

SUSTAINABLE FUTURES BRIDGES TO HOUSING 2009 MIDYEAR EVALUATION REPORT

Executive Summary

Bridges to Housing is a regional initiative aimed at assisting high-need homeless families by providing permanent housing and intensive case management for up to two years with flexible funds available to meet immediate or emerging child and family needs. The goals of Bridges to Housing are to stabilize families in housing, stabilize children in childcare and education settings, attend to physical, mental, and behavioral health concerns of children and adults, and help families begin to move towards greater self-sufficiency and wellbeing.

Bridges to Housing began enrolling families in Clark County in September of 2006. As of the end of July 2009, when data were extracted from HMIS for this report, 266 families had entered the program across four counties that comprise the region. All were without permanent or stable housing at the time of enrollment. In addition to homelessness, families entering the program had many challenges and virtually all came into B2H without resources or supports to sustain themselves and their children.

This report will focus on progress in assisting families to achieve greater long-term financial self-sufficiency through education, training, and employment. We examine rates of education, training, and employment for families in Bridges to Housing over time, circumstances that appear linked with the likelihood of securing employment, barriers and challenges for B2H families and their case managers, and successes to date. We also report on efforts to realign systems to more efficiently and effectively assist families in this area.

Data for this report were drawn from several sources, including: the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) where we track progress and outcomes for Bridges to Housing families; a data reported by case managers on employment and related activities of current B2H heads of households; interviews with heads of households; focus groups with case managers; and the results of an employment workgroup planning process that brought together staff from Bridges to Housing, Department of Human Services Self-Sufficiency, and WorkSystems Inc.

The Status of the Current Caseload of B2H Clients

Data were provided by case managers for 196 families on their case loads through a brief report submitted to PSU in early July 2009. When these data were submitted, 45% of currently enrolled B2H heads of households were either employed, pursuing education, and/or in a job training program. Consistent with the impressions of case managers and PSU interviewers, heads of households in their first six months in B2H were the least likely to be engaged in employment or related activities (29%), with the percentages increasing, up to a point, with more time in the program: 46% of those enrolled for 7-12 months, 66% of those enrolled 13-18 months, and 44% of those more than 18 months.

- **Employment.** Rates of paid employment are fairly low overall. Among heads of households on the current caseload, less than one in five (19%) were employed. Findings indicate that more heads of households in families enrolled 7-18 months are working than those in the first six months or those enrolled longer than 18 months. These findings tentatively support the contention that a period of stabilization is needed before clients are ready to pursue greater self-sufficiency. The low overall rates of employment for all groups, however, suggest that even 18-24 months has not been enough time for more than half of B2H clients to find work.
- **Education.** About 21% of currently enrolled Bridges to Housing heads of households were in an educational program as of early July 2009. Those who have been in B2H for more than a year were the most likely to be enrolled in school (33% of those enrolled for 12 months or longer were in school versus only 13% of those newer in the program). In this case, families enrolled 13-18 months and families enrolled 19 months or longer were equally likely to be in school.
- **Training.** Participants in job training programs are surprisingly few, only 14% of the total sample. Heads of households who had been in the program 7-12 months may be somewhat more likely than other groups to be in a training program but the numbers are too small to interpret with confidence. However, the relatively small numbers of heads of households enrolled in B2H more than a year who are in job training programs – combined with the higher rates of school enrollment – may suggest that in the second year, many families that remain in B2H fall into one of two groups: those that are motivated to increase their opportunities through education and those that may have underlying barriers or challenges that will require more than the two years of assistance and support before any employment-related activity is likely.
- **The Prevalence and Impact of Barriers.** We asked case managers to identify for us the barriers that their clients were encountering or had encountered in the past, whether or not the client was currently employed or active in employment related activities. Looking at the relationship between barriers and rates of employment, we found – consistent with the impression of case managers - that mental illness was the strongest predictor of unemployment, especially combined with cognitive challenges. Lack of work history and lack of work skills were also significant predictors. In contrast, despite the difficulties that individuals who have a criminal background may encounter when they seek employment (and we have heard about this repeatedly from clients and their case managers), there is little evidence that individuals who have a criminal history are less likely to be employed than those without. Similarly, individuals with a substance abuse history and/or

with bad credit/debt are just as likely as others to have found work or to be engaged in other employment-related activities.

The Corporation for Supportive Housing Allies for Employment Workgroup

With a small grant from the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), Neighborhood Partnerships convened a workgroup of B2H case managers, DHS self-sufficiency staff and WorkSystems, Inc., this past year to address the lack of a systematic and coordinated system in Multnomah and Clark Counties for high-need families such as those in Bridges to Housing families. With the assistance of an outside facilitator, the workgroup met over several months to identify strategies to realign systems for a more systematic and coordinated ‘future state’, e.g. an integrated and coordinated system that would more smoothly and systematically assist individuals to achieve self-sufficiency goals. These strategies included adopting the DHS core assessment tool (adding to it as necessary for B2H clients), training for case managers in the services and resources available from other systems, developing a ‘self-sufficiency roadmap’ for clients that would illustrate the role of various systems at various points in their process towards self-sufficiency, and a single ‘client employment plan’ that would follow the client across the systems, tracking strengths and needs, goals, progress, and next steps. The evaluation will track implementation and effectiveness of these new efforts in the coming year.

Summary

A limitation of this study is that it focuses only on currently enrolled clients, excluding those that have exited either at the end of 24 months or prematurely. In either case, individual heads of households may or may not have secured employment or enrolled in education or training programs so the effect of their exclusion on overall rates is unknown.

Based on a survey of the current case load, 45% of heads of households were engaged in education, training, and/or employment, with clients enrolled 13-18 months most likely to be active. Less than one in five were employed, however, and rates are less than 25% even for individuals enrolled well into their second year. Almost a third of B2H heads of households in their second year were enrolled in an education program. Few were in job training programs. Mental illness, as has been noted by case managers in the past, is a significant deterrent to progress for many individuals. Early screening for mental illness and for limitations to cognitive capacity might assist in identifying more appropriate housing/service models for families that may not be able to succeed in a program like Bridges to Housing.

SUSTAINABLE FUTURES BRIDGES TO HOUSING 2009 MIDYEAR EVALUATION REPORT

Introduction and Background

Bridges to Housing is a regional initiative aimed at assisting high-need homeless families by providing permanent housing and intensive case management for up to two years with flexible funds available to meet immediate or emerging child and family needs. The goals of Bridges to Housing are to stabilize families in housing, stabilize children in childcare and education settings, attend to physical, mental, and behavioral health concerns of children and adults, and help families begin to move towards greater self-sufficiency and wellbeing. Early outcomes have looked promising in many areas with families showing markedly increased stability and safety at 6- and 12-months following enrollment.¹ Retention rates have also been good, with 92% of B2H families remaining in the program at least six months, 74% remaining at least 12 months, and 47% remaining for 18 months or longer.²

This report will focus on progress in assisting families to achieve greater long-term financial self-sufficiency through employment, education, and training. We examine rates of employment, education, and training for families in Bridges to Housing over time, circumstances that appear linked with the likelihood of securing employment, barriers and challenges for B2H families and their case managers, and successes to date. We also report on efforts to realign systems to more efficiently and effectively assist families in this area.

Data for this report were drawn from several sources:

- The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) where we track progress and outcomes for Bridges to Housing families;
- Information provided by case managers about the status of families on their current case loads;
- Interviews with heads of households (n=16);
- Focus group interviews with case managers; and
- The results of an employment workgroup planning process that brought together staff from Bridges to Housing, Department of Human Services Self-Sufficiency, and WorkSystems Inc.³

Bridges to Housing Families

¹ See for example the Bridges to Housing 2008 Year-End Evaluation Report, available from PSU or Neighborhood Partnerships, or at the website: <http://www.bridgestohousing.org/impacteval.php>.

² Based on data submitted by the end of July, 2009. These exit numbers include B2H participants who achieved their goals as well as those who were not able to be successful in the program.

³ Supported by an Allies for Employment Planning grant from the Corporation for Supportive Housing, see page 14 of this report.

Bridges to Housing began enrolling families in Clark County in September of 2006. As of the end of July 2009, when data were extracted from HMIS for this report, 266 families had entered the program across four counties that comprise the region. All were without permanent or stable housing at the time of enrollment. They came into the program from emergency shelters (including domestic violence shelters), a variety of unstable circumstances ('doubling up' with family or friends or a motel/hotel), transitional housing, substance abuse treatment programs, or places not meant for habitation. Families entering B2H had moved as many as 11 or more times during the two years prior to entry, and some children had attended as many 11 or more different education settings during that time as well. All of the families reported prior episodes of homelessness, with almost half of the families in the prior two years and half reporting episodes of homelessness of six months or longer. Fifteen percent of the families reported being homeless for more than 20 months during that period.

The Sustainability Challenge

Bridges to Housing was designed to promote long-term stability and improved wellbeing for families with a recent history of multiple systems involvement. The 'housing first' model, combined with intensive case management, recognized that families entering the program would have many challenges in addition to homelessness and would require assistance in stabilizing before underlying needs could be addressed to prevent future homelessness.

Self-sufficiency through employment is clearly one desirable outcome that could safeguard a family's future. However, Bridges to Housing also recognized that for some families, employment may be an unrealistic goal. Instead, access to appropriate public supports, engagement in needed services, maintenance in permanent housing, and the development of stronger and/or healthier informal supports may better define a sustainable future.

Although this report focuses more narrowly on progress towards employment among Bridges to Housing clients, the results are also intended to contribute to the larger discussion about the different levels of housing/service models that would have to be in place to attend to the entire continuum of homeless families.

Some of the challenges that Bridges to Housing families face provide a backdrop for this discussion, for example:

- More than a third (36%) of the adults at the time of enrollment reported coping with mental illness.
- Nearly that many struggled with alcohol abuse (16%) and/or drug abuse (34%) in the present or recent past.
- Physical or medical conditions affected 23% of adults.
- In 40% of the families, one or more children presented a social, emotional or behavioral concern, and in 16% there was a child with a learning disability.
- Approximately one in four families had one or more children recently returned from foster care or were awaiting their return.

Many families (35%) entered B2H with two or more of these special needs and/or other challenges. Virtually all entered the program without resources or supports to sustain themselves and their children. In this context, caseworkers and families alike say they need to focus on immediate needs during the first months in B2H and that planning for the future can only begin after a period of stabilization. This is particularly true for individuals who are newly recovering from addiction.

“When I came out of [the treatment center], I needed a full year just to learn how to be in the world...things like going to the grocery store....I needed to learn how to live again.”

-Former B2H Head of Household (now employed)

“...when you think about these people that have this extensive history being users and how that affects their ability to think and function and process, as well as people who are the result of drugs in utero. And then they have children that [are drug affected] and they are trying to raise these children....I think there is a large population that could fit into that category.”

-B2H Case Manager

“I would love to see everyone on my case load with jobs and employed. But is that realistic? No...I mean a job shouldn't be an option right off the bat because there needs to be a stabilization period. And that should be a year. And then after a year it just seems like ok now, maybe we are ready to start thinking in that direction.”

-B2H Case Manager

In fact, employment-related activities are explicitly deferred for a year or more for many heads of households that are receiving Temporary Assistance for Needed Families (TANF) from the Department of Human Services (DHS or DSHS in Clark County) if they have other requirements in their plan related to recovery from addiction, mental health treatment, or other needs. In this respect, welfare-to-work programs recognize that success in training, education, and employment depends on stable mental and behavioral health as well as concrete supports such as housing, transportation, child care, etc.

Other families may feel ready mentally and emotionally to seek out employment or related opportunities but have legal, financial or other types of problems that need to be addressed first, including a criminal background, bad credit/debt, lack of a GED, or lack of documentation such as a social security card, driver's license, etc. For undocumented residents, these barriers may prohibit job-related activities or result in marginal job opportunities at best.

Finally, some heads of households have little or no work history, very limited skills, limited capacity, depression, or other mental health concerns and may lack confidence or motivation that would help them progress.

“...[if] you don’t have an income, you feel hopeless and that hopelessness...creates that mental health [problem]... if you don’t have a job and have nothing to do, you get bored, and then the families with little kids...they don’t’ have the break from the little kids, there’s no respite... and they can’t afford a babysitter or anything...also the mental health and addictions part...it kind of overlaps...and then it just can start getting into a quick downward spiral...”

-B2H Case Manager

“I see families that struggle to put themselves outside their comfort zone. They struggle with the idea that I’m going to challenge myself in some way now that my rent is paid and I can live in some place...I’m not homeless. It’s almost like they don’t know, sometimes, how to push themselves at all. It’s hard to teach that.”

-B2H Case Manager

“...there’s so much value placed on housing... thank God we’re able to do that for people. But what I see [is] children come home, people complete treatment, they get housed, they’re okay now, and services back off. I think it can be a really overwhelming time for people, even though housing can be such a reward, it can be overwhelming.”

-B2H Case Manager

The current context. Bridges to Housing is operating at present in an environment that has unusually high unemployment rates as well as reduced resources for services and supports to vulnerable populations. With the job market as tight as it has been recently in the region, clients with personal challenges as well as barriers such as a criminal background, limited work history, or lack of work skills seem likely to experience increased frustration or defeat as they compete against individuals without those barriers. Examples from individual clients illustrate the challenges:

“I was originally working, when I moved in [to Bridges to Housing]. Then I got a different job. There’s been two times since I’ve been unemployed because of the economy being such a mess. I was doing retaining walls. Construction is hit the hardest, anything to do with that, even flagging, is really shut down. I applied for a parks job, maintenance. I think they tossed my app’ because of felonies.’

-B2H Head of Household

“I has hired...straight hired. He was getting the paperwork ready and I had to sign this background check. I told him I had this felony conviction, and he said ‘you were sooo hired’ but they didn’t hire me. Then I went to the temp services that I had worked for before, five years ago, for the same job. And I went in and the guy said they were no longer hiring felons because they had so many people applying that didn’t have a record. I

was pretty down and out that day. I kept thinking if I could just get in the door they would want me.'

-B2H Head of Household

The picture is complex, however, because although caseworkers and clients are frequently discouraged by these and other barriers to self-sufficiency, they also recount successes, sometimes in the face of barriers that seem insurmountable.

"She works full time, she goes to school full time as well. She has started to tackle legal issues like taking care of tickets. She's closer to getting her driver's license. And I thought, wow, that's just amazing."

-B2H Case Manager

"I have [a client] who has a huge rap record, and she just got out of prison and her kids just got returned from CPS, and she started going back to get her GED, and she ended up getting employment in the bakery at the college. She's also volunteering now at [parent support program]. They said they would hire her after her two years are up."

-B2H Case Manager

"I met this lady through a neighbor and she has her own cleaning company. She knows my background, she knows everything and she's still willing to give me a chance. So I start on Monday...I'm so excited...she's going to train me, so I'll work from 7:30 in the morning until whenever. I told her I'd work however many hours she needs. I'll be making \$9 an hour to begin."

-B2H Head of Household

"[My case manager] gave me a few leads, one of which...the lady told me that if I can get my typing skills up to 30 words a minute, I definitely have a job. I've been working really hard. I'm already at 27words/minute and the lady told me to come back."

-B2H Head of Household

"I love my job. I love the people there. Having a job has given me so much motivation in my life...major self-esteem booster. It's nice to be able to go to Wal-Mart and buy something for my kids without having to ask somebody for help..."

-B2H Head of Household. She noted that her employer now is no longer taking felons because there are so many people without criminal backgrounds who are looking for work.

All of these experiences – whether they reflect despair or unexpected successes in the face of enormous challenges – are important parts of the B2H story. In order to

rigorously evaluate the program’s impact and to plan for the future, however, it is important to look systematically at the degree to which Bridges to Housing clients are moving towards self-sufficiency. In the next section, we report on the status of all currently enrolled heads of households with respect to education, training, and employment.

Progress Towards Self-Sufficiency: the Status of B2H Clients

Data were provided by case managers for 196 families on their case loads through a brief report submitted to PSU in early July 2009. The report captured the current status of B2H heads of households with respect to employment-related activities, their length in the program, specific barriers they faced, and/or special circumstances in their families. The data submitted come from across all counties and providers as noted below:

Current Caseloads	
Bridges to Housing Families (n=196)⁴	
Clark County	40 families
Clackamas County	19 families
Washington County	21 families
Multnomah County	116 families
Central City Concern	11
Human Solutions	49
Impact NW	56
Total	196 families

Among these families,⁵

- 25% (n=48) had been enrolled six months or less.
- 35% (n=67) had been enrolled 7-12 months.
- 21% (n=41) had been enrolled 13-18 months.
- 19% (n=36) had been enrolled more than 18 months.

Results

As of early July 2009 when these data were submitted, 45% of currently enrolled B2H heads of households were either employed, pursuing education, and/or in a job

⁴ As of early July 2009.

⁵ Data on length of time in B2H were missing for three families.

training program.⁶ Consistent with the impressions of case managers and PSU interviewers, heads of households in their first six months in B2H were the least likely to be engaged in employment or related activities, with the percentages increasing, up to a point, with more time in the program:

- 29% of those enrolled for 1-6 months were either working, in school, or in a training program, versus
- 46% of those enrolled for 7-12 months,
- 66% of those enrolled 13-18 months, and
- 44% of those more than 18 months.

As illustrated above, the greatest likelihood of being engaged in employment or related activities occurred between 13 and 18 months after enrollment,⁷ when fully 66% of B2H clients were either employed, in school, or in a training program. Among those heads of households who had been enrolled more than 18 months, the percentage dropped to 44%. This may suggest that a number of families in which heads of households have been successful in this respect have exited the program by that point, with the majority who remain in the program past 18 months needing extra time or assistance to progress towards self-sufficiency.

Employment. Rates of paid employment are fairly low overall. Among heads of households on the current caseload, less than one in five (19%) were employed. The proportion of those employed also appears to increase somewhat with time in the program, though because of the relatively small numbers and modest differences, these are suggestive of trends only. The findings are summarized in the table on page 8. They indicate that more heads of households in families enrolled 7-18 months are working than those in the first six months *or* those enrolled longer than 18 months.

These findings tentatively support the contention that a period of stabilization is needed before clients are ready to pursue greater self-sufficiency, and that some will be successful during the end of their first year or in their second year while others will need longer-term help or a different level of support. The low overall rates of employment for all groups, however, suggest that even 19-24 months has not been enough time for more than a few (less than 20%) of B2H clients to find work.

Among those who are employed, jobs range from those that appear likely to pay wages that would sustain a family to others that are temporary, part-time, or more marginal. Examples from the current set of B2H families include: *orthodontic assistant (temporary), administrative assistant, account work, caregiver, baker, collection agency, diet aide at health clinic, office assistant, caregiver, domestic violence advocate assistant, part-time hotel receptionist, call center, cleaning houses, food service, warehouse driver, cashier, janitorial, and on-call work.* For undocumented individuals,

⁶ An important limitation of this study of employment is that it excludes families that have exited B2H. Some of these exits reflect success in achieving self-sufficiency; others, however, reflect the experience of families who were not able to be successful in the program and are more likely not to have achieved a greater level of self-sufficiency.

⁷ Finding is statistically significant, $\chi^2=12.03$, $df=3$, $p<.05$.

work opportunities may occur outside the formal job sector, for example a client who sells flowers or picks fruits and vegetables, or takes odd jobs as they appear.

Education. About 21% of currently enrolled Bridges to Housing heads of households were in an educational program as of early July 2009. Those who have been in B2H for more than a year were the most likely to be enrolled in school (33% of those enrolled for 12 months or longer were in school versus only 13% of those newer in the program).⁸ In this case, families enrolled 13-18 months and families enrolled 19 months or longer were equally likely to be in school.

We have only limited data about the educational aspirations among B2H clients, but they range from individuals who have identified a career that requires more education, to those that want to finish basic educational requirements, along with clients that find it especially challenging to find work in a struggling economy and may see school as a more realistic option.

“Honestly it felt like I wasn’t going anywhere because most of the time we were learning how to do resumes and getting on a computer and emailing and faxing our resumes. It felt like I was hitting a brick wall every time. And only because the economy is so bad, and I felt like I wasn’t going anywhere, but sitting down and waiting for someone to email me or call me back. That’s why I decided to go back to school. I felt like this is, there’s no better time than any to go back to school.”

-B2H Head of Household

Training. Participants in job training programs are surprisingly few (14% of the total sample). Heads of households who had been in the program 7-12 months may be somewhat more likely than other groups to be in a training program but the numbers are too small to interpret with confidence. It is difficult to say whether the low numbers overall reflect a lack of training resources in the community, challenges with access, lack of coordination/information about what may be available, or characteristics and needs of the population.⁹ However, the relatively small numbers of heads of households enrolled in B2H more than a year who are in job training programs – combined with the higher rates of school enrollment – may suggest that in the second year, many families that remain in B2H fall into one of two groups: those that are motivated to increase their opportunities through education and those that may have underlying barriers or challenges that will require more than the two years of assistance and support before any employment-related activity is likely.

Findings regarding employment and employment related activities are summarized in the following table.

⁸ $\chi^2 = 10$, df 2, $p < .01$

⁹ See discussion of the Allies for Employment workgroup on page 13.

**Employment Related Activities:
All Bridges to Housing Heads of Households (n=196)**

	% Enrolled 1-6 Months	% Enrolled 7-12 Months	% Enrolled 13-18 Months	% Enrolled 19 Months or Longer	% of all B2H Current Heads of Households
Employed	13% (n=6)	21% (n=14)	27% (n=11)	14% (n=5)	19% (n=36)
Enrolled in Educational Program	11% (n=5)	16% (n=11)	34% (n=14)	31% (n=11)	21% (n=41)
Enrolled in Job training	13% (n=6)	18% (n=12)	12% (n=5)	11% (n=4)	14% (n=27)
Engaged in any of the above	29% (n=14)	46% (n=31)	66% (n=27)	44% (n=16)	46% (n=88)
Total	n=48	n=67	n=41	n=36	n=196

The Prevalence and Impact of Barriers

In light of the fact that less than a quarter of currently enrolled B2H families (even those enrolled well into their second year) have secured employment, we also examined the prevalence of specific barriers and their relationship with employment status and other employment-related activities. We asked case managers to identify for us the barriers that their clients were encountering or had encountered in the past, whether or not the client was currently employed or active in employment related activities. Case manager reports on their clients' barriers are summarized below.¹⁰

Barrier	Percentage of Heads of Households on Current Caseload
Drug or alcohol issues	46%
Limited or no work history	44%
Criminal history	43%
Mental Illness	36%
Bad credit or debt history	35%
Lack of transportation	35%
Lack of skills (including soft skills)	32%
Child care issues (e.g. new baby or children with special needs)	32%
No GED	23%
Low motivation	17%
Limited cognitive ability	14%
Lack of suitable clothes, self-presentation	11%
Overwhelming service plan requirements	11%
Lack of documentation	4%

¹⁰ Note that information about client barriers comes from the B2H assessment process and client records rather than from an independent standardized assessment.

Other barriers noted by case managers included serious physical impairment, medical or dental issues, language barriers, and a variety of other individual circumstances that affected their clients' ability to engage in employment or related activities.

Mental illness and work history. Looking at the relationship between barriers and rates of employment, we found – consistent with the impression of case managers - that mental illness was the strongest predictor of unemployment:

Ten percent of heads of households who have a mental illness were currently in jobs in contrast to 23% of those who are free of mental illness.¹¹

Lack of work history and lack of work skills were also significant predictors. Individuals without these barriers were more likely to be working.

Approximately 25% of those who have a work history and/or work skills were employed versus 12% of those without work history and only 5% of those who lack skills.¹²

Although this latter finding is not surprising and reinforces the need for more opportunities for skill building and training, it may be also that these barriers reflect underlying issues for some clients that have not been identified or addressed. These might include low motivation or self-esteem, limited intellectual capacity, or unidentified cognitive, mental or emotional challenges.

Criminal background and substance abuse. In contrast, despite the difficulties that individuals who have a criminal background may encounter when they seek employment (and we have heard about this repeatedly from clients and their case managers), B2H heads of households seem to be managing this challenge relatively successfully. There is little evidence that individuals who have a criminal history are less likely to be employed than those without. This may be due to extraordinary efforts on the part of case managers to assist their clients either to get criminal records expunged or to connect with prospective employers who might be willing to give them a chance despite their record. Or it may be that the majority of clients with criminal backgrounds have records that are related to their drug use, have been through treatment, and are now highly motivated to put their lives back together. This hypothesis gains support from the lack of relationship between drug/alcohol problems and employment. Individuals with a substance abuse history are just as likely as others to have found work or to be engaged in other employment-related activities.

¹¹ $\chi^2=5.2$, df 1, $p<.05$

¹² $\chi^2=4.7$, df 1, $p<.05$

Bad debt/credit. Bad debt/credit also appears to have no relationship to employment or lack of employment among B2H families. However, heads of households who have problems with credit or debt are somewhat *more* likely to be in school (28% of this group versus 17% of those without this barrier) and significantly more likely to be in a job training program (21% versus only 10% of those who are free of this barrier).¹³ Without more information, this is a difficult finding to interpret. There may be underlying factors that are not captured here that would help explain both the likelihood of incurring excessive debt or credit problems and the motivation required to seek out additional education or training.

Clients Not Yet Participating in Employment Related Activities

Although 45% of B2H heads of households are engaged in employment or employment-related activities, more than half are not (55%, 107 families). We asked case managers to note the status for these individuals as well. Within this group:

- 13 heads of households (7% of all current clients) were currently looking for work.
- 22 (11% of current clients) were in other ‘active’ status, in many cases completing DHS service plans and pre-employment activities related to recovery as discussed earlier in this report.
- 39 (20% of current clients) were perceived by their case managers to be ‘not ready yet, but likely will be in the future’.
- 26 (13% of current clients) are considered likely to need long-term assistance – those that case managers feel ‘may never be able to work.’¹⁴

These latter two groups (those needing additional time but expected to progress and those likely to need long-term assistance) are especially important to consider in planning for a continuum of services to address the needs of homeless families in the region.

Families who are ‘not ready yet.’ The majority of the 39 families in this group (70%) are within their first 12 months in B2H. Their ‘not yet ready’ status is consistent with what we have heard and seen across the board. Case managers celebrate their progress in making small but crucial steps towards ‘readiness’:

“...there’s another woman who is a victim of domestic violence and she is always dependent on her husband, and now she is coming out of her shell. [Now she is saying] ‘I am going to computer classes, finishing ESL classes and I want to look for a job.’

-B2H Case Manager

¹³ $\chi^2=4$, df 1, $p<.05$.

¹⁴ Seven families were listed as ‘other’, sometimes because another adult in the household is working or there are other circumstances that our framework did not reflect.

“I think of another young lady who is a young mom and this is her first apartment. It’s the simplest thing. This is her first apartment. And she’s stayed a year – her very own apartment.”

-B2H Case Manager

“Another family, a single mom with two kids, and she also started the program about 7 months ago. She wasn’t even able to take care of the basic things and now she’s her own payee, and she’s been paying her bills on time. For about five months, and it’s really exciting.”

-B2H Case Manager

“I like to help remind them or plug them back into the skills they have learned, say like skills from a parenting class...Or one client really struggles with keeping her house clean. She’s in therapy. I remind her to do just one thing a day, and just work on that. So just plugging into that and supporting that instead of [asking her] to do something entirely different.”

-B2H Case Manager

“...these smaller goals are really important. Getting folks ready, for example getting their GEDs, getting their drivers license, or getting their car ready to drive, just little things but you know those are big things. And getting childcare, good childcare.”

-B2H Case Manager

Thirty percent of this group, however, has been in the program 13 months or longer and is not yet engaged in any employment related activities. This is a very small subset of the total current B2H population (only 12 families) and in each case there may be particular circumstances that explain the status. Because the numbers are so small, it is difficult to draw conclusions. As a group, however, they differ from the total population in several ways. There is greater prevalence of mental illness, limited work skills, and reported child care issues in the group. There is also a greater likelihood that they are perceived by their case managers as lacking motivation, though this perception could easily be a result rather than a predictor of their non-engaged status. They are also *less* likely than the general B2H population to have substance abuse concerns or a criminal history and by sizeable margins.

Although this is a small number of families, it is the group that potentially could be assisted with different strategies or resources and it may also be the group that most frustrates case managers. It may be useful as we move forward to examine in more detail the individual circumstances and needs of families that fall into this subset as well as the nature and level of case management and other services they are receiving.

Families that may need long-term support. These 26 families (approximately 13% of the total current Bridges to Housing population) are the heads of households that case managers predict ‘may never be able to work.’ They differ from the group described as ‘not ready yet’ in that they have a somewhat greater incidence of mental

illness and are somewhat *less* likely to have a criminal history. The biggest difference, however, occurs in the area of cognitive capacity, where this group is significantly more likely to be noted as having cognitive limitations and significantly more likely to have a combination of mental illness and limited cognitive capacity.¹⁵ The case managers in Bridges to Housing appear to recognize the extreme challenges these families face but have limited resources to offer and limited capacity to assist them in ways that might change their families' trajectories.

These findings highlight the importance of screening at the point of enrollment for limited cognitive capacity, particularly when it is combined with mental illness, assessing the seriousness of these conditions if they are present, and determining the most appropriate service/housing model for families with these challenges. An effective screening, assessment, and planning process could not only improve outcomes but reduce inefficient use of resources, as well as safeguarding the energy and morale of staff.

The Role of Services and the Service System

We have examined a number of characteristics of Bridges to Housing clients and how they may be linked with employment or engagement in employment-related activities. What is missing is an examination of the role that case management and other services play in achieving or not achieving these self-sufficiency outcomes for families.

We know from prior reports that the philosophy, approach, and structure of case management vary considerably among the Bridges to Housing providers.¹⁶ We know also from our focus groups as well as informal discussions with case managers that their knowledge of the employment systems, experience assisting clients to overcome barriers, and personal relationships that can open doors to jobs also varies considerably. Moreover, it is likely that the amount of emphasis placed on employment-related activities also varies across providers and/or individual case managers. We are not currently able to assess the degree to which these differences directly influence client outcomes, but it is important to bear in mind that they certainly do.

At the same time, virtually all B2H clients are involved with multiple systems beyond Bridges to Housing, most frequently DHS/DSHS which may provide temporary financial, child care, and other supports but may also offer (or require) numerous other services at the same time. The mix of services can be daunting for clients.

“One of my clients, I helped her make a schedule because she was so confused...working with DHS, getting their son back, mental health, all these treatments and requirements. It looked like four days out of five were completely booked, like 9am to 8pm or something. It’s just almost impossible to think about.”

-B2H Case Manager

¹⁵ $\chi^2=11.5$, df 1, $p<.01$

¹⁶ See the implementation study in the 2008 Bridges to Housing Year-End Evaluation report for a discussion of this issue.

“They push them to the point that I would challenge a CPS [Child Protective Services] worker to start off the day with the demands that they ask families to do.”

-B2H Case Manager

“I’m still in treatment and I’ve got a lot of classes. And then I’m going back and forth with [my son] to school, you know, it’s like a full time job. With a dual diagnosis, [there is] relapse prevention, I try to do one of those at least once a week, at least, and she wants me to start going more.”

-B2H Head of Household

At the same time, many clients appreciate the time they are provided to manage treatment and recovery needs before moving towards work. B2H case managers routinely report assisting their clients to track and manage these requirements and to limit other expectations during this period. Once clients are deemed ‘ready’, however, they are expected to demonstrate job-related activity in order to keep their child care and other benefits.

Up to this point, we have had little information about what happens next - i.e., the role of public systems in assisting B2H heads of households towards employment. It has also been unclear how those systems are coordinated with Bridges to Housing case management and other services families receive. This year, Neighborhood Partnerships addressed these issues by inviting key partners to jointly consider how their resources and capacities might be better aligned to improve outcomes for high-need families.

The Corporation for Supportive Housing Allies for Employment Workgroup

With a small grant from the Corporation for Supportive Housing, Neighborhood Partnerships convened the key self-sufficiency and employment systems, DHS and WorkSystems, Inc. along with B2H staff from Multnomah and Clark County and a representative from the PSU evaluation team for a series of meetings over this past year. Under the guidance of a consultant,¹⁷ the workgroup sought to:

- Map the current state, including processes, program components, and timelines of each system as they currently exist.
- Share information about the resources and opportunities afforded by each system as well as current policy and program changes.
- Examine the combined results to identify unnecessary and repetitive demands on clients, duplication of effort, inappropriate or ineffective efforts, wastes of time, talent, resources, etc.
- Identify a more ideal ‘future state’ - an integrated and coordinated system that would more smoothly and systematically assist individuals to achieve self-sufficiency goals.

¹⁷ Oregon Manufacturing Extension Partnership

- Develop agreements between the systems and pilot specific strategies for this future state.

The role of evaluation was to bring in the perspective of B2H clients based on interviews about their experiences with these systems, participate in the Workgroup to help think critically about the current state and more ideal future state, and identify possible approaches to assess the effectiveness of new strategies implemented as a result of the Workgroup's efforts.

Results. Results of the Workgroup have been reported elsewhere and are available from Neighborhood Partnerships.¹⁸ In brief, the mapping process revealed:

- Significant duplication of effort across systems (e.g., repeated needs assessment and goal setting with clients).
- Parallel and duplicate programming, e.g., assistance with resume-writing, job-searching, interviewing skills, etc.
- Poor fit in some instances between client needs and program offerings; clients referred for inappropriate services (e.g., computer classes for individual who lacks capacity and interest).
- Lack of 'bridging' services for clients who may not be able to access and manage on their own the more complex systems such as WorkSystems Inc. that cannot provide individualized one-on-one support.
- Lack of current information on the part of B2H case managers about resources and supports for clients and no clear means to keep information updated.
- Mistrust across systems, often stemming from clients' reports of failure in accessing systems or benefiting from services.
- Significant differences in the perspectives and priorities of the different systems that contribute to continuing communication challenges.
- A strong desire to achieve a more effective coordinated and integrated system.

Input from a small sample of B2H clients (n=6) reinforced challenges identified by case managers. Some clients found *some* of the services helpful (practice interviewing with videotaping and skilled feedback, for example). Others felt they were counseled into programs they could not benefit from. None of the clients who had secured employment reported that they found the job through the public employment system; instead, jobs were found through word of mouth or the behind-the-scenes efforts of case managers based on pre-existing relationships with employers.

Future state. A number of specific strategies were identified to realign systems for a more systematic and coordinated future state. These included adopting the DHS core assessment tool (adding to it as necessary for B2H clients), training for case managers in the services and resources available from other systems, developing a 'self-sufficiency roadmap' for clients that would illustrate the role of various systems at

¹⁸ OMEP, Value Stream Mapping Project: Summary and Implementation Plan, June 2009. CSH Allies for Employment Planning Grants Final Progress Report, Neighborhood Partnerships, July 2009.

various points in their process towards self-sufficiency, and a single ‘client employment plan’ that would follow the client across the systems, tracking strengths and needs, goals, progress, and next steps.

Evaluating progress. In 2009-2010, the evaluation team will follow the implementation of these strategies and will integrate them into the ongoing evaluation of Bridges to Housing. Working with B2H case managers, we will document the experience of a sample of heads of households who are far enough into the program to be ‘ready’ for employment related activities. We will track the progress of these clients and the roles of B2H case managers, DHS, and WorkSystems, Inc. in providing services and assistance. In particular we will examine the use of the single ‘client employment plan,’ if it is developed, that is intended to promote a better fit between services, resources and client needs and capacities. We will also assess whether progress towards a more ideal future state results in greater numbers of individuals in B2H engaged in employment related activities, particularly job training, in which currently only about 14% of B2H clients are participating.

Summary

This report presented information on rates of education, training, and employment for currently enrolled families in Bridges to Housing. Results revealed that 45% of heads of households were engaged in one or more of these employment-related activities, with clients enrolled 13-18 months most likely to be active. Less than one in five were employed, however, and rates are less than 25% even for individuals enrolled well into their second year. Almost a third of B2H heads of households in their second year were enrolled in an education program. Few were in job training programs.

We also examined barriers to employment and found that mental illness, as has been noted by case managers in the past, is a significant deterrent to progress for many individuals. Early screening for mental illness and for limitations to cognitive capacity might assist in identifying more appropriate housing/service models for families that may not be able to succeed in a program like Bridges to Housing.

A limitation of this study is that it focuses only on currently enrolled clients, excluding those that have exited either at the end of 24 months or prematurely. In either case, individual heads of households may or may not have secured employment or enrolled in education or training programs so the effect of their exclusion on overall rates is unknown.

The CSH Allies for Employment Workgroup addressed the lack of a systematic and coordinated system for high-need families such as those in Bridges to Housing families. The Workgroup identified specific strategies to improve the system, and the evaluation will track implementation and effectiveness in the coming year.

B2H case managers continue to demonstrate exceptional commitment to the B2H families, combined with energy, skill, and knowledge. We appreciate their continued willingness to assist in the evaluation and the time they contribute to our efforts. Likewise, we deeply appreciate the input from many Bridges to Housing clients who share their stories and their insights with us.