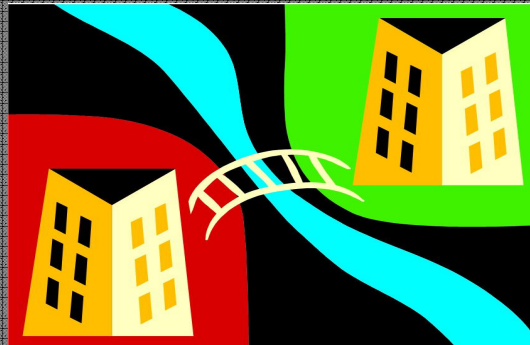


**BRIDGES TO HOUSING EVALUATION
2008 YEAR-END REPORT**



**REGIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE
PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY**

BRIDGES TO HOUSING EVALUATION

2008 YEAR-END REPORT

Bridges to Housing Evaluation Team

Diane K. Yatchmenoff, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
Kimberly Ford, M.U.R.P., Project Manager
Robin Walker-Phillips, Interviewer
Aimee Bellmore, L.C.S.W., Graduate Research Assistant
Sara Jade Webb, M.S., Data Analyst

Contact Information

Diane K. Yatchmenoff
Phone: 503-725-4158
Fax: 503-725-4180
Email: yatchmd@pdx.edu
Web: www.rri.pdx.edu

The *Bridges to Housing Evaluation: 2008 Year-End Report* was published March of 2009 by the Regional Research Institute for Human Services, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon.

BRIDGES TO HOUSING EVALUATION 2008 YEAR-END REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Bridges to Housing (B2H) is a regional initiative aimed at moving high need homeless families out of the cycle of homelessness by providing permanent affordable housing and intensive case management services that build on the strengths of family members. Clark County in Washington State and Multnomah, Washington, and Clackamas Counties in Oregon joined together (along with cities and Public Housing Authorities) to develop Bridges to Housing. In addition to supporting families in their efforts to obtain permanent housing and progress towards self-sustainability, Bridges to Housing is developing regional solutions to family homelessness. At the coordinating and governance levels, B2H focuses on stimulating policy changes and the re-alignment of public resources and needed systems.

The first Bridges to Housing families were enrolled and housed in October of 2006 in Clark County. The project has rolled out gradually across the jurisdictions as housing and resources for case management have become available. Nearly 200 families have been enrolled in B2H to date.

The evaluation of Bridges to Housing includes a longitudinal outcome study of children and families served by B2H, following them from the time of enrollment for up to two years; a process study focusing on the implementation of B2H and the experience of providers and families; and a comparison group study of the impact and relative effectiveness of B2H in improving outcomes for high need families and their children. This report focuses on outcomes for families enrolled in B2H for 12 months, program retention, and the implementation of B2H across jurisdictions and providers.

Findings are drawn from baseline data on 162 B2H families and 12-month follow-up data on 44 families submitted through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) as of mid-November. Quantitative data are supplemented by information gathered through site visits, interviews with case managers, discussions with the Service Provider Workgroup¹, and interviews with B2H heads of households.

¹ The Service Provider Workgroup is attended by B2H case managers and supervisors and meets on a monthly basis as a forum for training and ongoing peer support.

12-Month Outcomes for B2H Families

Overall, the 12-month findings are consistent with the positive outcomes found at the end of the first six months, suggesting continued stability for families as well as modest gains in some areas. We also see reflected in the data the challenge of helping these high need families achieve self-sufficiency within a relatively short time frame, given the many barriers they encounter.

- **Stability in housing.** Among the 44 families with baseline, six-month and 12-month data, only three families moved during the second six months of the program (two moved to different apartments within B2H; one went to a substance abuse treatment facility). This is in contrast to an average of two moves per family in the six months prior to enrollment, when nearly half of the families moved at least twice and many moved more often than that.
- **Family safety and stability.** The 12-month data are similar to the findings at six months in that families are less likely to have experienced domestic violence or child protective service concerns than when they were homeless. Three families reported an incident of domestic violence that occurred between six and 12 months after enrollment (7% of families) versus 18 families (44%) who reported domestic violence for the six months prior to enrollment. One family had a child removed and placed in foster care in contrast to seven families who experienced child removal in the period just prior to enrollment.
- **Income and employment.** B2H families continued to make modest gains in employment and employment readiness. Employment rates improved from 20% (n=8) at intake to 34% (n=14) at 12 months with corresponding average hourly wage increase from \$8.30 to \$9.10. Furthermore, by 12 months 41% of all B2H heads of households were either enrolled in a job search or job training program **or** a school or degree program, or both. Significant challenges to employment remain for many families, however.
- **Child wellbeing.** The experience of children in B2H is markedly different from what it was in the period prior to their families' enrollment in the program. Both at six months and 12 months, not only have children stopped moving from place to place, they are also safer from exposure to violence, safer from inappropriate or inadequate parenting, and less likely to be removed from their families and placed in out-of-home care. Some families have received substantial help to address behavioral, mental health, and educational challenges for their children as well as enriched opportunities for social and emotional growth.
- **Stability and success in childcare and education settings.** The number of children who had attended two or more childcare/education settings in a six month period decreased from 35% at baseline to 10% at 12-months. Moreover, at the time of enrollment just over a third (n=14) of the focus children were meeting grade benchmarks. By 12 months, more than half of these children were performing at grade level (n=21). In addition, more parents were aware of how

their children were doing (49% at 12 months versus 18% at baseline could say whether or not their children were meeting benchmarks).

- **High cost health care services.** Health behaviors were unchanged across the three time points, with 40-50% of the families utilizing Urgent Care or Emergency Rooms for illness, acute conditions, or injury for adults or children. Discussion with providers and families clarified the underlying issue as a consistent lack of access to same-day or same-week appointments with primary Oregon Health Plan (OHP) providers, even when there are emergent needs for treatment.

Program Retention and Early Exits from B2H

The overall retention rate for B2H has been reasonably high within the first six months of services (88% of families stayed in place) and moderate within the first 12 months of service (64% of families remained in their B2H placement). A number of families also exited between 12 and 19 months after enrollment, bringing the total of early exits to 34 families out of the 117 enrolled prior to April 2008.²

About a third of the early exits were voluntary and designated ‘positive’ (families had progressed, were ready to move on, and/or had found other housing opportunities). However, roughly 65% of the premature exits (22 families) were designated as ‘negative,’ signifying eviction or termination from B2H as a result of non-payment of rent, criminal activity, other lease infractions, or conflicts with the program. Among these families, 77% had listed mental illness as a special need at the time of enrollment, contrasting with a lower prevalence of mental health among families that remained in B2H or left voluntarily. These families on average were also higher resource users than other B2H families, and may have needed a different or higher level of service than B2H provides in order to be successful in housing.

The Implementation of B2H

In the fall of 2008, the PSU evaluation team joined Neighborhood Partnership Fund (NPF) staff in a series of visits to the B2H providers in each of the four counties. The purpose of these visits was to update information about B2H housing sites as well as to review the implementation of the B2H service model.

Briefly, site visits confirmed that B2H is rolling out across a wide range of housing locations, including project-based Section 8 units within small, medium or larger housing facilities; scattered site ‘affordable housing’ units or apartment complexes for which rents are directly subsidized by B2H and/or the jurisdictions; and designated units within public housing facilities. Most of these units are owned by mission driven housing providers such as community development corporations or housing authorities. The ‘permanency’ of B2H housing for families varies as well: in many cases, families may stay indefinitely unless their

² Thirty or more additional families enrolled after April 1 but are not included in this analysis because six-month data (and relevant exit data) were not yet available in HMIS.

income rises to a point that makes them no longer eligible for subsidized housing; in some cases, however, long-term permanency will depend on increasing family income sufficiently to assume full rent payments after the initial two-year subsidy ends. In some cases, provisions are in place to provide these families with housing vouchers if they are unable to assume full rent payments at the end of B2H services.

Discussions during site visits, combined with information gathered through interviews with families and case managers, highlighted consistencies in practice across jurisdictions/providers as well as variations, especially in the degree of structure in assessment, service planning, and case management. Certain practices are emerging that may prove especially promising in helping families to move forward and/or in contributing to cross-system collaboration.

Summary

Children and families enrolled in Bridges to Housing for 12 months are more stable in their housing, childcare or education settings, safer, and more likely to be doing well than in the period just prior to entering the program. Most gains that were noted at six months have been maintained through the first year. In addition, further gains in employment and employment readiness can be seen in the data. Significant challenges remain, particularly related to job readiness, job training, and employment opportunities.

Families interviewed for the evaluation are grateful to be housed and express deep appreciation for the help they have received for themselves and their children.

“...[Bridges] is awesome...I don’t know where our family would be without it.”

-B2H Head of Household

###