



# Ending Family Homelessness

## The View from Mercer County

Frank Cirillo, Director of Welfare

Mercer County Board of Social Services

# A Little Background

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In 2008, Mercer Alliance convened its government partners in a year-long study process.

- Analyzed Dennis Culhane research on family shelter utilization.
- Researched National Alliance best practices around Rapid Rehousing.
- Looked internally at our HMIS Data for Emergency Shelter (ES), Transitional Housing (TH) projects.

# What We Discovered

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- People were staying in TH too long, and were not exiting to Permanent Housing.
- Long term stayers in TH were not those with highest need.
- 80% of persons in TH could be rapidly rehoused.
- Current system was NOT ending homelessness and was very costly- \$5M from TANF agency alone.
- Need to look at reallocation of TH and moving towards Rapid Rehousing as a policy

# What We Decided

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- ✓ To stop managing homelessness and instead to end it.
- ✓ To shift focus to permanent housing and away from shelter & transitional housing.
- ✓ Families would stabilize quickly in an apartment they could stay in; as soon as they moved in, they were no longer homeless.
- ✓ Families would receive services and rental assistance until they were self-sufficient.

# Our Strategy

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- To find funding for a Rapid Rehousing model
- Align all local funders in one system – County, City, Board of Social Services.
- Enlist Division of Family Development (DFD / TANF) as major partner.
- Create program for Rapid Rehousing that would combine rental assistance & case management.

# Key Components of RRH Program

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## Rental Assistance

- Made fundamental decision to give **TRA** to homeless households
- Changed Use of **TRA** to front end, rather than after Transitional Housing

## Case Management

- Case Management with Focus on Employment was key
- Contracted community-based agency for CM services, paid for by mix of funds

# WHAT WE LEARNED: RAPID REHOUSING WORKS

## Comparing Rapid Rehousing to Transitional Housing

Decreased  
Length of Time  
on Public  
Assistance



Rapid Rehousing: **189 Days**  
Transitional Housing:  
339 Days

Increased Earned  
Monthly Income



Rapid Rehousing:  
**50%**  
Transitional Housing:  
14%

Reduced  
Recidivism Rate



Rapid Rehousing: **6%**  
Transitional Housing:  
21%



# Rapid Rehousing Decreases Public Assistance spending per family by 50%.

Rapid Rehousing is a *Cost Effective* solution to ending family homelessness.

OLD SYSTEM:

SHELTER TO TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Service	Rate per Day	Average LOS	Cost per Family
Emergency Shelter	\$125	87 Days	\$10,875
Transitional Housing	\$84	253 Days	\$21,252
Total Average cost per Family:			<b>\$32,167</b>

NEW SYSTEM:

RAPID RE-HOUSING

Service	Rate per day	Average LOS	Cost per Family
Emergency Shelter	\$125	54 Days	\$ 6,750
Rapid Re-Housing	\$50	189 Days	\$9,450
Total Average Cost per Family:			<b>\$16,200</b>

# A View from Mercer County

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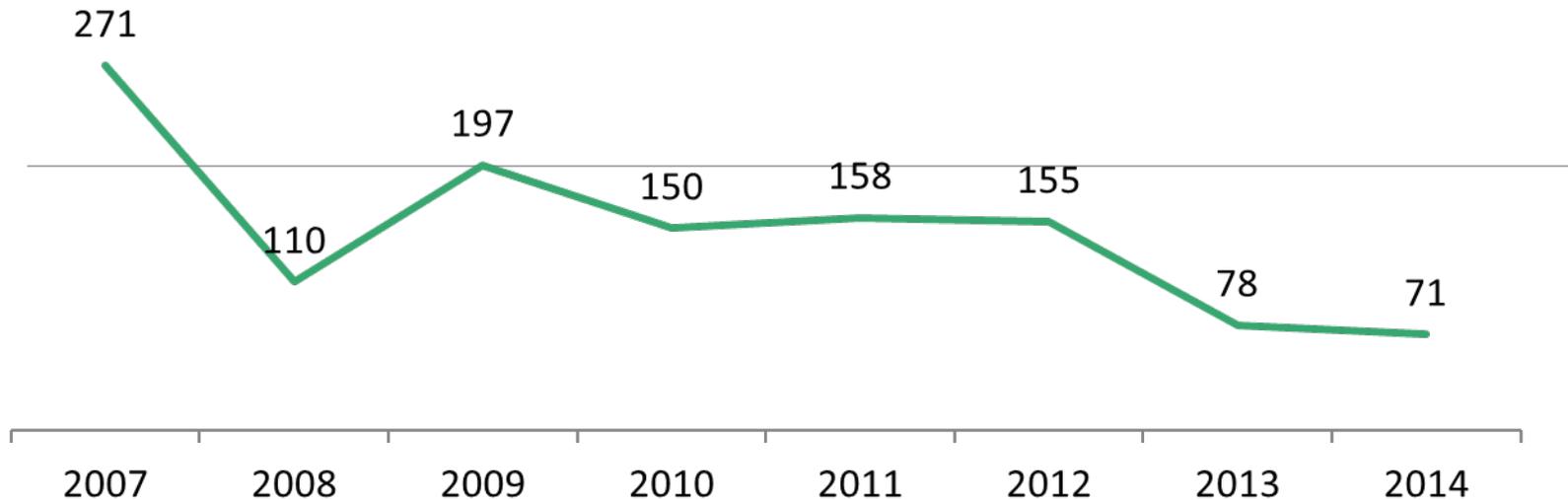
Since 2010 over **400** homeless families have been rapidly rehoused by moving into their own apartments within **54** days of entering the homeless system.

- Over 800 children, who were once homeless, are now living with their families in their **own** apartments, and attending schools in their **own** neighborhoods.
- Rapid Rehousing's case management services have helped families increase their earned income by **50%**, reducing the length of time on public assistance from one year to **6** months on average.
- Rapid Rehousing decreases the length of stay in emergency shelter by **36%** meaning that families are able to be back in their own homes more quickly.
- Best of all, **94%** of families who have been rapidly rehoused have not become homeless again.



## Point in Time Count Homeless Family Households

Since 2007, on any given day, the number of homeless family households in Mercer County has declined by **74%** compared to 38% in NJ and 16% nationally.



# Rapid Rehousing Adopted by System

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Our COC voted to end HUD funding of Transitional Housing for families in Mercer after 2013.

MCBOSS made decision to no longer place families in TH, but to use RRH instead.

Rapid Rehousing will be model for most families (90%). Only those with disabilities will need lengthier period of services or Permanent Supportive Housing (10%).

State's partnership has been crucial in making this transition in the homeless system.



# Specialized Staffing Unit

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Board of Social Services created its own RAPID EXIT unit, using TANF-paid social workers -- NO NEW \$.

BEFORE	NOW
Family Services Unit -- served mix of homeless and not-homeless families – huge caseloads.	Specialized Rapid Exit Unit created -- only for rapidly rehousing literally homeless families - caseloads of 25 per social worker.

# What's Needed at Local Level

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- Commitment from County Welfare Agency to use TRAs, coupled with intensive case management -- through a community agency or CWA staff.
- Commitment to assign high-level staff to work in partnership with COC.
- Commitment to using a Rapid Rehousing screening tool.
- Commitment to enter data in HMIS so outcomes can be tracked and reported.

# Your Take-Away

- New Jersey's Emergency Assistance provides a unique opportunity to address family homelessness.
- The use of TRA (Temporary Rental Assistance) can be **THE BEST TOOL** for ending family homelessness.
- TRAs can be used effectively for 90% of homeless families, even those without histories of employment.



# Contact Information

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Frank Cirillo, Director of Welfare

[fcirillo@xbp.dhs.state.nj.us](mailto:fcirillo@xbp.dhs.state.nj.us)

609-989-4494

