Ending Family Homelessness
The View from Mercer County

Frank Cirillo, Director of Welfare
Mercer County Board of Social Services
A Little Background

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

- 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

✓ 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

- 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

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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Rate per Day</th>
<th>Average LOS</th>
<th>Cost per Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Shelter</td>
<td>$125</td>
<td>87 Days</td>
<td>$10,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Housing</td>
<td>$84</td>
<td>253 Days</td>
<td>$21,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Average cost per Family:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$32,167</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### NEW SYSTEM:
**RAPID RE-HOUSING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Rate per day</th>
<th>Average LOS</th>
<th>Cost per Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Shelter</td>
<td>$125</td>
<td>54 Days</td>
<td>$ 6,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapid Re-Housing</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>189 Days</td>
<td>$9,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Average Cost per Family:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$16,200</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A View from Mercer County

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.
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

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEFORE</th>
<th>NOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Services Unit -- served mix of homeless and not-homeless families – huge caseloads.</td>
<td>Specialized Rapid Exit Unit created -- only for rapidly rehousing literally homeless families - caseloads of 25 per social worker.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What’s Needed at Local Level

- 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

Frank Cirillo, Director of Welfare

fcirillo@xbp.dhs.state.nj.us

609-989-4494