

A progress report from Building Changes

COORDINATING EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING SERVICES: A STRATEGY TO IMPACT FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

Background and Summary //

Parents of families experiencing homelessness cite “employment” as the one thing that would most help get their family back on its feet. Due to their housing crisis, however, they face a unique set of barriers in finding and keeping a job—and earning the income they need to find and keep stable housing.

Over the past decade, Building Changes has supported a series of pilots designed to improve access to—and participation in—employment services for heads of homeless families. Our strategies have inspired the workforce and homeless housing systems to collaborate and coordinate their services. Through our work, we have learned much that can be of value to system leaders and providers wishing to establish a partnership:

- ◆ **Connections to employment services are central to Rapid Re-Housing.** Rapidly re-housed families need to be able to support themselves financially so they do not return to homelessness. To better assist those families, local workforce and housing providers should develop referral and service coordination agreements.
- ◆ **Cross-system coordination takes effort and time to build.** It works best when each partner “stays in its own lane,” focusing on its area of expertise while leveraging resources of the other to address a family’s barriers to both employment and housing. To nurture and grow the partnership, providers should communicate constantly and share collective wisdom.
- ◆ **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds can be tapped to pay for employment services for homeless families.** The 2014 federal law identifies homeless people as having a particular need for improved workforce system access and assistance. As a result, the act can be leveraged for funding, as well as provide incentive to the workforce system to partner with the homeless system.
- ◆ **Data coordination is difficult but vital.** The workforce and homeless systems collect, track and report client information differently. The two systems should address this challenge upfront and develop a data coordination plan. Strong data allows us to better evaluate program effectiveness and use that knowledge to improve services.
- ◆ **Conversations with heads of homeless families about earned income and employment need to begin early.** Housing providers should initiate discussions about household budget and income as soon as they begin working to get a family housed. After assessing financial needs, the provider then can refer the head of the family to a workforce partner to provide employment services.
- ◆ **Maintain a pool of “flex funds” that can be accessed and distributed quickly.** Flex funds help families resolve their most urgent barriers to employment. They can be spent on items like: clothing and tools needed for work or job interviews; short-term childcare; car repairs or transit vouchers necessary for commuting. Partners should identify and exhaust all sources for flex funds, and coordinate their efforts to make the dollars available quickly.

Download the full report at: www.buildingchanges.org/2016EmploymentPaper.pdf
For more information, contact: Liza Burell, Program Director, Liza.Burell@BuildingChanges.org, 206.805.6143

