

Perinatal Housing Grant | *Project Evaluation Summary*

BACKGROUND

Building Changes supported the **Perinatal Housing Grant** (PHG) pilot project in Pierce County, Washington, to improve housing and health outcomes for pregnant women and postpartum mothers who needed additional support to prepare or provide for their babies.

The project operated from November 1, 2016, to October 31, 2019. It was funded through the Family Homelessness Initiative, a partnership between Building Changes and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to create high-performing homeless systems in the three most populous counties in Washington: King (Seattle), Pierce (Tacoma), and Snohomish (Everett).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Perinatal Housing Grant expanded the use of Diversion to a new field within the health sector:

Maternity Support Services (MSS).

Diversion is an approach that empowers people to resolve their housing crises quickly, safely, and permanently. Working with PHG project grantees, Building Changes adapted Diversion for use within a maternal and child health services setting.

PHG trained MSS workers in the techniques of Diversion. Once trained, MSS staff initiated brainstorming conversations with their clients to help them identify realistic prospects for stable housing that already existed within their universe of support. MSS staff further assisted by following through with the potential housing solutions identified by their clients. For example, staff would mediate a client's conflict with a current or prior landlord, negotiate with a prospective new landlord, or connect the client with a relative or friend who could offer a permanent place to live.

If deemed necessary, MSS staff offered PHG participants one-time financial assistance from a pool of "flex funds" to cover expenses standing in the way of a mother's ability to secure stable housing for her family. Covered expenses included the security deposit, the initial rent payment, other move-in costs, payoff of a housing debt, and various costs related to maintaining or securing employment and/or childcare.

WHO WAS SERVED

The project served **680** pregnant and postpartum mothers already enrolled in MSS, the equivalent of about one in every seven women receiving MSS in Pierce County. The mothers' participation in the PHG program was voluntary.

Housing Status at Program Entry¹

- » **557 (81.9%)** were living in unstable housing
- » **106 (15.6%)** were experiencing homelessness
- » **17 (2.5%)** were of "unknown" housing status

Participant Characteristics at Program Entry

- » **27.6 years old** was the average age
- » **46.5%** were employed

Family Characteristics at Program Entry

- » **72.4%** were headed by a single female
- » **2.7 people** was the average size

Race and Ethnicity of Program Participants

- » **46.8%** White
- » **36.8%** Black/African American
- » **17.2%** Latina
- » **5.9%** Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- » **3.5%** Asian
- » **1.8%** American Indian/Alaska Native

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

The Building Changes evaluation of the PHG program examined outcomes related to stable housing and provided a demographic analysis of the families served. Due to service delivery timing and other limitations, the project's impacts on maternal and child health outcomes could not be measured.

KEY FINDINGS

- » **69.7%** of the 680 women who participated in PHG successfully exited² the program to stable housing.

The success rate was slightly higher for participants who were living in unstable housing when they entered the program (**72.4%**) than for those who were experiencing homelessness at the time (**57.5%**).

- » **90.9%** of the 474 PHG participants who successfully exited the program ended up living in a rental unit with no ongoing housing subsidy.

7.0% ended up living in a rental unit with subsidy.

- » **20 days** was the average length of time it took the 474 PHG participants to successfully secure stable housing, from point of program entry to the point of exit.

- » **92.4%** of the 474 PHG participants who successfully exited the program received flex funds.

\$895 was the average amount of flex funds received by a PHG participant who successfully exited the program.

¹To determine the housing stability of program participants, caseworkers used the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of "housing instability": the individual is within 14 days of losing housing. This guideline was followed loosely and clients self-identified that they were at risk of losing their housing or housing was unsafe/untenable. Families experiencing homelessness were identified based on HUD's definition of homeless, found here: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/1974/criteria-and-recordkeeping-requirements-for-definition-of-homeless/>.

²Successful exits (permanent housing secured) included securing a rental with or without an ongoing housing subsidy; staying or living with family or friends under a lease agreement or other permanent arrangement; securing housing owned by client, with no ongoing housing subsidy; moving into a hotel or motel paid for without an emergency shelter voucher.