

AN INTRODUCTION TO EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES IN RAPID RE-HOUSING PROGRAMS

ADVOCAP

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OVERVIEW

Rapid Re-Housing and Employment Case Studies

In 2018, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) identified four organizations that integrated employment assistance in their Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) programs to help substantial numbers of client households not only secure permanent housing, but also develop or increase employment income. This introduction and the individual case studies:

- Offer snapshots of each organization and its RRH programs;
- Highlight key features of their RRH approaches;
- Present their varied strategies to helping participants find employment and/or increase earned income;
- Identify common participant challenges; and
- Describe community collaborations that may improve employment outcomes.

As detailed in the case studies, some of these programs incorporate employment services as part of the case management function, some deliver employment services as part of a program operated by the parent agency, and some leverage employment services from a collaborative community partner. No matter the approach, employment assistance is a priority for the highlighted programs, because their staff understand that for the large majority of program clients, employment income is vital to ensuring long-term housing stability and well-being. This is especially true if clients transition to unsubsidized permanent housing, as most do.



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Each agency highlighted serves a somewhat different clientele and operates in a unique economic and employment environment. This makes it impossible to meaningfully compare the programs based on statistics alone. What is clear, however, is that their focus on employment has enabled these programs to help many participants gain or increase earned income. Given each organization's success and innovation, it is not surprising that their respective regional HUD offices and Continuum of Care (CoC) leaders selected these agencies for this spotlight. They join us in hoping that other RRH programs can benefit and find encouragement from the case studies presented.

The agencies featured include two Community Action Agencies serving large multi-county regions in Nebraska and in Wisconsin, a faith-based organization serving a two-county region on Florida's east coast, and a nonprofit serving greater St. Paul, Minnesota. The following statistics from Annual Performance Reports (APRs) covering the two most recently completed program years provide a sense of the programs and their clienteles:

- The programs ranged in size, from 12 units to 56 units of housing, and in the number of households served annually—from 39 to 87.
- Three programs served only families with children; families with children constituted 69 and 85% of the other programs. The programs that served both individuals and families with children reported average household sizes of 2.75 and 2.95 persons, respectively. The programs focusing exclusively on families reported household sizes ranging from 3.40 to 3.67 persons. Family households were primarily headed by women.
- Adult clients were nearly all younger than age 45 (88 and 95%).
- Participants with disabilities represent a modest-sized group in these programs and (less than 22%).
- Few of the families with children met the definition of chronic homelessness and very few clients were veterans.



These four case study programs were chosen because their rates of employment are higher than those most in evaluation reports.

Earning Income from Employment

In 2016, across all CoCs, only around 19% of people exited the homeless service system having increased their earned income. Put another way, most people—about eight out of 10—leave the system without earning more money than when they entered (Schnur, 2018). A national evaluation of RRH programs reported modest increases in earned income among participants. Although RRH is intended to be a short- to medium-term, crisis-oriented housing program, it can help participants address their income needs and grow their income through employment and job training, as shown in these case studies. However, employment services are not routinely included in RRH program services.

Homelessness service providers may feel they are not equipped to provide employment services. They also may not know how to build collaborations with local employment resources. Not surprisingly, the evaluated programs did not offer separate or targeted employment assistance with trained staff. Without a focused employment intervention, positive employment outcomes are less likely. However, recognizing the importance of earned income, some RRH grantees have found ways to provide employment services for participants—either directly or through community/state partnerships. These four case study programs were chosen because their rates of employment are higher than those in most evaluation reports. Presumably the rates are higher, in part, because the RRH staff find ways to address participants’ employment needs and seek improvements in participants’ earned income.

RRH reports showing income from employment describe modest but promising gains (Cunningham et al., 2015). The four case study sites in this report are also encouraging because with a focus on employment, their employment outcomes appear to be greater than in earlier reports (Finkel et al., 2016; Gubits et al., 2015). Chart 1 averages the employment rate for people served in the four RRH programs over a 2-year period, calculating the rate for all participants and for those people who exited RRH. In addition, we determined the employment rate average for all four sites. These rates of employment are on par or superior to rates of employment in other programs serving people experiencing homelessness (The ICA Group, 2012; Trutko et al., 1998) and chronic homelessness (Palan et al., 2007).

Chart 1: Earned income results

SITE	Central NE Community Action Partnership	Amherst H. Wilder Foundation	Halifax Urban Ministries	ADVOCAP
Employment rate for all RRH adult participants ¹	43%	32%	30%	29%
Employment rate for exiting adult participants ²	82%	65%	65%	54%

¹ Number of adults with earned income at exit/all adults served in RRH including leavers and stayers.

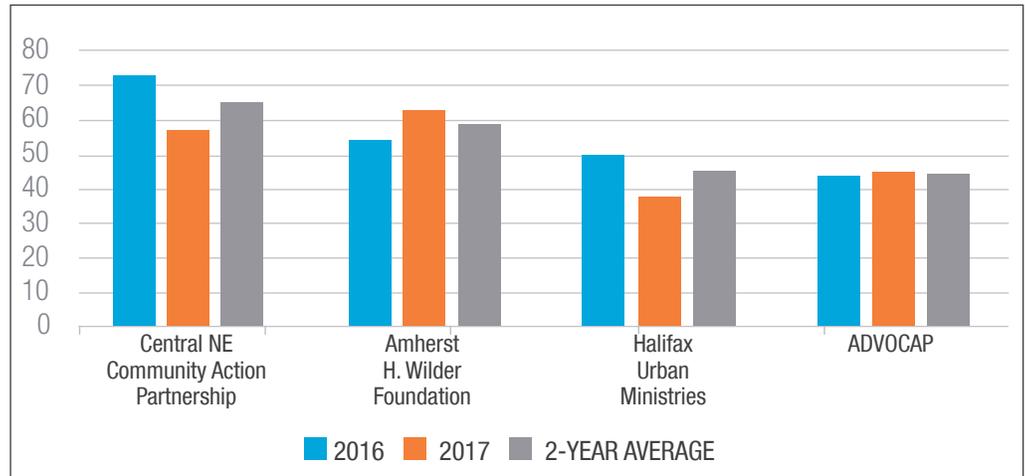
² Number of adults leaving RRH with earned income/all adult leavers.



Rates are higher, in part, because the RRH staff find ways to address participants' employment needs and seek improvements in participants' earned income.

In addition to rates of employment, RRH programs reported on the percent of exiting adult participants who gained or increased their earned income between the time they entered RRH and the time they left the program. Chart 2 shows that all programs increased the earned income of their participants during program tenure.

CHART 2. Percent of exiting participants who gained or increased earned income between entry and exit by program and year



For adult participants who entered the RRH program in 2017 without a job, the programs helped an average of 15 individual participants secure employment while in the program. During the same year, an average of 53 adults exited these programs, and 19% of those adults with earned income at entry increased their earnings by the time they left the program.

As shown in Chart 3, for adult participants who gained or increased their earned income between entering the program and exiting the program, each program substantially increased monthly earnings.

CHART 3. Average increase in earned income of adult clients who gained or increased earned income between entry and assessment/exit in the four RRH programs

Central NE Community Action Partnership	Amherst H. Wilder Foundation	Halifax Urban Ministries	ADVOCAP
\$958	\$1,193	\$1,428	\$1,189



Each RRH participant has unique challenges, but all participants face some similar obstacles.

Addressing Employment Challenges Among RRH Participants

RRH programs that enroll participants with employment needs have the option of either directly addressing participant challenges to employment or securing the assistance from community partners. Each RRH participant has unique challenges, but conversations with RRH providers for these case studies suggested all participants face one or more of the following obstacles:

- Poor or limited work history
- Lack of in-demand job skills and credentials
- Low education levels, including lack of a high school diploma or GED
- Not having, or not having the ability to afford, child care
- Lack of access to adequate transportation
- Poor credit and/or prior evictions
- Mental health issues
- Active/recent addiction
- Criminal background

The agencies described some common case management approaches to addressing participants' employment- and housing-related barriers, including helping clients:

- Understand and clean up their credit reports
- Address rent or utility arrearages and/or other debts that might stand in the way of being offered a lease or obtaining a reference (once they have an enough income to cover their share of housing costs).

- Find landlords who have shown a willingness to take a chance on applicants with a less-than-perfect work history, credit history, and/or tenancy history.
- Access benefits they may not already be receiving, but that can help sustain them once they have housing (SNAP, WIC, TANF, SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, Fuel Assistance, etc.).
- Target, apply for, obtain financial assistance for, and complete short-term job training.
- Prepare for and find work (e.g., identify possible/preferred occupations, strengthen soft skills, prepare or enhance a resume, practice interviewing skills, identify potential employers, provide support for sustaining a job search).
- Cope with the challenges of maintaining employment and find new employment if they lose their job, want a better job, or need additional employment to supplement their income. Such assistance may be provided directly or by referral to an in-house employment services program, or by referral to a community-based employment service provider, such as a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)-funded American Job Center.
- Assess their childcare and transportation needs and access any available help for addressing those needs.
- Apply for subsidized housing or housing subsidies if the person seems likely to have difficulty sustaining housing with the kind of wages he or she is able to earn.



Moving Toward a Vocational Case Management Approach

The innovative strategies highlighted in these study sites fit well into a “vocational case management” approach, which means incorporating an employment focus as part of each client’s service plan. Moving toward this approach might include focusing on structures and supports for clients to pursue employment, such as:

- Conducting weekly case conferences in which 50% or more of meetings are held with other agencies serving the same client.
- Ensuring every RRH participant has an employment-related goal in the service plan, whether it is about pre-employment readiness development, getting a job, keeping a job, or advancing in the workforce. A plan should address other client pursuits if the individual opts out of pursuing employment.
- Making sure a minimum of 10% of staff time is spent in the community developing and strengthening relationships with employment-related resources and staff.
- Expecting that all unemployed RRH participants co-enroll in the local American Job Center.



Conclusion

HUD estimates there are 93,718 RRH beds in the country, of which 68,789 (73.4%) are targeted for people in families and 24,893 (26.6%) are for adult-only households (HUD, 2017). The investment in RRH has led to significant decreases in family homelessness. Although fewer single adults are served by RRH than families, the intervention remains potentially impactful for both. Given the risks attached to reliance on obtaining subsidized housing or a housing subsidy, and given the inability to sustain mainstream housing with just a public benefits income, it is clear that employment income is essential to gaining and maintaining housing. These case studies demonstrate that the integration of a targeted employment intervention can be an effective approach to assisting program participants in obtaining and increasing earned income to meet their housing costs and other household needs. They also offer a range of successful strategies for supporting RRH participants in developing and growing employment income that other RRH programs can implement in the quest to end homelessness in our nation.

NOTE: The case studies are descriptions of program activities and do not represent any attempt to evaluate the programs. Outcome data was drawn from their Annual Progress Reports submitted to HUD and were not independently confirmed. Each study was written to stand alone, in addition to being part of a package that includes this introduction and a summary. Readers can download the documents that interest them from the HUD Exchange at <https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/employment/>.

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