

Rapid Re-Housing: An Integral Component to Solving Homelessness

The low incomes of poor families across the nation are increasingly unable to support the rising cost of housing. This puts them at risk of homelessness, and some lose their housing and fall into homelessness. We call it a homelessness crisis, but in many ways the homelessness system is simply managing the most acute symptom of the housing affordability crisis.

Anyone – rich or poor – who loses their housing thinks of one thing only: getting back into a home. Homeless families are no different, and they benefit from returning to housing as quickly as possible. Once in a home, they can maintain employment, get their children to school, and approach their problems from a solid footing; goals that are much harder to achieve from shelter or other temporary housing.

There is good evidence that rapid re-housing is an effective intervention compared to usual practice for homeless families (shelter, and transitional housing for a limited number). Based upon data from rapid re-housing interventions funded in the \$1.5 billion federal Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) and rapid re-housing programs across the nation, we know:

- families served with rapid re-housing are homeless for shorter periods of time than those assisted with shelter or transitional housing;
- more families exit to permanent housing from rapid re-housing programs than from shelter or transitional housing;
- compared to those families that exit to permanent housing from transitional housing or shelter, those that exit through rapid re-housing are less likely to return to homelessness; and
- rapid re-housing is less expensive per exit to permanent housing than shelter or transitional housing.

Based on such information, communities around the country are shifting to a rapid re-housing approach, with encouragement from Congress and federal agencies. The largest federal homelessness programs – the US Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Homeless Assistance Grant (via the HEARTH Act) and the US Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Services for Veteran Families program – prioritize rapid re-housing. Further, the US Department of Health and Human Services has sent a memo to the states encouraging them to use TANF funds for rapid re-housing and services to homeless families.

Some rightly point out that permanent housing subsidies like Section 8 would do a better job of addressing families’ housing crises. However, such subsidies are severely underfunded. Nationally, only one quarter of the need for such subsidies is being met, and little change is expected in the future. Rather than comparing rapid re-housing to unavailable housing subsidies, compared comparison should be made to current practice, i.e., what families actually receive. Current practice is a stay in a temporary facility, short term services, and NO rental subsidy. With rapid re-housing, families at a minimum receive some subsidy and connection to services in the community. As mentioned above, the outcomes are much improved over current practice.

It is important to note that rapid re-housing – alone – will not end homelessness or provide a solution to every housing crisis. Crisis shelter is still needed to address immediate needs. Families hampered by a member’s chronic disability and which have repeated homeless experiences may require permanent supportive housing. Furthermore, a key part of rapid re-housing must be the ability to re-assess and adjust assistance over time – rapid re-housing is not just a check and a handshake. However, in tandem with access to appropriate, voluntary services, rapid re-housing is an important strategy in quickly returning a family to permanent housing.