

King County Housing Authority

Sponsor Based Supportive Housing Program

Background

The King County Housing Authority (KCHA) has partnered with a wide consortium of public, private and non-profit stakeholders in King County to implement the region's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. This plan identifies and prioritizes the need for housing for special needs, disabled, young adult, and chronically homeless households who require dedicated supportive services.

The Sponsor Based Supportive Housing Program allows the Authority and its partners to meet the supportive housing needs of these populations in ways that KCHA's traditional subsidized housing programs are not designed to address. This program allocates funding in tandem with partner public and behavioral healthcare systems; alleviate significant amounts of paperwork and process for vulnerable participants; prevent duplication of mainstream data collection; and create administrative ease for KCHA and its provider agencies.

KCHA is authorized under the terms of its Moving To Work Agreement with HUD to use the block granted funding for its Public Housing and Section 8 programs "to provide flexibility in the design and administration of housing assistance to eligible families" including "the operation or preservation of locally developed housing programs." The Authority's MTW Agreement and Annual Plan identify the expansion of the network of supportive housing for homeless and special needs populations and the leveraging and coordination of service funding as key initiatives.

Policy Guidelines

KCHA has competitively selected supportive service providers directly or with partner public and behavioral health systems to serve a total of up to 200 individuals. Funding commitments are made for any duration up to 5 years. KCHA funding is conditioned upon adequate service funding, and service providers and programs are required to provide appropriate services and remain in good standing with service funders for the duration of the contract. KCHA monitors per unit costs and provide an analysis in the Annual MTW Report of unit and client costs for those programs as compared to the costs of comparable Section 8 voucher assistance and, as available, institutional and emergency alternatives for target populations served. KCHA ensures proper use of funds by monitoring participant eligibility, Housing Quality Standards, rent reasonableness determinations and program entrances and exits at least annually.

KCHA has provided funding to participating sponsor agencies to master lease units from private market landlords or to subsidize units in developments that they own. Participants sign month-to-month occupancy agreements or sub-leases with the provider agencies. Additional funding may be allocated to cover the costs of new-unit set ups, vacancies, and other housing-related needs such as security deposits. Specific program elements are described in each contract between KCHA and sponsor agencies.

Initial Demonstration Program

KCHA initially implemented the Sponsor Based Supportive Housing Program in late 2006 through a demonstration program that housed 25 chronically homeless individuals¹. In this initial demonstration program, KCHA partnered with the King County Department of Community and Human Services' Mental Health & Chemical Abuse and Dependency Services Division (MHCADSD) and United Way of King County (UWKC) to fund a "housing first" supportive housing program in South King County.

MHCADSD provides mental health/chemical dependency treatment and housing case management funding primarily through Medicaid reimbursements. UWKC provided flexible service dollars to support the entitlement enrollment process, health-care and supported employment. KCHA is funding housing operations and housing-related client assistance. The funders collectively selected Sound Mental Health to administer the program.

The demonstration piloted a number of new approaches to the creation of permanent supportive housing for our community's most vulnerable populations:

- 1) The housing and service funding streams were coordinated prior to soliciting bids to ensure that ample service funding was connected to the housing and to alleviate the need for the selected service provider to pursue multiple funding sources for client housing.
- 2) The project uses a "housing first" philosophy, which is meant to "screen in" hard to house individuals in order to relieve them of the stresses and obstacles of living on the streets prior to enrolling them in supportive services. (Traditionally, housing has been used as a "reward" for participation in services, but research shows that compliance with program service requirements can be virtually impossible for individuals trying to survive on the street.)
- 3) The project was the first in King County to specifically serve chronically homeless individuals outside of Seattle.

¹ Due to the initial success of this demonstration, the program capacity was expanded to 50 in July 2008.

Sound Mental Health administers the services through a modified Program for Assertive Community Treatment (PACT) model, which is a highly successful national evidence-based practice model serving individuals with severe and persistent mental illness. The trans-disciplinary clinical team serving program clients is comprised of two housing case managers, a psychiatrist, a chemical dependency specialist, a nurse, and a peer support counselor. This team works collectively with each participant to ensure that they maintain their health and stable housing. Clients may live in scattered site or clustered housing, and the service team will come to their homes as often as three times per day. Participants are assisted with activities of daily living such as grocery shopping and house cleaning, medication management, transportation to appointments, and tenancy support. The team is on-call to the client *and* the landlord 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Program goals include housing stability and quality of life for participants as well as cost savings to government programs. Most of the clients served in this program have previously been served in high-cost emergency service, healthcare, and corrections systems. Initial implementation was monitored by a steering committee made up of representatives from KCHA, MHCADSD, UWKC, SMH, Healthcare for the Homeless, and the Taking Healthcare Home Initiative.

Program Expansion

The success of the initial program has led to two additional sponsor-based contracts with SMH and Navos. These new programs pair two additional significant funding sources with the Sponsor Based Supportive Housing Program under additional pilot projects, including federal PACT funding and WA State 2163 funds, both of which target individuals moving out of the corrections and in-patient mental health service systems.

A fourth contract was recently awarded through King County's Combined Funders NOFA process to Valley Cities Counseling and Consultation to begin a sponsor-based program for 15 homeless young adults in South King County. VCCC will provide supportive services and will identify landlords with units available for master leasing. Referrals will be made through street outreach, VCCC's behavioral health staff, and a network of community service agencies.

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