

WHAT RAPID REHOUSING PROVIDERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

The central principle of rapid rehousing (RRH) is that by providing short-term financial assistance and related supports, we can help certain households achieve long-term housing stability. Currently, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds RRH through its Continuum of Care Program and Emergency Solutions Grants. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) supports RRH through the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program. Analyses of the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program (HPRP), which was active from 2009-2012, inform current practices in RRH programs. Many HPRP households failed to achieve long-term housing stability, and only a small percentage of households increased their income significantly. With a stronger economy and a focus on employment, outcomes can improve.

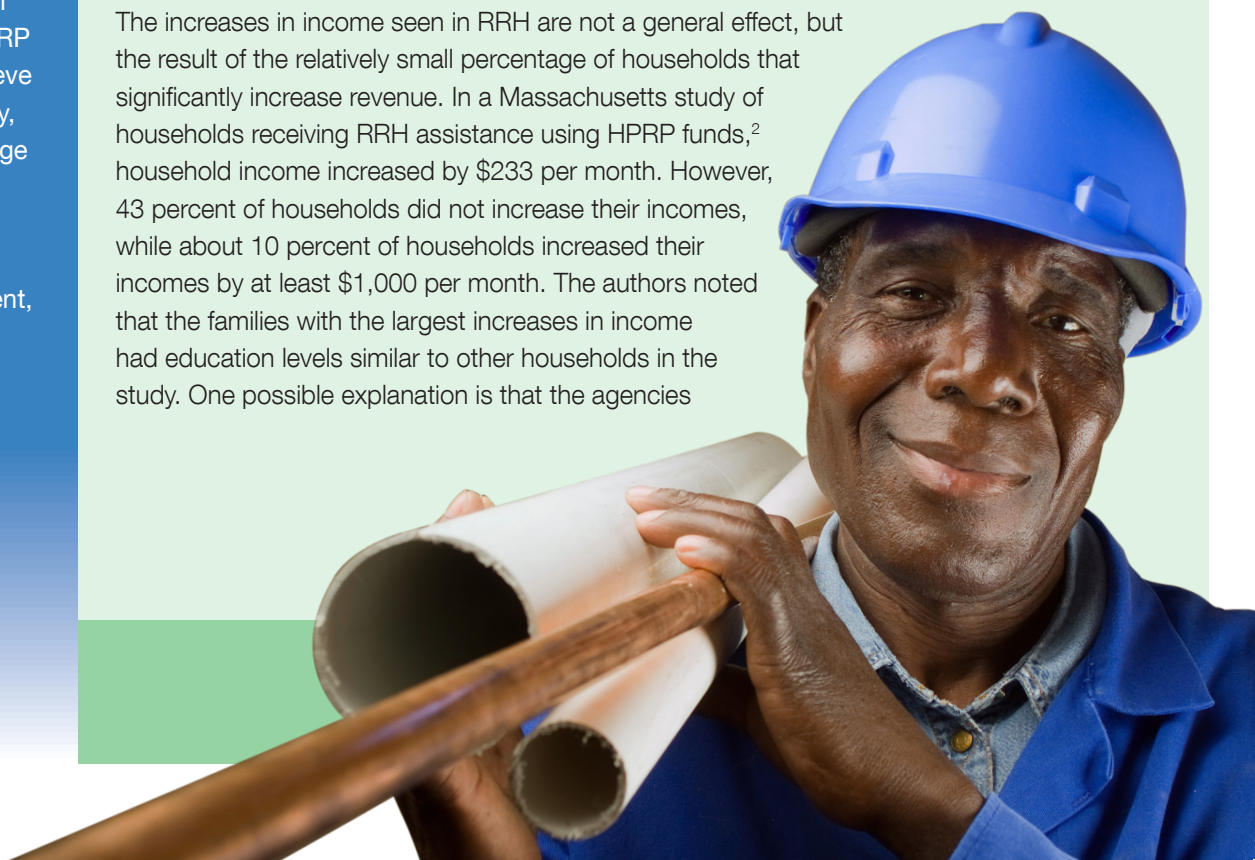
RRH programs are more likely to achieve long-term success if employment supports are a centerpiece of the assistance provided. Employment offers an opportunity for advancement, unlike public benefits, which increase modestly over time based on cost of living. Work incentives built into HUD-assisted housing, Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and other benefits programs ensure a net benefit for households with employment income. Work, including full- and part-time employment, offers additional benefits, including engagement in productive activity, increased self-esteem, and improved housing stability. Housing programs can either provide employment supports directly or collaborate with mainstream or targeted resources.

RRH alone is associated with modest increases in average income.

Although stable housing makes it easier to earn income, housing alone does not support the types of income increases needed for long-term housing stability. In HUD's Family Options Study,¹ which compared community-based RRH, project-based transitional housing, and permanent housing subsidies to usual care for families experiencing homelessness, RRH was associated with increases in income. However, there was no difference in employment or participation in educational activities. Further, the increases in income averaged less than \$100 per month (\$1,128 annually), and the gains were similar to those for families assigned to transitional housing.

Significant gains by select participants drive increases in average income.

The increases in income seen in RRH are not a general effect, but the result of the relatively small percentage of households that significantly increase revenue. In a Massachusetts study of households receiving RRH assistance using HPRP funds,² household income increased by \$233 per month. However, 43 percent of households did not increase their incomes, while about 10 percent of households increased their incomes by at least \$1,000 per month. The authors noted that the families with the largest increases in income had education levels similar to other households in the study. One possible explanation is that the agencies



“*People who are facing homelessness need jobs that pay enough to afford a place to live and support to get and keep those jobs.*”

– Norm Suchar¹⁰

implementing the program varied widely in their approaches to employment supports. One agency hired a full-time employment specialist using HPRP funds and placed 18 percent of RRH participants into full-time employment and another 38 percent into part-time or seasonal work. These findings are significant because they suggest that increasing focus on employment supports can help promote greater increases in income, even among those with barriers to employment.

Failure to increase income diminishes the impact of RRH efforts.

An analysis of households assisted by the Philadelphia Office of Supportive Housing (OSH) between 2010 and 2012⁹ revealed that only 5 percent of the households increased their income after receiving RRH assistance. OSH had targeted households earning between 20 and 30 percent of Area Median Income, following the rationale that families earning less would not be able to maintain housing and that families earning more were less in need of assistance. However, 6 months after exiting the program, only 51 percent of households were current on rent, and only 26 percent were current on utility bills. Without additional income to cover rent and utilities, families struggled.

Households with employment income are better off financially.

Although many people receiving public benefits are afraid that employment will leave them worse off, most benefits programs have work incentives or work requirements, meaning that people will be better off if they earn income. Work incentives such as HUD's Earned Income Disallowance and Social Security Work Incentives allow people to earn income for an extended period without eliminating benefits. People with disabilities who receive Social Security benefits can participate in the Ticket to Work program, which offers free training and support without jeopardizing disability status. People can continue to receive SNAP benefits if they receive SSI, and SNAP income calculations exclude employment expenses and a portion of earned income. Further, low-income workers qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit, which can boost their incomes when they file their tax returns.

By working with a benefits specialist, RRH participants can ensure that their net income goes up when they return to work. An evaluation of the RRH program operated by the Mercer County, New Jersey, Board of Social Services (MCBOSS)⁴ found that people who were employed when exiting the RRH program had average monthly household incomes of \$1,300, compared to \$835 for those without employment income. Although income levels may be modest at the beginning, participants can still receive benefits and work toward higher salaries.

Combining employment supports with RRH lowers costs and improves outcomes.

The MCBOSS RRH program uses state Temporary Assistance to Needy Families funding to provide up to 24 months of rental assistance. In an effort to improve outcomes and reduce costs, MCBOSS began providing employment-focused case management to all RRH participants. The program evaluation revealed that people who received the enhanced supports received an average of 5 months of rental assistance, compared to an average of 12 months before the change to employment-focused case management. Further, people exiting the RRH program were 3.5 times more likely to be employed and had higher average incomes than people exiting transitional housing. More than 95 percent of participants have avoided returning to shelters.

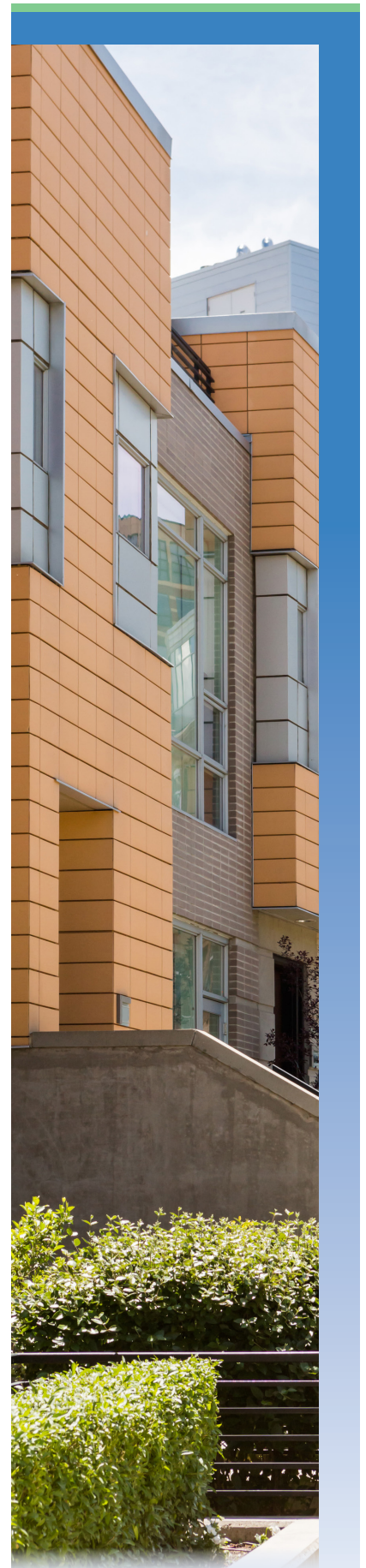
RRH programs have multiple options for providing employment supports.

Helping RRH participants get jobs requires innovation, taking advantage of local opportunities, and identifying people who will serve as champions for employment. Emergency Solutions Grants do not pay for employment services. Continuums of Care often prioritize housing, but encourage collaboration with mainstream services such as employment services. RRH programs can braid funding streams or turn to intensive collaborations to provide high quality, effective employment supports.

Some programs successfully offer employment-focused case management. In Mercer County, New Jersey, where adopting the practice resulted in higher incomes and shorter periods of rental assistance, case managers have received training in helping people identify job opportunities, apply for work, and manage public benefits.⁵

Another effective strategy is an intensive collaboration with the national network of [American Job Centers](#). Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, these centers offer both basic job assistance and more intensive training. The Secure Jobs Program in Massachusetts is an example of a successful partnership between RRH and workforce programs.⁶ In Washington State, the workforce system embeds employment specialists within housing services.⁷ In Utah, RRH participants are required to register with American Job Centers,⁸ and in New Jersey, some of the MCBOSS RRH staff are co-located in American Job Centers to help coordinate participants' job searches.⁹

Other federally funded job training programs provide opportunities to assist RRH participants. In addition to providing food security, SNAP offers employment support through its Jobs Training Program. RRH providers can also become certified to provide employment supports to participants who have disabilities, as [Employment Networks](#) in the Ticket to Work program or as vendors for state [Vocational Rehabilitation](#) agencies funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT WORK INCENTIVES AND EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS:

- American Job Centers: [CareerOneStop: http://www.careeronestop.org/site/american-job-center.aspx](http://www.careeronestop.org/site/american-job-center.aspx)
- Employment Networks, Ticket to Work: <https://yourtickettowork.com/web/ttw/en-home>
- HUD, Annual Earned Income Disallowance FAQ: http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/phr/about/ao_faq_eid
- HUD, Annual Earned Income Disallowance 2016 Rule: <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2016/03/08/2016-04901/streamlining-administrative-regulations-for-public-housing-housing-choice-voucher-multifamily#h-15>
- Internal Revenue Service, Earned Income Tax Credit: <https://www.irs.gov/Credits-&-Deductions/Individuals/Earned-Income-Tax-Credit>
- Rehabilitation Services Administration, U.S. Department of Education: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/index.html>
- SNAP Fact Sheet on Resources, Income, and Benefits: https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/SNAP_Basics_FactSheet.pdf
- SNAP Federal Jobs Training Programs: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/Federal-Jobs-Programs>
- Social Security, Work Incentives: <https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/workincentives.htm>
- Ticket to Work Program: <http://www.chooseworkttw.net/>

Endnotes

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- ⁴ National Alliance to End Homelessness. (n. d.). Promising strategies: Mercer County Board of Social Services and Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from: <http://www.endhomelessness.org/page/-/files/Mercer%20profile%20final.pdf>
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- ⁶ Meschede, T., Chaganti, S., & Revis, A. (2013). Secure jobs, secure homes, secure families: Process evaluation of the Massachusetts Secure Job Pilot. Waltham, MA: Institute on Assets and Social Policy, Brandeis University. Retrieved from: <http://iasp.brandeis.edu/pdfs/2013/Fireman.pdf>
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- ⁸ Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (Feb. 20, 2013). Use of TANF funds to serve homeless families and families at risk of experiencing homelessness. Memorandum No. TANF-ACF-IM-2013-01. Retrieved from: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ofa/tanf_acf_im_2013_01.pdf
- ⁹ Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness. (2013). Report to the community. Retrieved from: <https://www.camdenhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Mercer-Alliance-Report-to-the-Community-2013.pdf>
- ¹⁰ Suchar, Norm (2015). SNAPS In Focus: CoC Collaboration with Workforce Boards Under WIOA. Retrieved from: <https://www.hudexchange.info/news/snaps-in-focus-coc-collaboration-with-workforce-boards-under-wioa/>

