

Rapid Re-housing *July 8, 2008*

Congress appropriated \$25 million in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants for 2008 to demonstrate the effectiveness of Rapid Re-housing programs to reduce family homelessness.

How will the federal Rapid Re-housing Demonstration funds be awarded?

Communities can apply for Rapid Re-housing funds as part of the Homeless Assistance Grants competition process (Continuum of Care). Determining the effectiveness of Rapid Re-housing programs is an important part of the initiative and \$1.25 million is reserved for evaluation.

HUD is directed by Congress to select a limited number of sites to receive funds. When determining awardees, HUD is directed to select sites based on the following criteria:

- Proven experience in providing Rapid Re-housing Services;
- Strongly performing Continuum of Care; and
- Geographic diversity.

While programs that model a comprehensive Rapid Re-housing approach will be favored under these criteria, communities that offer only one component of Rapid Re-housing services (e.g. home-based case management services or housing placement assistance) may still want to consider competing. HUD may need to include programs that may not have a fully developed Rapid Re-housing intervention, in order to achieve geographic diversity as directed by Congress. In an application, programs can stress the services they currently offer that are consistent with Rapid Re-housing, and explain how additional funds will allow programs to extend their intervention.

How can the Rapid Re-housing funds be used?

HUD will provide detailed information on how funds can be used when the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants is released. Based on information included in the Report Language that accompanied the Appropriations legislation, Congress expects the funds to be used to provide:

- Housing placement services

- Short-term housing assistance (including up to 18 months of rental assistance)
- An array of appropriate services for families.

What does Rapid Re-housing Programs Offer?

Consistent with a Housing First approach, Rapid Re-housing programs help families experiencing homelessness locate housing in the community, negotiate with landlords, and provide home-based case management to promote housing retention and link families with needed services within their new community. Rapid Re-housing strategies have been used in rural, suburban, and urban communities. In communities with limited shelter resources, helping families move quickly back into housing can reduce the strain on shelters while ensuring families have the services they require to be successful. Some Rapid Re-housing programs offer support beyond what is allowed in the demonstration or within McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants programs. This is achieved by leveraging other funding resources or using McKinney-Vento as a funding bridge.

Examples of successful Rapid Re-housing initiatives include the Shelter to Housing Pilot in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Family Housing Collaborative in Columbus, Ohio, and the Rapid Exit Program in Hennepin County, Minnesota. In each of the above programs, nonprofit organizations help families who are unable to afford rent independently in the short term locate rental housing in their community. In Massachusetts, families with a working parent or a parent enrolled in an education or training program were targeted for Rapid Re-housing services in the Shelter to Housing Pilot. In other communities, families with limited incomes are also targeted and families receive help to increase their income as quickly as possible through enrollment in benefits and help with employment.

Critical to the success of Rapid Re-housing programs is aggressive landlord outreach and housing search assistance. Providers use a variety of strategies to educate landlords in the community about their services to families, dispel myths about families experiencing homelessness, and provide support to the family and the landlord to promote successful tenancy. Building and retaining the trust of landlords is instrumental and expands the housing options available to families, particularly those with more challenging rental histories.

Rapid Re-housing programs typically offer some housing assistance to help families pay for housing. Housing assistance can vary from security deposit and first month's rent, a two year rent subsidy, a subsidy of up to a capped amount (e.g. \$6,000 per family) that can be tailored to meet the needs of families, and traditional Housing Choice Vouchers. The extent of the rental assistance offered can impact which families are targeted for Rapid Re-housing services. It appears, however, that communities providing Rapid Re-housing services are achieving success with a large number of families experiencing homelessness with small amounts of housing assistance.

Rapid Re-housing ensures that people who are exiting homelessness have services. Indeed, the home-based services are a critical element in creating a smooth transition into

housing and promoting housing retention. It is true that home-based services will differ from services delivered to families in shelter or transitional housing. Once a family is in its own home, services are voluntary and are therefore tailored to the goals of the family. Services may be more effective and efficiently delivered to families in their own home; families in their own homes do not require services that are largely supervisory in nature and parents may be more prepared to focus on their long-term goals for their family when they are not overwhelmed in shelter.

Typically, home-based services are offered for a transitional period of time of six to twelve months. There is an emphasis on maximizing the use of services that already exist in the community to support low income families, including income support programs, education and work training, early childhood education, mental health and domestic violence counseling. These services allow formerly homeless families to access specialized and skilled practitioners and allow the Rapid Re-housing provider to focus on helping families exiting homelessness make a smooth transition back into their community. In some instances, providers find that it is difficult to link families with the services they need. While challenging, efforts to improve access to public and community-based services is critical. It will benefit families enrolled in the Rapid Rehousing program along with many other low income families in the community that may also be at risk of homelessness.

Ideally, Rapid Re-housing programs are being evaluated to determine their effectiveness and refinements are being made as needed. The Shelter to Housing Pilot in Massachusetts provided families with up to \$6,000 in rental assistance, housing placement services, and home-based case management. Approximately, 85 percent of families housed remained stably housed 18 months after the housing placement. While the families who were targeted for intervention were those with the greatest potential for employment income, the rate of success parallels what is achieved with a full housing subsidy for homeless families as a whole. This demonstrates that short-term or capped rental assistance can effectively end homelessness for some families experiencing homelessness. Other programs, such as Hennepin County's Rapid Exit Program, capture returns to shelter. Families who are offered minimal rental assistance, housing search assistance, and home-based case management have return-to-shelter rates of approximately eight percent.