built new capacities that would likely have a significant impact across their organizations. In addition, most organizations thought they would sustain the capacity they built during the project.

Successes

The Employment-Focused Capacity Building Program helped all 12 organizations recognize the importance of assisting homeless households in accessing employment and earned income in order to reduce homelessness. Those with a primary mission of offering housing and support services were resourceful and innovative in expanding their capacity and integrating a focus on employment, job training, and education into their programs and partnerships. Examples include:

- Adding vocational assessment tools to case management services
- Using the organization's own operational infrastructure as work experience and training opportunities for clients, including front desk and office tasks, food banks, donations, and meal services
- Re-purposing staff resources to reach out to local employers and businesses

A number of organizations formed effective partnerships with the mainstream workforce system by building on their own case management services and their connection to community resources and social service infrastructure. Examples include:

- WorkSource Connection: housing organizations offer access to WorkSource services from their housing program location, which encourages family participation in job search and builds cross-system coordination.
- Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET): providers offer access to funding for job training and education as well as support services and employment-focused case management.



Challenges and Key Learnings

Sustainability and funding

Organizations indicated that having the time and funding available to sustain newly developed capacities moving forward were the most significant challenges. During the course of the program, four of the 12 organizations experienced a loss of funding, significant staff turnover, and layoffs. Loss of funding forced one organization to lay off their one full-time employment specialist, and another organization to reduce staff. The latter was later re-funded, although at a lower level and for a short period of time.

As a part of our technical assistance Building Changes addressed the question of sustaining new capacities with each organization. Organizations recognized the importance of thinking about sustainability early on and being realistic about their resources when planning and developing employment programs. Despite challenges, this group demonstrated high levels of resourcefulness and innovative thinking during this project, which puts them in a strong position to maintain their efforts.

Data collection

Collecting data and developing outcome measurement tools that track employment information on a program level also remains challenging. The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) used by housing providers does not provide the level of employment services-specific data collection and reporting desired by individual organizations. A few organizations have developed separate data collection tools that are helpful, but often require duplicative data entry for staff.

Community partnerships

While a number of organizations were able to create successful community partnerships through the course of the program, it became evident that identifying and engaging potential partners early on in the grant application process is a vital step in linking housing with employment. As a grantmaker and capacity builder, Building Changes also has a role in helping to promote and coordinate collaboration among housing and workforce systems, in advance of its capacity-building efforts to ensure that families benefit from both resources.

[The Housing and Employment Navigator model](#), funded by the Washington Families Fund, is one such strategy. Building Changes is partnering with the workforce system, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), housing providers, community colleges, and evaluators on a Department of Labor funded project to further test, develop, and improve this model going forward.

New Opportunities

As a result of broader Building Changes efforts, unique opportunities arose during the course of the program and proved beneficial to participants.

United States Department of Labor (DOL) Workforce Innovations Grant: WorkForce Central of Pierce County, in partnership Building Changes, was awarded a Workforce Innovations Grant by the United States Department of Labor (DOL) to expand and replicate the Housing and Employment Navigator model. Three WFF grantee organizations will participate in this project (Helping Hand House in Pierce County; the YWCA of Yakima; Opportunity Council in Whatcom County) and benefit from increased resources, services, and partnerships.

Washington Families Fund Systems Innovation Grant: Building Changes awarded System Innovation Grants (SIG) to Housing Hope in Snohomish County. These grants fund Housing Hope to expand its employment work in the areas of access to health care careers, employment readiness, and the development of a life skills curriculum for homeless families.

Foundations: In addition, Transitions in Spokane County worked in partnership with the YWCA of Spokane to secure a grant from AVON to fund a vocational specialist position. Transitions also received a grant from the Inland Empire Community Foundation to support employment services.

Conclusion and Looking Ahead

Building Changes continues to identify effective strategies and best practices that increase the capacity of housing providers and mainstream systems to serve homeless families so that they sustain permanent housing, employment, and economic stability. The Employment-Focused Capacity Building Program, which grew out of previous successful capacity building programs, has provided additional learnings to carry forward, including:

- Housing and service providers play a vital role in helping families connect to employment opportunities.

- Innovation, as well as timely and accurate assessment of resources is key to program sustainability.
- Community partners and links to workforce need to be identified early on to ensure coordination and collaboration.

Going forward, Building Changes is participating in a project that is taking a new approach to quickly stabilizing homeless families in housing, getting them on a career pathway, and decreasing their reliance on ongoing housing subsidies. The [Ending Family Homelessness project](#), developed by the Washington State Departments of Commerce and Social and Health Services, focuses on rapidly housing families with a goal of reducing homelessness for the 9,058 children who are unsheltered or living in shelters or motels. The approach includes:

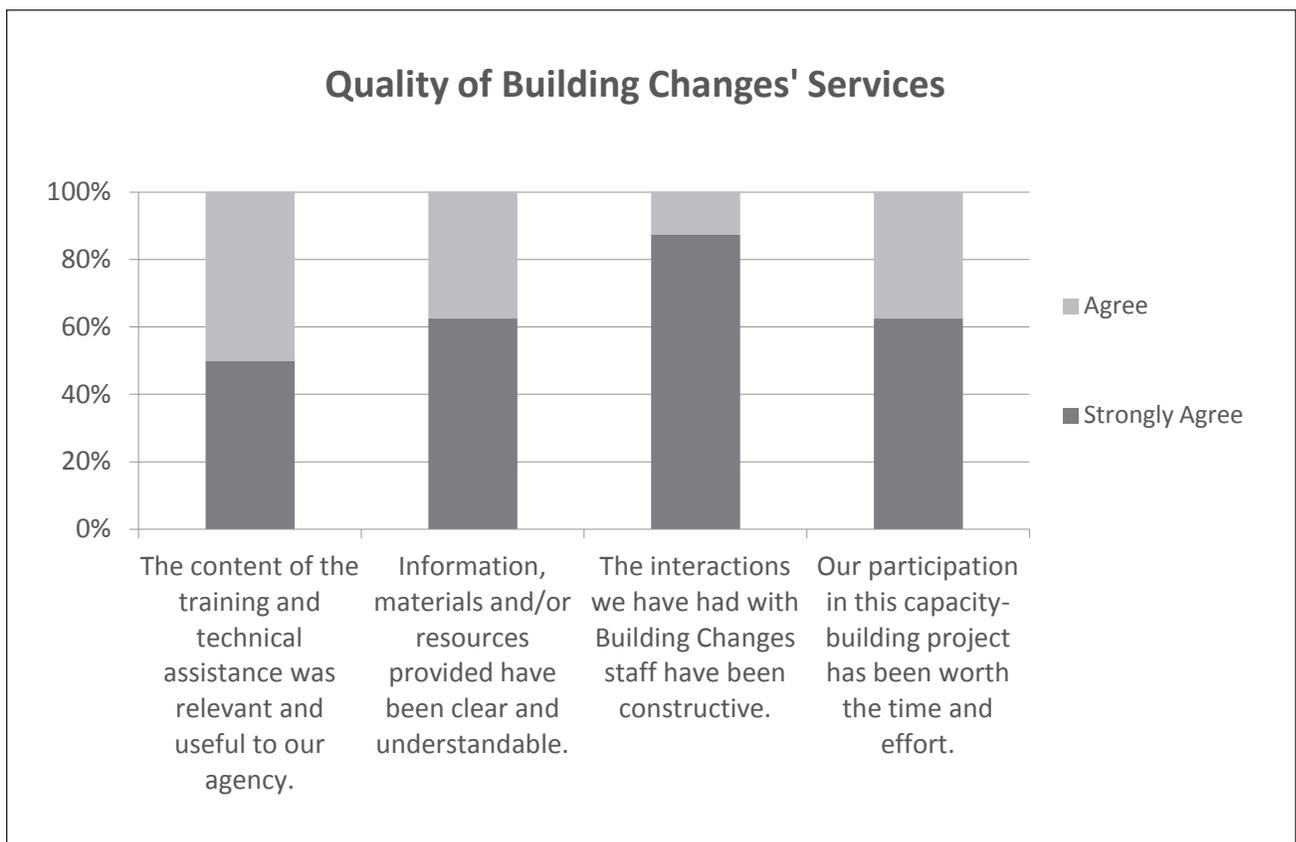
- Time-limited rental and financial assistance
- Housing-focused case management services
- Employment services
- Follow-up support

This project will inform future strategies to eliminate homelessness for all families with children.

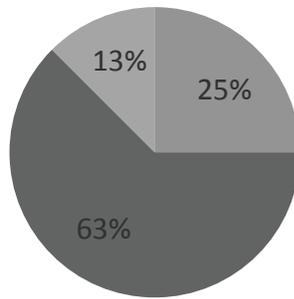
Appendix A: Employment-Focused Capacity Building Program Participants

Washington Families Fund Grantee	County
Emergency Support Shelter	Cowlitz County
Friends of Youth	King County
Helping Hand House	Pierce County
Hopelink	King County
Housing Hope	Snohomish County
Opportunity Council	Whatcom County
Serenity House of Clallam County	Clallam County
St. Margaret's Shelter	Spokane County
Transitions	Spokane County
Valley Cities	King County
YWCA of Yakima	Yakima County
YWCA Young Parent Program	King County

Appendix B: Post-Program Participant Survey



Rate the sustainability of any progress you've made as part of this project.



- New capacity was built and will likely sustain itself at the program level.
- New capacity was built and will likely sustain itself with some organization-wide impact.
- New capacity was built and will likely have significant organization-wide impact.

What challenges (or barriers to implementation) do you anticipate in sustaining the progress you've made?

