August 23, 2016

# CoC Competition Focus: Ending Family Homelessness

In our most recent In Focus message on ending family homelessness, we described specific steps communities can take and interventions communities can use to end family homelessness. Our FY 2016 NOFA policy priority to end family homelessness emphasizes the importance of quickly housing families using rapid re-housing. While most families can benefit from rapid re-housing, some families need additional support and a community needs to be able to assess when a family might need other types of assistance and then be able to provide it.

This *Competition Focus* message provides information and resources to help Continuums of Care (CoCs) and stakeholders understand the FY 2016 policy priority ***ending family homelessness.***

**Developing an Appropriate Crisis Response System**

Many families experiencing homelessness have young children and CoCs grapple with how to make their crisis response system, emergency shelters in particular, developmentally appropriate, safe, and healthy for young children. CoCs can use the Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Family Shelters from our partners at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to create shelter facilities that are safe and developmentally appropriate for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in five areas: Health and Safety, Wellness and Development, Workforce Standards and Training, Programming, and Food and Nutrition.

Many families, including families with young children, experience homelessness as a result of domestic violence or have a history of domestic violence. These families have experienced trauma and it is imperative that the CoC's crisis response system is designed to serve homeless families fleeing domestic violence by protecting their privacy and safety and to prevent further trauma.

Trauma-informed practices that are sensitive to the lived experience of all people presenting for services need to be incorporated into every aspect of the crisis response system, including the coordinated entry process. For example, the assessment tool and process should not re-traumatize the individual or family, must inform the person up-front about how the information will be used, and must allow them the option to refuse to answer questions or choose not to disclose personal information.

The coordinated entry process must also include protocols to ensure the safety of all individuals and families seeking assistance, and these protocols must specifically address how individuals and families fleeing domestic violence will have safe and confidential access to the coordinated entry process along with safe and secure referrals to appropriate housing and services. Further, the process must include procedures for how referrals will be made to victim service providers that are not participating in the coordinated entry process. CoCs should work with victim service providers in their community to determine the most appropriate procedures to implement. For additional guidance, please review the HUD published FAQs on Coordinated Entry and Victim Service Providers.

**Assessing a Family's Needs and Making Appropriate Referrals**

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) published a Family Connection tool detailing actions for federal, state, and local agencies can take to end family homelessness. One key area of action is developing a coordinated entry system that helps CoCs identify families needing assistance and quickly helps families with the

appropriate housing assistance. The Coordinated Entry Policy Brief describes the qualities of an effective coordinated entry system and how CoCs can prioritize certain populations.

To help us understand what interventions are most effective in housing families and preventing returns to homelessness, HUD commissioned the Family Options Study that measured different housing interventions in 12 communities. The Family Options Study found both the cost effectiveness of rapid re-housing relative to transitional housing and the effectiveness of permanent housing subsidies for keeping families housed. To end family homelessness, communities must be able to provide permanent housing subsidies, permanent supportive housing, and rapid re-housing for families. CoCs should use their coordinated entry processes to determine which of these housing options is most appropriate for each family.

**Ensuring all Appropriate Housing Interventions are Available to Families**

Previous CoC NOFAs and the current FY 2016 NOFA have allowed and encouraged CoCs to strategically use funds available by creating new projects through reallocation. Many CoCs reallocated funds to create new rapid re-housing projects for families with children as part of the FY 2015 Competition and those projects will begin coming online in the coming months. We are excited about the number of families for which these projects will end their homelessness. For those CoCs that did not reallocate in the FY 2015 Competition, or who continue to have low-performing projects, we continue to encourage you to consider using the reallocation process in the FY 2016 Competition to create rapid re-housing for families with children. For CoCs that created new rapid re-housing projects in previous competitions, or for those that are considering doing so in the FY 2016 Competition, the Rapid Re-Housing Brief gives a thorough overview of the rapid re-housing intervention, including core program components and considerations when implementing those projects.

Rapid re-housing is an effective housing intervention for most families because services in rapid re-housing are tailored to meet each family's diverse needs. This includes providing access to wrap around mainstream services needed by the family. It can also be an effective way to end homelessness for victims of domestic violence as described in the webinar, *Rapid Re-Housing with DV Survivors: Approaches that Work*, published by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) from their 2014 Conference.

For some families, permanent supportive housing or a permanent housing subsidy are more appropriate interventions. HUD encourages CoCs to work with local Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) and has published Resources for PHA and CoC Collaboration to End Family Homelessness. Many PHAs have established preferences for individuals and families experiencing homelessness and these resources can help you determine how to establish one in your community.

**Providing Wrap-Around Services**

While the provision of housing will end a family's occasion of homelessness, the provision of services is often necessary to help families maintain their housing. There are several mainstream programs administered by our federal partners that can be particularly important to connect families to, including Medicaid, behavioral health supports, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), domestic violence supports, Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), Head Start and Early Head Start, Healthy Start, and the Federal Home Visiting Program.

For example, the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) provides subsidized child-care services and helps improve the quality of those services. These services can support children's development and allow family members

to pursue employment or educational opportunities, which ultimately increase the housing stability of the entire family.

Head Start (and Early Head Start) serves children from birth to age five, pregnant women, and their families. The children of families experiencing homelessness are categorically eligible for Head Start and are identified and prioritized for enrollment. Children and their families receive services related to nutrition, developmental, medical, and dental screenings, immunizations, mental health and social services referrals, family engagement, and sometimes transportation.

The Federal Home Visiting and Healthy Start programs can provide prenatal and postpartum programs, parenting skill-building, child care, and other supportive services. February's Opportunities for CoC Partnerships with Home Visiting Programs detailed these programs and provided information on how to incorporate them into CoC projects, possibly as match funds.

Finally, CoCs can connect families fleeing domestic violence to case managers and advocates funded through HHS's Family Violence Prevention Programs or Department of Justice's (DOJ) Office of Violence Against Women. Many communities have resources that can assist victims of crime financially. Those programs are funded through the DOJ's Office of Victims of Crime. CoCs looking to connect families experiencing homelessness and fleeing domestic violence to appropriate services should contact their state coalition for referrals to local victim service providers in their area.

Finally, in a previous SNAPS Weekly Focus message, we've discussed the important role that philanthropy can play in helping communities end homelessness and it is important to think about the local philanthropic resources that may be available within your community to end homelessness. These resources, combined with other state and local resources, can help provide a comprehensive package of wrap around supportive services to families with children to help make homelessness amongst families rare, brief, and nonrecurring.

Providing services to both the adults and the children, in what is known as the Two Generation approach, helps families to thrive. A child's development is linked to the well-being of the adults in their lives, and children thrive when those adults thrive; likewise, parents can concentrate on employment or education when children are safe and doing well.

The resources and tools listed are just a few examples of those that are available for CoCs, recipients, and other stakeholders to use when developing projects and systems to combat family homelessness. We will continue to highlight additional resources as they become available.

As always, we thank you for your tremendous commitment to ending homelessness.

Norm Suchar and Ebony Rankin
Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAPS)

**Resources**:
- SNAPS Weekly Focus: Working Together to End Homelessness
- SNAPS In-Focus: Family Homelessness Part II
- Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Family Shelters
- Birth to Five: Watch Me Thrive!

- [Trauma-Informed Approach and Trauma-Specific Interventions](#)
- [Coordinated Entry and Victim Service Providers FAQs](#)
- [Family Connections: Building Systems to End Family Homelessness](#)
- [Coordinated Entry Policy Brief](#)
- [Family Options Study: Interim Report](#)
- [Rapid Re-Housing Brief](#)
- [How Can RRH Providers Better Serve Survivors of Domestic Violence?](#)
- [Resources for CoC and PHA Collaboration to End Homelessness](#)
- [Child Care and Development Fund](#)
- [Head Start and Early Head Start](#)
- [Opportunities for CoC Partnerships with Home Visiting Programs](#)
- [US State and Territorial Coalitions Against Domestic Violence](#)
- [Building Partnerships to Address Family Homelessness](#)
- [Two Generation Strategies at the Administration for Children and Families](#)