

CASE STUDY: KING COUNTY RAPID RE-HOUSING FOR FAMILIES PILOT

The Rapid Re-Housing for Families pilot evaluated the effectiveness of enhancing rapid re-housing programming with employment navigators.

King County, Washington State

In 2010, three organizations in Washington State—Building Changes, the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County, and Workforce Central in Pierce County—began developing the employment navigator model to improve coordination of housing and employment systems on behalf of people experiencing homelessness. The navigator model recognizes the important role of employment in helping people experiencing homelessness stabilize and aims to increase access to employment services for homeless jobseekers through the public workforce system, which has historically underserved this population.¹ Employment navigators work one-on-one with families to facilitate connections among housing, employment, training, and other supports. Navigators also work to connect the housing and employment systems and expand their capacity to offer homeless jobseekers coordinated service and resource delivery.

From 2013-15 in King County, Washington, the Rapid Re-Housing for Families pilot evaluated the effectiveness of enhancing rapid re-housing programming with employment navigators. The navigators helped heads of homeless families become steadily employed and increase earned income so that they could successfully maintain stable housing after their rapid re-housing rental subsidy ended. Through the pilot, participating homeless services and workforce development providers made official agreements to work together, determining their roles and laying the framework for consistent collaboration across providers and systems. When a family engaged

“You need someone to play the employment navigator role—there needs to be a guide, a person who’s an advocate around your job plan. If a homeless person walks into an American Job Center, it’s pretty clear they won’t get the services they need. The navigator is the key.”

– Neighborhood House, Seattle/ King County

with rapid re-housing services, the housing provider referred them to an employment navigator at their partnering workforce agency. The heads of families who opted to work with the employment navigator received individualized services to link them with workforce programs and related resources, assist them with job retention and career development once they’d obtained employment, and help them understand and become comfortable with the public workforce system so they could navigate it independently going forward.

In addition to one-on-one services, the pilot program also involved building cross-system collaboration to support the employment and housing needs and interests of families experiencing homelessness. Employment navigators supported systems-level collaboration by assembling cross-sector teams to jointly address a family’s barriers to both employment and housing. These teams included the family itself, the workforce system’s navigator, the housing system’s rapid re-housing case manager, and other service providers working closely with the family, such as emergency shelter providers. The team regularly conferred to ensure coordinated service delivery, and team members pooled their collective knowledge to help the family access services and resources to further support their housing and employment stability such as safety net programs, childcare, legal aid, and transportation.

Early results from the King County Rapid Re-Housing for Families pilot suggest it was effective: the average monthly income of families who worked with an employment navigator increased by \$338 between program entry and exit, while the average monthly income for those who did not work with an employment navigator went up by only \$56. Additionally, families who worked with an employment navigator were more likely to exit to permanent housing, and no family who exited to permanent housing and worked with an employment navigator returned to homelessness within 24 months.²

While most families exited the pilot by mid-2016, ongoing testing of the navigator model continues in Washington State. The King County Rapid Re-Housing for Families pilot shows the effectiveness of cross-system collaboration on behalf of families experiencing homelessness. By working together to share capacity, knowledge, and resources, public systems can help rapid re-housing participants get, keep, and advance in work in order to stabilize in housing over the longer term.

1. Vanucci, K., & Young, M. (2014). *The Workforce Investment Act: Homeless system innovation & recommendations*. Retrieved from Heartland Alliance’s National Initiative on Poverty & Economic Opportunity website: http://nationalinitiatives.issuelab.org/resource/the_workforce_investment_act_homeless_system_innovation_recommendations; Building Changes. (2012). *Employment navigator: Connecting homeless families to workforce systems*. Retrieved from <http://www.buildingchanges.org/images/documents/library/2013%20Employment%20Navigator%20Connecting%20Homeless%20Families%20to%20Workforce%20Systems.pdf>

2. King County. (2016). *Preliminary results from King County Rapid Re-Housing for Families pilot—November 2013 through December 2016*. Unpublished report.