

PHA Spotlight: New Hampshire Housing Finance Agency Mainstream Voucher Implementation

CHALLENGE

The state of New Hampshire experienced a rise in homeless population between the years 2019 and 2021 described by many as a “tidal wave” of increase of homeless camps, mostly in urban settings but also with a significant number in rural areas. Challenges described by NHHFA staff include clients with financial obstacles and limited resources and lack of housing vacancies and suitable unit sizes.

SOLUTION

NHHFA found a great response to its initial award of 20 vouchers. Encouraged by the response and high range (60-70 percent) of voucher holders with qualifying disabilities, subsequent awards enabled them to receive a total of 340 Mainstream vouchers: an equivalent to 20% of their estimated homeless population. With a ready source of clients, NHHFA quickly realized they needed to rework their procedures to meet the heightened demand for their Mainstream vouchers.

Broadened Preferences and Complimentary Partner Programs Heightened Voucher Utilization

Initial Mainstream applications include two preferences: at risk of homelessness or transitioning out of institutions with a risk of homelessness. Subsequent applications included a third preference of those clients in a permanent supportive housing or rapid rehousing project that previously experienced homelessness. Adding this preference significantly enabled NHHFA to engage with service providers with eligible clients. This preference also allowed service providers with eligible funds to assist their clients that needed financial assistance to meet leasing requirements.

Engaging with service providers that had ideal matching programs such as the Moving On Program and NHHFA’s Rapid ReHousing Program also assisted in broadening the pool of potential eligible clients. Development of Memorandums of Understanding with multiple service agencies to provide supportive services helped to initiate and ensure that operations between the partners were specific to the needs of each partner and the clients. Management of the relationships was maintained via regular, reoccurring meetings to review the status of active clients, needed resources and looming deadlines.

Creations of “Expeditor” Roles Increased Application Processing Efficiency

NHHFA quickly learned that maximizing their internal capacity was vital to managing the influx of clients and partners. In order to do so, NHHFA assigned specific roles to staff with the flexibility to design processes that ensured active engagement between all parties. The role creation of two “expeditors” was

invaluable to achieving success. Expeditors were given almost “cart blanche” ability to devise procedures, make decisions regarding reasonable accommodations, approve funding requests, engage with landlords and partner agencies to ensure efficient coordination of activities.

Initiation of “Road Shows” to Engage New Partners

To further develop relationships with agencies that can provide needed resources, NHHFA staff developed a “roadshow” program to visit potential partners at their places of operation to describe the advantages of the Mainstream voucher program. This innovative technique brought instant results via face-to-face meetings and/or virtual meetings (during COVID) to learn the benefits of partnering. This outreach also led to sourcing of potential new partners from an agency’s network or “sister” agencies unfamiliar to NHHFA staff.

RESULTS

NHHFA achieved great success in leasing all 70 vouchers of its pre-2020 awards. Of the remaining 270 vouchers, 203 are available for leasing with 25 clients actively looking. Monthly meetings helped to keep utilization strong and achieve its utilization goal of 80% and maintaining high coordination efforts helped achieve minimal turnover.

INSIGHT/LESSONS LEARNED

NHHFA believed that clients themselves could effectively “sell” landlords on the Mainstream voucher program. Many clients who were searching for suitable units on their own were able to identify landlords that NHHFA may not have reached. NHHFA was also open to negotiate with landlords to keep them engaged. Lastly, by channeling communication via specific points of contact (expeditors), NHHFA lowered miscommunication and enhanced productivity and achievement of goals.

RESIDENT INTERVIEW

Darrell is a 49-year-old male who grew up in a low-income household that moved around a lot which created both housing and schooling instability. His adult life found him in and out of jail due to alcoholism, drug addiction and homelessness. His last stint in jail was four years ago, and when he was released, he used drugs quite heavily.

He entered a rehab program in Florida and then returned to New Hampshire to stay with his daughter. Darrell then found the Terrell House which is a sober living program. The caseworker at Terrell House signed Darrell up for the Mainstream program. He has an additional caseworker, to help him manage his dual diagnosis, get access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Medicaid.

While at Terrell House, Darrell discovered that there were additional units available for rent in the same building that were not part of the sober living. He approached the landlord about leasing one of the units through the Mainstream voucher program. Darrell liked the location of Terrell House due to its proximity to transportation, food/shopping, and his daughter’s residence. Leasing an upstairs unit with a voucher was important for him to retain the stability he had developed.

Darrell thoroughly enjoys his new apartment. He has been sober for 3 years, and off drugs for 10 months. He even obtained a part-time job at McDonald’s. Darrell has a fiancé and a cat.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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