

# Brief Update on the Investing in Families Housing Services

## Overview

This brief report examines the housing-related work of Investing in Families (IIF). Sources of data for this report include the IIF Coordinated Intake and Housing Resource Specialist (HRS) tracking sheets, and interviews conducted with families and Catholic Community Services staff.

Forty-six families received housing assistance during the first fourteen weeks of the program: 72% of the families found housing within a month, and many (32%) found housing the same day or within a few days of receiving HRS services. One of the biggest challenges was serving families with undocumented family members for whom eligibility for many housing services is very complex. Additional challenges were the provision of housing services to families with five or more members and availability of housing services for victims of active domestic violence.

The HRS was very successful at advocating for families who faced many different barriers (lack of credit, poor credit, history of evictions or a criminal background). A system for assessing and responding to the housing needs of families was put in place. The IIF housing system building strategies included strong connections to landlords and housing programs and persistent efforts to simultaneously engage families in other services that would position them to be more likely to secure and ultimately retain housing.

## ***Number of Families Who Received Housing Assistance***

The IIF strategy official start date was July 17, 2011. As of 10/31/11 forty-six (46) families received housing assistance from the Investing in Families (IIF) Housing Resource Specialist. Twenty-eight were Tier I (Housing Path) families and eighteen (18) were Tier II (Services Path) families. The 46 families represented 55% of the total families enrolled in IIF.

This report does not include information about the Tier 3 families who are receiving some form of legal assistance to address less emergent housing needs. A full report on the services offered to Tier 3 families will be presented in the future.

Findings in this report are preliminary as the project is still underway.

## ***Description of Families Who Received Housing Assistance***

The majority of families receiving housing services (72%) were headed by a single head of household and half were Caucasian. Families ranged in age from 1 to 8, with an average family size of 3. Fourteen different sources referred families to IIF.

<b>Family Household Type</b>	<b>Number/Percent of Families</b>
Single HOH	33 (72%)
Married/Couple	13 (28%)
Total Families	46 (100%)

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number/Percent of Families</b>
African American	4 (9%)
African	1 (2%)
Caucasian	23 (50%)
Hispanic	4 (9%)
Native American	1 (2%)
Missing	13 (28%)
<b>Total Families</b>	<b>46 (100%)</b>

<b>Number in Family</b>	<b>Number/Percent of Families</b>
1	1 (2%)
2	16 (35%)
3	9 (20%)
4	14 (31%)
5	2 (4%)
6	2 (4%)
7	1 (2%)
8	1 (2%)
<b>Total Families</b>	<b>46 (100%)</b>

<b>Referral Source for Families Receiving Housing Services</b>	<b>Number of Families Referred</b>
CATCH	5
Coordinated Intake Registry List	1
ECEAP	1
Everett School District	2
Familias Unidas	5
FUP	8
Immigrant and Refugee Program	1

Referral Source for Families Receiving Housing Services	Number of Families Referred
Interfaith	3
Monroe Public Schools	1
Project Self Sufficiency	2
Sky Valley CSO	5
Snohomish County Jail	1
Take the Next Step	3
WorkSource	8
<b>Total Families</b>	<b>46</b>

### **Families Circumstances**

This report provides a quick snapshot. A more comprehensive analysis of family needs, circumstances and strengths will be presented in future reports.

Some families were living in dangerous and precarious living situations (campgrounds, unheated motor homes, cars and in the woods) when they entered the program. Many were couch surfing, and/or were no longer welcome to stay with friends or other family members, and were in desperate need of finding housing. Most had limited or no credit or income, and some had been evicted from previous residences. Very few had jobs, and those that did were often underemployed, or working in low wage, temporary work. Some were receiving unemployment benefits that had or were about to expire.

One was ineligible for Section 8 because of a prior termination, and three were ineligible for other housing programs because of prior terminations. Housing Hope is currently working with one of those families to get them back on the waitlist even though she was previously terminated in the past and/or had burned bridges with other housing programs. A significant number had extensive criminal justice involvement, and one was a sex offender. Some were fleeing domestic violence, and many had significant physical, mental or developmental disabilities that required medical attention and other specialized supports.

Despite facing formidable challenges, some families were very motivated and regarded IIF services (housing, employment, flex fund) as essential resources for stabilizing their families.

### **Results of Housing Assistance**

To date, 29 (63%) of the 46 families have received housing support that resulted in 28 families accessing housing and one family retaining housing. Two families received two housing placements, resulting in their receiving emergency support that addressed their short-term crisis needs, followed by help that resulted in their accessing longer term housing. Those families

placed in housing without services are working with the IIF Navigator, if they are determined to need longer term supports in order to be stably housed.

<b>Types of Housing Accessed or Retained by IIF Families</b>	<b>Number/Percent of Families Accessing Different Types of Housing</b>
Emergency Motel	6 (20%)
Permanent Subsidized	7(24%)
Permanent Unsubsidized	6 (20%)
Temporary Subsidized Housing with Services	5 (17%)
Temporary Subsidized Housing without services	5 (17%)
Emergency Shelter	1(3%)
Temporary Support to Stay in Private Housing	1(3%)
Total Number of Individual Families Accessing or Retaining Services as a result of HRS	29 families received 31 different types of housing

### **Status of Families Who Have Not Accessed Housing**

Services to the other 17 families are in process. Six (6) have been referred to local housing programs; one (1) was still living in her house, which was in the initial stages of foreclosure and one (1) was no longer eligible for services because her children had been removed from the home.

One of the biggest challenges has been serving families with undocumented family members. Three (3) families with undocumented family members were facing numerous challenges.

In one of these families the husband and wife were both undocumented and not work-authorized. The husband was working under the table and providing some income for the family but had been detained by immigration and was no longer able to earn income. There were documented children in the family. Therefore the HRS helped this family submit an application for Section 8 project based assistance to the housing authority. Additionally, an IIF provider partner, the Dispute Resolution Center is acting as the tenant advocate and mediator for the family with the landlord. The immigration status of the husband and wife, however, will have implications for long-term housing and income stability.

One of the other families affected by citizenship/immigration status includes a single mother with a teenage son, both undocumented. The woman works under the table part-time, and was referred to Mercy Housing but because she was not able to provide necessary documentation of income she was found ineligible for this housing. Her application to Housing Hope is still

underway. The family was not referred to the housing authority since no family member is documented and Section 8 is therefore not an option. In this instance, immigration status will have implications for the family's long-term housing and income stability as well.

The third family includes a non-English speaking mother and her five children. Since none of the family members is documented, the family is not eligible for a Section 8 voucher. The HRS referred her to Housing Hope, Mercy Housing and HASCO Low-Income Housing. The long-term housing and economic stability of the family is in doubt given the family's immigration status, however.

One (1) family moved right after the HRS found her housing because she had to leave the state to care for an extremely ill adult child. One family (1) is staying temporarily with family members, while she appeals a decision that resulted in her being denied disability assistance. If the appeal is successful, this family may end up pursuing private housing. In the meantime they were referred to Housing Hope, Bridgeways, YWCA Pathways and Mercy Housing. The application was denied by Mercy Housing, because the 51 year old woman, a single mother of an 18 year old daughter was not considered a family.

One (1) family included a woman who was living in a campground with her boyfriend who is sex offender and has an extensive criminal background. The woman has a seizure disorder, is developmentally disabled and cannot work. Her boyfriend cares for her and she refuses to be housed without him. The family is temporarily separated from their children, who are living with their grandmother. The family turned down an offer of clean and sober housing because the boyfriend does not want to stop consuming alcohol. The HRS had the family sign a release of information for the housing authority so that she could run a background check and determine whether to initiate an appeal. The background check revealed that his criminal record was too extensive to pursue this course of action.

One (1) family had received a VASH voucher and was currently looking for housing. Two (2) families are still living with family members and were exploring the possibility of other housing. One was terminated from a Housing Hope waitlist for noncompliance because she refused to go to a shelter. She is awaiting Housing Hope confirmation that she will be allowed back on the wait list after a hearing on December 1<sup>st</sup> if she can demonstrate compliance at that time. One other family declined a two bedroom home through Mercy Housing, and is holding out for a three bedroom home. She is staying longer in her home, which is in foreclosure. This woman, who has close connections with the Russian community, anticipates finding a job and housing in the near future.

### **Length of Time to Access/Stabilize Housing**

The majority of families (72%) found housing within a month; and of these (32%) found housing the same day or within a few days of meeting with the Housing Resource Specialist (HRS). The HRS worked quickly to assess the short and long-term housing resource needs of families. Whenever possible, the HRS provided support for families to stay in their current housing, if the situation was safe, while their applications to other housing programs and opportunities were underway.

Number of Days Between Referral to IIF and Accessing or Stabilizing Housing	Number/Percent of Families
0 (same day) – 6 days	10 (35%)
7-14 days	4 (14%)
15-22 days	5 (17%)
23-30 days	2 (6%)
31-38 days	3 (10%)
39-46 days	2 (7%)
47-54 days	0
55 -62 days	0
63-70 days	2 (7%)
71-78 days	1 (4%)
Total Number of Families	29 (100%)

### Types of Housing Support Provided to Families

The main HRS strategies fell into six primary areas and were adjusted to accommodate the different strengths, needs, strengths and circumstances of families. The HRS work with families included:

**Identifying the Strengths and Needs of Families:** The HRS identified family need for housing by examining a variety of factors (family size, credit and rental history, criminal justice involvement, and eligibility for Section 8 or other housing programs).

**Coordinating Family Referrals to Housing:** The HRS made referrals to Housing Hope, Mercy Housing, HASCO, Family Tree, Union Gospel Mission, YWCA Pathways, FUP, and Catholic Community Services, Pregnant and Parenting Women and other programs. The referral process included reviewing with families the different policies, practices and eligibility criteria associated with different programs. The HRS also helped families' secure required paperwork, such as birth certificates and TANF verification, and complete housing applications.

**Encouraging Families to Access other IIF Partner Services:** The referral process included encouraging families to access other services needed to qualify for housing services. For example, one family was required to get counseling support prior to qualifying for Bridgeways Shelter Plus Care services. Another family needed to demonstrate more income stability prior to moving into housing. The head of household, a single mom with two children, was referred to Housing Hope and the YWCA Pathways program, and HASCO's low-income property in Monroe. Because they could no longer stay with family members, the HRS helped the family find an affordable apartment and negotiated the deposit, using flex funds. The family will pay the

first month's rent, drawing upon the income generated through her new job as an Assistant Manager at McDonalds, a job she secured after working with the YWCA, an IIF partner. The services the family received may eliminate the family's need to access subsidized housing, or at minimum will stabilize the family's housing situation while their housing applications are being processed.

***Negotiating with Landlords:*** The HRS negotiated directly with twenty (20) landlords to help families access or keep housing. The HRS work included finding out where families are in the eviction process, coordinating move-outs where appropriate, and negotiating with landlords to rent to families. The HRS also successfully negotiated with current landlords to advocate for clients who have poor credit histories or criminal justice involvement, and identify landlords who will rent to families who face these obstacles. This process frequently included making a case for why landlords should rent to families. During these discussions the HRS frequently emphasized the types of positive actions that families' were taking to address their previous problems, and underscored the positive connections which families have to stabilizing resources such as the YWCA.

The HRS landlord engagement and intervention services benefited families. For example, the HRS services to one family, headed by an unemployed single parent to a severely autistic child, helped the family find an apartment complex that would rent to them despite the head of households criminal background, poor rental and credit history. The HRS negotiation resulted in the landlord agreeing to let them move into a one bedroom and later transfer to a two bedroom, when a voucher is obtained during the spring of 2012, as the family is on the waitlist for EHA Section 8 housing.

***Allocating Flex Funds Strategically to Support Family Housing Search and Retention:***

The HRS used flex fund resources as a last resort and other leveraged funds whenever possible to meet the housing support service needs of families. The funds were used to help stabilize families while they were on housing wait lists, and to assist families who required gap-filling support to access available housing. Flex funds were used in a strategic and opportunistic manner.

Twenty-one (21) of the 29 families received flex fund assistance distributed across the six areas noted in the chart below. Four families received more than one type of housing-related assistance. Assistance per family ranged from \$20.00 to \$2,123.00, averaging \$752.43 per family.

How Housing-Related Flex Funds Were Used	Number/Percent of Families Receiving - Related Flex Fund Support	Total Amount of Funds
Emergency Motel	7 (33%)	\$5,566.16
Application Fee and/or First Month and/or Last Month Rental Assistance and/or Deposit	13(62%)	\$9,513.00
Rent Support to Stay with a Friend	1(5%)	\$350.00
Birth Certificate Fee	2 (10%)	\$ 40.00
U-Haul	1 (4%)	\$160.00
Utility Cost	1 (4%)	\$170.00
Total Number of Individual Families Receiving Flex Fund Housing Assistance	21 (72%) of families	\$15,799.16

**Mapping and Addressing the Changing Housing Needs of Families:** The HRS keeps in ongoing contact with families to verify changes in their situation, and to determine how these changes influence their ongoing eligibility for housing. This includes tracking changes in family composition income, debt, legal status and other issues that may influence their eligibility for different subsidies and housing, and, if applicable, helping families access “next step” housing. The HRS also continues to track the status of families who are on wait lists, and continually encourages families to take steps (such as debt reduction, making changes to their housing applications, or engagement in employment) that will make them more competitive for housing.

### Next Steps

Next steps include:

- Identifying the next step housing needs of families who are placed in temporary housing and continuing to work with them.
- Tracking time on wait lists for different housing referrals to get an idea of the system need and capacity.
- Continuing to determine who is finding housing /not finding housing and brainstorm solutions for challenges addressed.
- Continuing to look for strategies and resources to support refugees and immigrants and persons experiencing domestic violence.
- Examining the use of flex funds in light of family outcomes to see the longer term benefits of this investment and where future changes in flex fund awards may be needed.
- Ongoing cultivation of landlords who are willing to work with high need families.