

PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

A summit on integrating employment and housing strategies to prevent and end homelessness

COMMUNITY: WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

DESCRIPTION

Western Massachusetts is a large, geographically diverse region of Massachusetts, consisting of Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden Counties. The region is the most rural in the state while having two of its poorest cities: Springfield and Holyoke. Like the rest of the state, Western Massachusetts has experienced an increase in homelessness in recent years even while the nation overall is experiencing a decline. Homelessness in Western MA has increased 10% since last year and 13% over the past 5 years.

Several factors disproportionately impact the region, including: a higher rate of families in poverty than the state overall, with our major metropolitan area of Springfield, MA having one of the highest rates in the country (44%); high rates of teen pregnancies, with Holyoke, MA having the highest teen pregnancy rate in the state; the highest rate in the state of homeless families living in overflow hotels/motels, where lengths of stay are longer than in shelter settings while services are fewer; and higher rates of chronic homelessness than the rest of the state (16% vs. 11%).

Target populations for our Secure Jobs program are homeless and formerly homeless families, including those living in shelter or motels and those recently housed with short-term rental subsidies, families at risk of eviction and homeless individuals.

Our employment approach is based on three core concepts: (1) integration among non-profit and public programs in employment, housing, child care and education sectors; (2) individualized employment plans that address the specific needs of each homeless job seeker and (3) flexible funds to resolve specific employment barriers such as childcare, transportation and training certificates. Our program identifies and reaches homeless individuals and families through referrals from organizational partners, including housing and shelter providers, state agencies and human service and health care agencies. Participants also contact the program directly based on word of mouth among peers. Prior to enrollment, clients complete a series of appointments for intake, assessment and career planning, confirming that they are ready, willing and able to participate in program services and employment.

COLLABORATION

Western Massachusetts' employment efforts on behalf of homeless individuals and families span dozens of providers through private, public and quasi-public funding, all working collaboratively under the coordinating umbrella of the Secure Jobs Advisory Council, facilitated by the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness. The region's employment efforts for homeless families and individuals include participation of all four county career centers, early education and

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child care organizations, shelter and housing providers, community colleges, Regional Employment Boards and multiple state agencies that intersect with the job seeking homeless population.

This initiative began with the vision of the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Foundation, a long-time state partner in the effort to end family homelessness. The Foundation initially funded a Western Massachusetts planning grant to respond to employment needs for homeless families and individuals in Spring, 2012. Based on that plan's recommendations, The Fireman Foundation launched the Secure Jobs pilot project, with Western Massachusetts being one of five awards state-wide. That initiative's success inspired the complementary publicly funded efforts now underway.

Funded partners include the following non-profit organizations: Berkshire Works Career Center, CareerPoint Career Center, Construct, Inc., Corporation for Public Management, FutureWorks Career Center, Franklin Hampshire Career Center, HAPHousing, and ServiceNet, all of which provide case management, job readiness, training, and job retention services. Playful Minds LC and Square One provide child care and partner in developing career pathways to the early education and care career field. Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness provides extensive coordination and oversees the Secure Jobs Advisory Council and maintains the online presence for the Western Massachusetts Secure Jobs collaborations. See:

<http://westernmasshousingfirst.org/blog/secure-jobs-connect/>

Corporation for Public Management provides data coordination, hosts the Secure Jobs database and coordinates child care resources with partner and state agencies. MA Department of Housing and Community Development, MA Labor and Workforce Development, MA Department of Transitional Assistance and MA Department of Early Education and Care are all critical partners in the effort. The Continua of Care of Hampden County and Three County (Hampshire, Franklin, Berkshire) provide their collaborative support in the effort as well.

Funding is provided by the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Foundation, Commonwealth Corporation through the MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLW), and the MA Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), in addition to private and leveraged resources. These resources include in-kind contributions from all funded partners, ranging from office space and supplies to data base management and career center activities. Additionally, HAPHousing leveraged significant state housing stabilization funds to support a collaborative workforce development initiative for homeless families. This collaboration is detailed below in the "Innovation" section.

The keys to sustaining this partnership are communication and collaboration. Secure Jobs programs optimize coordination of services throughout a client's journey to full employment. The Secure Jobs Advisory Council meets monthly to review and evaluate outcomes and ensure that all Secure Jobs programs are maximizing resources, building on successful strategies, and troubleshooting challenges. On an operational level, in-person, telephone, and email communications between all

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workforce development sub-contractors, and shelter and housing stabilization staff are continuous in order to monitor clients' progress and overcome barriers.

Innovation

The Secure Jobs model, based on an unprecedented level of collaboration and flexibility in meeting clients' needs, is a highly extremely successful innovation. Each program brings new partners to the table in unique partnerships. With the most recent state funding, we every Career Center in our four county region is now invested in the effort. Each of these four career centers offer unique features that contribute to program success, including a cohort model in which clients attend a three work job readiness and self-esteem building program prior to job placement, as well as the co-location of career center staff and Secure Jobs staff at each others' sites. These models allow homeless clients greater access to career center services, reducing the barriers to employment that homeless job seekers frequently face.

The collaboration between HAPHousing and Corporation for Public Management in its implementation of the Secure Jobs program offers a powerful example of what resource allocation and service coordination can produce. First, HAPHousing elected to allocate MA Stabilization Funds to employment efforts for homeless families, building on the Fireman Foundation's private investment and CPM's program model. Secondly, it and CPM devised a comprehensive referral system with the local career centers that directs clients to the appropriate program and career center depending on their job readiness. Finally, through ongoing communication and coordinated case management, they supported 191 homeless parents into employment over a 1 year period. Please go to: <http://westernmasshousingfirst.org/blog/secure-jobs-connect/sjc-progress-report/> for the final progress report of this particular initiative.

Additional innovations pertain to child care, a critical need for employment success. Working in collaboration with child care partners, the Secure Jobs model allocates funding for "bridge childcare" to provide immediate child care services while working to obtain long-term child care vouchers and/or income-eligible slots provided by the Commonwealth. Finally, a recent innovation includes the development of an early education career track for job seekers. Working with child care agencies, Secure Jobs is sponsoring two courses and internships that will qualify an individual for child care teacher certification. While building career ladders, the region is increasing its capacity to serve the children of future job seekers.

FUNDING FOR INITIATIVE/PROJECTS

Public, private and foundation funding as well as extensive leverages combine to fund Secure Jobs: HAPHousing (MA DHCD) \$212,000; Fireman Foundation \$523,000; MA DHCD \$250,000; Commonwealth Corporation through EOLWD \$207,000; Partner agency leverages \$475,000.

When permissible, Career Center partners make every attempt to co-enroll clients in various programs to leverage available dollars. Workforce Investment Act funds and services are accessed when clients are eligible for and enrolled in WIA, and funds

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are available for approved training and educational programs. Two homeless clients have accessed WIA funds thus far to support job training and child care services.

CONNECTION TO EMPLOYERS

The Secure Jobs design includes incentives for businesses to hire, which have proven effective in helping employers to “take the risk” to hire clients that may not have the skills, education or work history they typically seek. Additionally, businesses engaged in our program frequently exceed the strict role of providing employment to include a more expansive approach with assistance such as: gift cards for successful completion of job training or readiness programs; provision of interview or job clothing; and the establishment of a car ownership program.

Secure Jobs also engages employers through recognition. At a “first year” program celebration event in February, 2014, the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness, with support from all the program partners, hosted a large public event to honor 13 businesses that participated in the Secure Jobs program. The event included approximately 20 state legislators, mayors and state officials who attended to applaud the business participants and success of the program’s clients. Businesses also received positive media coverage from every major media outlet in the region. Businesses were eager to continue and to do more in support of this project as a result of this event (which also was key in fueling political support for the public funding that was allocated by the state legislature in June later that year).

Secure Jobs clients have secured employment in private, public and nonprofit sectors. Industry sectors where employment has been secured include healthcare, childcare, hotel and food Service, construction and manufacturing, retail and wholesale, transportation and administration.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT –

Community Population	Hampden 467,319; Hampshire 159,596; Franklin 71,221; Berkshire 129,585
2014 PIT (overall homeless)	Hampden County 2655; Three County CoC 753; Combined 3408
2013 CoC award	Hampden County \$2,109,95; Three County CoC \$1,599,964; Combined \$3,709,916
2013 WIA formula grant allocation*	Hampden \$3,512,146; Franklin/Hampshire \$1,518,105; Berkshire \$926,042
Current unemployment rate**	Hampden 8.1%; Hampshire 5.7%; Franklin 5.8%; Berkshire 5.8%

*This includes Title 1 Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth WIA Formula Grant Allocations by county

**Most recent month; not seasonally adjusted.

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DATA AND RESULTS

Data protocols for Fireman Foundation and DHCD funded grants are extensive and tracked by Brandeis University which is collecting and analyzing all data for program evaluation. We follow the same protocols for all three programs.

Data is collected via a customized data base. Extensive demographic and programmatic data is gathered including changes in employment, housing and child care situations.

Overall the collaborations have employed over 200 clients between February 2013 and August 2014. Of the 23 clients that entered employment prior to August 2013 (able to achieve 1 year job retention), 17 remain employed for a 74% one year job retention rate. Of the 47 clients that entered employment prior to February 2014 (able to achieve 6 month job retention) 41 remain employed for an 88% - six month job retention.

For more information on the *Secure Jobs Fund & Vocational Training* initiative go to <http://www.ppfound.org/pdfs/SecureJobsReport.pdf>

SUGGESTIONS FOR REPLICATION

Keys to our program's success include:

- Design a program where each client works toward their individual goal vs. a design of one training program that must fit all;
- Allow for flexible dollars in order to allocate funds precisely towards each client's needs, including training fees, certifications, driver's license and identifications, child care costs, transportation expenses;
- Work within career ladders in order to provide homeless clients with the immediate income they need while working towards advanced credentials and experience that will allow them to increase their income and housing stability;
- Establish child care prior to employment to increase the chances of a successful transition for both parent and child;
- Develop partnership agreements with all stakeholders to foster collaboration and coordination;
- Meet often and be prepared to discuss the challenges and successes; and
- Celebrate! Include clients, businesses, elected officials and community partners in at least an annual celebration of the program's impact on reducing homelessness and building healthier communities.

We are pleased to have been invited to share our successful model with Connecticut partners, including the Melville Charitable Trust, and look forward to supporting its replication in our neighboring state and beyond.

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SUCCESS STORY

Stephanie is a 24 year old single parent of a toddler. She lived in shelter since late in her pregnancy; her child knew only shelter from the start of her life. While in shelter, Stephanie received strong case management from the Center for Human Development shelter staff and successfully completed a medical assistant training. However, she was unable to secure employment and was referred to our Secure Jobs program March, 2013.

Upon enrollment in Secure Jobs, we established child care for her daughter and paid for Stephanie to receive her Phlebotomy and Blood Borne Pathogens Certifications. CareerPoint staff worked with Stephanie on job search, and she was offered a full time position in a medical office. Stephanie's job required her to work from 8 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday and offered a sustainable wage and full benefits package.

Unfortunately, the child's current child care situation could not provide coverage for the times necessary for Stephanie to work this job. Reaching out to partner child care agency Square One, we secured a daycare slot that would accommodate Stephanie's work schedule. However, the shelter was located outside of their transportation area and public transportation schedules did not allow for Stephanie to take a bus from the shelter to the daycare and arrive at work on time. Through our collaboration with housing partners, we located a shelter vacancy at an alternate shelter run by the partner agency New England Farm Workers' Council. This unit was in the transportation service area and less than 1 mile from Stephanie's job. Within 4 days of accepting her new employment, Stephanie was moved from one shelter provider to another, and her child was moved to the new daycare center.

Stephanie has now been employed since September 2013, and has received a pay increase to \$13.79 per hour. She has maintained perfect attendance. In February 2013, she and her child left shelter and moved into their first apartment. In October 2014, Square One is honoring Stephanie for her dedication and commitment to her child. She is planning on starting college courses in January, 2015, to work toward her LPN Certification, paid for by her employer.

Thankfully, Stephanie's story isn't unique. This type of coordinated effort is happening daily in our region. It is a reflection of the collaboration, flexibility and individualized attention that are required to support a homeless job seeker's path to employment and housing stability.