



Wilder has been committed to improving people's lives and well-being since 1906.

WILDER FOUNDATION:

– “ROOF” Rapid Rehousing (RRH)



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The [Amherst H. Wilder Foundation](#) is a private nonprofit organization in Minnesota serving the greater St. Paul metropolitan area in Ramsey County—one of the most densely populated counties in the United States. Wilder has been committed to improving people's lives and well-being since 1906. It accomplishes this by drawing on the strengths of the community to solve problems together.

Despite its name, the Wilder isn't a grantmaking organization, but rather a multifaceted social service and research organization established through an endowment from the Wilder family. This case study focuses on its scattered site “ROOF” Rapid Rehousing (RRH) program for households with children, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

ROOF RRH Program Overview and Entry Process

Wilder Foundation staff are proud of their ability to assist large families. During the 2016 and 2017 program years, there were an *average* of 2.5 children per family household served. Families with more than one or two children typically are harder to serve because they need larger apartments, which are more expensive. They also tend to need more assistance with housing costs, child care, and transportation, and are less likely to achieve housing stability than smaller households because the income needed for sustainability is much higher with a bigger household. Nonetheless, Wilder staff



“There’s no family we turn down because of family size.”

believes these families deserve a chance and stated, “There’s no family we turn down because of family size.” Due to serving larger households, it takes a little longer to find housing—on average, between 30 and 60 days from the date of program enrollment.

HUD regulations and Ramsey County Continuum of Care (CoC) policy requires that all referrals to the Wilder Foundation RRH program come through the CoC’s Coordinated Entry for Everyone (CEE) process. Once ROOF staff notify CEE system administrators about an open slot, they receive a referral within 5 business days. ROOF staff then meet with and interview the client. Based on the family’s needs, housing history, work history, credit, and income, staff decide which of the private landlords they regularly work with can provide housing that will fit the client’s needs and circumstances, or they begin a targeted housing search.

Approach to Employment Services

Because employment is vital to sustain the housing needed for a family, within the first 30 days of a client being housed, ROOF case managers do an initial assessment. Staff assess that person’s readiness for work, including work history and employment goals; skills; personality and character strengths; access to child care, transportation, and back-up plans; ability to use the Internet and social media in a job search; access to a Social Security card, birth certificate, and driver’s license; access to interview clothing; and the type of assistance or resources the person is looking to receive.

Wilder runs an employment group three times a year for program participants. The group’s five 2.5-hour sessions and handouts cover topics relevant to a successful job search, such as the following:

- Self-assessment of strengths and challenges
- Preparation and tips for completing a job application and strategies for resume writing



One of the ROOF participants who was successful in finding excellent employment with the U.S. Postal Service.

- Preparation, tips, and practice opportunities for phone and in-person interviews
- Strategies for presenting yourself effectively (in person and via social media, using anecdotes to illustrate strengths and transferable skills, dressing appropriately, etc.)
- Tips and encouragement for maintaining a positive attitude
- Strategies and tips for handling conflict and stress in the workplace to support job retention

Wilder has a computer room and holds an Open Lab twice a week where clients can create resumes and cover letters, apply for jobs, do employer research and prepare for interviews, and engage in other positive activities with support from staff. Wilder donates its laptops every 3 years to PCs for People, for refurbishing and Wilder client families get first choice of the affordable, refurbished laptops.

Most client families are enrolled in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), Diversionary Work Program (DWP), or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and have a county-assigned job counselor who assesses their job skills, helps with resume writing, does an employment skills and interest inventory, and creates an employment plan. Clients must report to this job counselor each week about their job-search activities to continue receiving benefits. DWP participants and SNAP recipients are assigned to work with a job counselor from Workforce Solutions, the designated vendor for employment and training services for those programs. MFIP recipients can work with Workforce Solutions or one of several other vendors. Each vendor designates one job counselor on its staff who will serve ROOF participants.

Case Management

ROOF case managers work in conjunction with a client's assigned job counselor to ensure each client's employment plan is implemented. ROOF case managers and the job counselors meet regularly in what they call the Ramsey County Collaborative to coordinate efforts on behalf of their mutual clients.

ROOF case managers have caseloads of 17 to 20 families and have once- or twice-a-week communication with their clients. They meet twice a month as a team with their supervisors to do case consultations and problem solve challenges related to employment, client mental health, and the needs of the children. During case consultations, case managers celebrate what participants are doing well and their achievements, which staff said, "helps keep morale up, because we can see that our clients are moving forward with their family support plan."

Case managers share their personal stories about the challenges and successes of job searching with their clients to give them a realistic perspective about the ups and downs of the process and assurance that they aren't the only ones experiencing frustrating setbacks. Staff also have successfully

“ Our [client-case manager] relationship is based on trust, honesty, and respect. Being supportive without being judgmental.”



employed former RRH program participants talk to clients about their past challenges in finding work. This helps current clients appreciate that although it takes work to get a job, the effort pays off. It also helps inspire the hope and positive energy clients need to persevere. Staff report that “there always are a few clients who aren’t enthusiastic about getting a job. Our relationship is based on trust, honesty, and respect. Being supportive without being judgmental.”

Employment Barriers and Solutions

Child care. Lack of access to child care can pose a challenge to looking for and sustaining employment. Fortunately, MFIP-funded child care assistance and Wilder in-house resources can be helpful in addressing the child care affordability barrier, though the lack of child care for people working second or third shift is still an issue.

Transportation. There is an efficient bus and light rail system in St. Paul’s inner core, but to access the increasing number of good jobs located outside the metropolitan area, clients often need another source of transportation. This is especially true if they work outside usual commuting hours or if travel is complicated by the need to get children to or from school or child care. In these cases, ROOF staff can often offer in-house assistance and coordinate with MFIP employment counselors to ensure timely availability of MFIP-funded benefits.

Criminal justice involvement. One barrier that is harder to overcome is a criminal record involving multiple felonies. In some two-parent client households, it may make sense for the parent with the criminal record to stay home and provide child care while the other parent works. Given the cost of child care, especially for

pre-school-aged children, that kind of arrangement may be more cost effective than paying for child care while both parents work. Obviously, single parents obviously don’t have this option.

Skill Building as the Key to Sustaining Housing

Although the RRH approach focuses on quickly building participants’ income and ability to sustain housing costs, it’s still challenging for large families to attain the income they need to sustain housing once their RRH subsidy ends. In addition to monthly rental costs between \$1,300 and \$1,600, plus any utilities not included in the rent, large families also have higher costs for food, clothing, child care, and other expenses that increase with the number of children.

Assuming 30% of income is allocated for housing, a family with monthly housing-related costs of \$1,500 in would need an income of \$5,000/month, or \$60,000/year. That kind of income typically requires more than entry-level employment, even if there are two wage earners in the household. Thus, specialized skills training is an important option for program participants.

ROOF case managers have many job-training vendors to which they refer interested clients, including:

- Goodwill/Easter Seals, which trains for jobs in the construction trades, automotive services industry, banking and financial services, electronics soldering and assembly, and medical office fields.
- Summit Academy OIC, which offers carpentry, electrician, and Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training.

- PPL, which offers short-term training for positions in banking, customer service, health care, and administration, and longer training programs (evenings) for positions in building operations, health care, human services, property appraisal, and public works.
- Twin Cities Rise, which offers 8-week skills training in many different fields.
- Sholom Home, where participants can work in a nursing home and get on-the-job training to earn a CNA or Personal Care Assistant (PCA) license.
- Local cosmetology training programs.

These short-term programs are mostly funded through the organization operating the program or through grants. If all the costs aren't covered, ROOF case managers can advocate with the client's MFIP employment counselor for funds to cover the rest of the costs. Wilder endowment funds can be used to pay the fee for CNA certification.



Conclusion: Success is Possible!

The path from homelessness to housing stability is challenging, particularly for single-parent families, large families, and families in which the breadwinner(s) has limited employment qualifications or other barriers that lead to relatively low-wage positions. The ROOF program results, demonstrated in the 2016 and 2017 program years, suggest it has provided its clientele with a strong start on the path to stability. During that time it assisted an average of 255 homeless households with children.

Three-quarters of program participants exited to permanent housing, and nearly 60% of clients exited with higher incomes (an average of \$1,160/month higher) than the incomes with which they entered the program. In addition, though only 33% of participants entered the program with earned income, nearly double that number (65%) exited with it. Of participants who exited in the two most recently completed years, 75% had permanent housing “destinations” and 65% had employment income.

As discussed in this report, longer-term housing stability may well require a higher income than what many of the ROOF clients have been able to achieve. This means future stability will depend on their efforts and successes in increasing their earnings and family income. But if the goal of RRH is to end clients' homelessness and put them on the track to higher-wage employment, then the Wilder RRH program has succeeded.