

## Questions and Answers from February 18 Webinar

### **Q: How were the landlord negotiators found and trained?**

We have one landlord negotiator, and to be honest, luck played a big part in finding him. We advertised and interviewed, knowing that we needed someone personable, someone who could “speak” to landlords (so a little bit more business minded), and someone who believed in the people he represents.

The candidate we hired had been working in a sales support position at scrapbook products corporation. He is the perfect marriage of a compassionate case manager type and a corporate “wheeling and dealing” type.

### **Q: How many caseworkers do you have in your program and what is your caseload to client ratio?**

We have 3 case managers for those clients in housing, they are currently running a caseload of 50 each. I know, it’s high. We are focusing on income and rent, with a face to face visit every 3 to 4 weeks, and phone calls in between.

### **Q: Do you provide funds directly to the family or to the landlord?**

No funds go directly to the clients. All checks are written to the landlord, utility company, etc.

### **Q: What do you do about the shortage of affordable housing? It seems to be our biggest issue is that there are places to rent but the clients will not be able to maintain \$650 a month in rent especially if they are on Social Security. Also, we do have Sec 8 however the waiting list is longer than 18 months. Do you have suggestions for families who will require more than 18 months of assistance?**

This is a very valid issue, and one we discuss regularly. We are looking at a two year wait for Sec. 8, at the very least, and although we are making sure all our families are on the waiting list, we know that only a few will obtain a Sec. 8 while in the Rapid Rehousing Program. We are seeking and working with a lot of new landlords, targeting lower rents and trying to negotiate even lower if we pay a higher deposit. We are also working closely with our Housing Authorities to find other types of subsidy programs, including public housing, and local tenant based subsidies that are targeted to specific populations (mostly funded through HOME dollars). We are really focusing on our partnerships with the Dept of Workforce services and expect that our families will be enrolling in all benefits for which they are eligible and/or following through diligently with an employment plan. We will be evaluating the number of families that leave the program and those that need continued assistance each month, so that we can adjust our program as needed.

### **Q: It was mentioned that the Housing Placement Approved stage it could take 1-6 weeks to happen. Why is that? Is it due to: the HMIS results, housing availability, waiting for benefits, folks were not qualified and not at the “but-for HPRP risk” or other unforeseen obstacles?**

Much of the time is due to ensuring the files are complete (both for HPRP and the TANF requirements). Since we are targeting families in the shelter and literally homeless, many of whom have moved multiple times, we often need to help gather the necessary paperwork, identification materials, etc. In addition, the HPRP component in HMIS has been extremely challenging, not up and running until we were well into the program, and continues to be a

struggle. That said, we did not delay because of this, but we did have to do everything on paper, and need to later enter it into HMIS. Housing availability has not been a major obstacle, though we have had a few families who, due to criminal and credit backgrounds, have not been able to find a landlord to accept them. Even though they qualified for this program, it is likely we will place in some housing that we or one of our partners own until we can get the backgrounds cleaned up.

**Q: How did most people react to being re-housed to a unit that was smaller when they had been living in a larger unit?**

I know this has been a struggle for some of the families. But the nice thing about this program is that the client can choose the apartment/home as long as it fits under the maximum rent we will allow and it passes our inspection. We have had some folks who declined this program initially, but then came back and changed their minds when they couldn't find something else.

**Q: If you have already provided clients with the financial assistance upfront, can you describe how you are able to get them to follow through with case management? We are having difficulty once the money is used having the household follow through with the service plan.**

We ask families to sign a case management agreement during the initial assessment. This doesn't lock them into anything, but I think it helps to have the conversation with them. We tell them how often we'll visit, what we'll talk about, etc. Also families are approved a quarter at a time, but we're sending the checks monthly. This may give them some incentive to stay in contact with us. Despite all of these methods, sometimes the family is more willing to work with us and other times they're more hesitant. We've had a few families stop contacting us, answering the door for us, etc., and we assume that they're doing well and no longer need our services.

**Q: Have you considered using the FTC model in family case plans?**

We're using a housing stability focused model in Rapid Rehousing. It's an approach we've used for several years with a variety of different subsidy programs. We have not considered using the FTC model.

**Q: How have you dealt with the individuals who are at the beginning stages of applying for benefits, and are in the process of losing their current housing?**

If you are referring to Social Security benefits, our case managers are trained to help move that application along. If you're referring to other benefits, we're partnering with Department of Workforce Services to link our families up with benefits and employment specialists.

We're not administering homeless prevention funds, so if we come across families who are housed but at risk of losing their housing, we're referring them to our Community Action Program who holds the contract for those activities.