



VOCATIONAL CASE MANAGEMENT IN RRH: AN EMERGING BEST PRACTICE

Rapid re-housing (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, or some combination of these. Although each participant has a unique constellation of challenges, all participants face one or more of the following:

- Criminal background
- Prior evictions
- Poor or limited work history
- Not having or being unable to afford child care
- Lack of in-demand job skills and credentials
- Low educational levels, including lack of high school diploma or GED
- Mental health issues
- Active/recent addiction
- Lack of transportation





Case managers offer participants job-interview preparation, coaching for job searches, and making direct contact with employers on behalf of clients.

These challenges are apparent among RRH participants in the four case studies that are companions to this piece, along with a few common themes that emerged about how they address participant challenges. Chief among these themes is their case management approaches. Not only are case managers at these agencies linking their clients to behavioral health treatment and other social services, but they also have developed robust linkages with local colleges, community-based employment service providers, and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)-funded American Job Centers. Their case management services go beyond assistance to obtain and move into permanent housing, stabilize in housing, and get connected to services and supports. They also offer participants vocational case management, which includes help with resume writing, job-interview preparation, coaching for job searches, and making direct contact with employers on behalf of clients.

If an RRH program is seeking to improve earned income among its participants, the integration of employment assistance seems to be beneficial. This benefit is shown through the four case studies and consistent with relevant available research. One study showed that programs working with people who have behavioral health issues who are experiencing homelessness may better serve these clients by placing as great an emphasis on providing employment services as on providing housing and clinical treatment (Cook et al., 2001). Another study observed the limited focus on employment in housing programs and described how an agency made an organizational transformation from providing traditional housing services to developing an in-house supported employment service; this led to increased competitive employment among clients (Gao et al., 2009). Clients themselves identify job training and placement as a need that is hard to obtain.

They rated it as at least as important as the need for affordable housing (Acosta & Toro, 2000). A study of black, formerly incarcerated men showed that consistent living-wage employment and a stable living environment are needed for these men to successfully reintegrate into both families and the larger society, and to avoid conditions that are precursors of health problems (Cooke, 2004).

Providing employment assistance might also help minimize the difficulty RRH participants have when they have to find a job quickly to become eligible for assistance or make rent payments, yet the kinds of readily available jobs are unlikely to sustain them after assistance expires (Fisher et al., 2014). Even in a Housing First program, participants receiving usual services, without the support of an employment-focused helper, rely more on internal motivation to search for employment (Poremski et al., 2016). However, programs assisting people experiencing homelessness in reaching their employment goals must be sensitive to homelessness-specific experiences that may make establishing trust difficult. Vocational services should be designed to allow clients to work with just one service provider, which allows them to develop a working alliance.

As observed in the case study sites, activities called vocational case management might be defined as a process and set of practices used to help a person with challenges or disabling health conditions overcome barriers to accessing, maintaining, or returning to regular employment and/or other gainful occupations. In the four RRH programs, this work is approached by staff as part of their role within the agency. They see themselves as being responsible for helping participants get the income needed to pay rent or getting them on the right pathway to a housing wage. “Housing wage” is the estimated full-time hourly wage a household must earn to afford a decent rental home at

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U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Fair Market Rent while spending no more than 30% of their income on housing costs (Aurand et al., 2018). Staff using this model recognize the supply of housing assistance is limited and the potential capacity of individuals to either work more or work at better-paying jobs.

The outcomes from the case study sites suggest they may be doing something right in aiming for positive earned income results among participants. However, we acknowledge that these agencies were identified because of their results and were not compared to the results of other RRH programs, nor was there any formal evaluation of these programs. Other variables may impact their positive results, such as the level of previous employment among their participants and/or the unemployment rate in their communities.

Earned Income Results in Four RRH Programs				
	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%

RRH programs that take up a vocational case management strategy are likely to improve their participants earned income. The four case studies illustrate the difference a personalized support system can make for RRH clients, particularly those with personal challenges such as behavioral health issues, criminal justice involvement, or childcare issues. These case studies provide a variety of strategies and partnerships other RRH programs can model to create an employment-focused orientation among staff and a uniform set of practices defining and guiding their approach.

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.

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