



Bridges to Housing Update

October 2009

Bridges to Housing is a coordinated regional response to the crisis of family homelessness.

Government agencies and housing and service providers in the four-county Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area have joined forces to develop a response to the needs of high need homeless families.

Bridges to Housing supports local and regional efforts to end homelessness by further refining systems for assessing family strengths and needs and matching the best intervention to each family. Bridges to Housing is testing whether housing plus services works to stabilize high-need homeless families in the Portland area.

Bridges to Housing: Offering Hope for a Better Future

Bridges to Housing recently celebrated serving families for two full years. The first Bridges to Housing families moved into housing in Spring 2007 in both Multnomah and Clark counties. Bridges to Housing now counts the total number of families served at over 250.

- Bridges to Housing is an approach that provides families with a permanent, affordable place to call home, plus intensive support from a case manager and assistance with child care. Bridges to Housing is seeing concrete evidence that this program works to help families make real change in their lives. Children have more opportunity to learn and flourish; parents are addressing their own health and educational needs.
- Bridges to Housing represents a step forward nationally with its grounding in a regional framework as well as its commitment to best practices. This program was created with input from other programs serving homeless families, and is now contributing to national knowledge on serving homeless families.
- Bridges to Housing is an innovative four-county, two-state program in the Portland metro area. Bridges to Housing is an important example of government agencies within counties working in new ways to meet goals, and it's also an important example of governments working across county lines to make a difference in the lives of families who need it most.

Evaluation Demonstrates Impact

Bridges to Housing includes a significant evaluation effort, designed and conducted by the Regional Research Institute at Portland State University. A 2009 Mid-Year Evaluation Report was released in October, 2009.

Bridges to Housing families have significant history of homelessness, and face many barriers to stability. The evaluation reports on the history of homelessness and client reports of barriers including mental health concerns, domestic violence and history of evictions and housing instability.

This mid-year report includes information on families at the eighteen-month mark as well as information on families' experiences with employment.

The evaluation also gives us confidence that the program is making a real difference in the lives of these families.

Families are largely stable in permanent affordable housing. As a result of the program, children are more stable in their school and childcare settings, and educational performance increases.

Family mobility significantly decreases as a result of the program. Participation in the program also reduces the incidence of domestic violence and reduces children's placement in foster care.

Current and previous evaluation reports are available at: www.bridgestohousing.org.

"I can't stress enough how much [Bridges to Housing] was really there for me...I've got a lot of gratitude and I've taken the things that I got from the program and continued moving forward with them. [My case manager] gave me the resources and the tools and I took them and ran with it..."

- Bridges to Housing
Head of Household

Bridges to Housing • Fast Facts

PROGRAM MODEL

- Bridges to Housing combines three program elements: first, families will be placed into permanent affordable housing using a Housing First or transitions-in-place model; second, Bridges to Housing provides intensive case management in a strengths-based approach which is uniform across the four counties; and third, Bridges to Housing will provide support as funding allows for children's services and child care.
- Bridges to Housing operates in four counties in the Portland metropolitan area: Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties in Oregon and Clark County, Washington.
- Bridges to Housing also stimulates the development of permanent supportive housing for families.

INVESTMENTS

- Significant philanthropic investment has been made, totalling nearly \$2.5 million to date. Bridges to Housing



is funded by: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, The Paul G. Allen Foundation, Oregon Community Foundation, Providence Community Grants Council, the J.W. & H.M. Goodman Family Charitable Foundation, the Portland Children's Investment Fund and Enterprise Community Partners.

- Significant local public investment has been made in capital for family housing, as well as services and rent subsidies. The investment totals over \$25 million to date from the public sector.

LEADERSHIP

- Neighborhood Partnerships (NP) administers funds contributed to Bridges to Housing. These funds will supplement local resources to provide housing plus services to families in all four counties in the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region. NP is also overseeing the evaluation, communicating learnings from Bridges to Housing, and raising additional funds.
- A Regional Steering Committee serves as a policy setting body, and includes representatives from each of the four counties. Members include elected officials, business leaders, non-profit organizations, staff from state agencies serving homeless families, funders, and formerly homeless mothers.
- The project involves city and county governments, non-profit housing and service providers and housing authorities.

NEW STRATEGIES

- A systems change strategy is being articulated at the state and local levels, and the Regional Steering Committee has begun to engage on policy agendas and system change

efforts. This strategy seeks to support plans to end homelessness as well as re-structure family support networks.

- In 2008, Bridges to Housing received an Allies for Employment Planning Grant from the Corporation for Supportive Housing. This planning grant allowed us to work closely with the workforce development system to build linkages and partnerships to better meet the employment needs of high-need homeless families. We are currently working to implement our learnings throughout the four county region.

EVALUATION

- The evaluation has three components aimed at understanding and assessing the impact of the program and contributing valuable information to support systems change at the local, county, regional and national levels. These components are: A process study focusing on the implementation of Bridges to Housing and the experience of providers and families; A longitudinal outcome study of children and families served. This study is being implemented through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS); and a comparative study on the impact and relative effectiveness of Bridges to Housing in improving outcomes for high resource-using families and their children.
- The evaluation gathers data on families using the HMIS system at entry and every six months for up to twenty-four months.

CONTACT US!

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